

The Vertigo of Belief - Inside Wittgenstein's Epistemology of Religion

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**Tese de Doutoramento em Filosofia
Especialidade de História da Filosofia**

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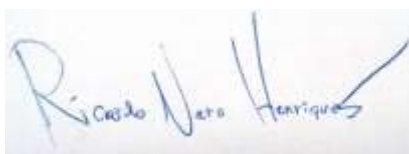
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*A Deus,
Para a Leonor, a minha irmã Carolina, e os meus pais.*

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Resumo

Esta tese de doutoramento procura aprofundar a ideia de Wittgenstein da injustificabilidade racional das crenças religiosas. A questão de partida que a move é a seguinte: como fazer sentido da ideia de Wittgenstein de que não temos uma justificação racional para as nossas crenças religiosas fundamentais? A tese está dividida em três capítulos, cada um focado nas diferentes dimensões da questão de partida. O primeiro capítulo foca-se nos temas de seguimento de regras e teorias do significado, procurando ligar diferentes autores como Saul Kripke, P.M.S. Hacker ou John McDowell. A ideia fundamental a ser defendida neste capítulo prende-se com a interligação das condições de assertabilidade e condições de verdade como matriz para o seguimento de regras em comunidade. O segundo capítulo foca-se em questões epistemológicas, a partir de conceitos como verdade, objetividade, conhecimento e contexto, cruzando diferentes correntes epistemológicas contemporâneas. Pegando nos temas discutidos no primeiro capítulo, a nossa capacidade para seguir regras e obter conhecimento está intimamente ligada com as ‘dobradiças’ wittgensteinianas, com o papel do contexto para a constituição destas dobradiças e com a possibilidade de conceber dimensões da realidade como objetivas. Esta tríade é sustentada pela leitura do trabalho de autores como Duncan Pritchard, Michael Williams e Markus Gabriel. O terceiro capítulo foca-se nos temas de filosofia da religião a partir do trabalho de Wittgenstein, ligando o seu pensamento com o de outros autores, tais como G.K. Chesterton, David Hart e Roger Scruton. Neste capítulo procuro mostrar como, à luz das ideias desenvolvidas, o contexto religioso constitui um contexto objetivo em si mesmo, com categorias ontológicas e epistémicas próprias, sustentado numa vida prática específica. No final procuro mostrar como é a partir de uma leitura realista do pensamento de Wittgenstein que melhor compreendemos o sentido da sua afirmação da impossibilidade de justificar uma crença religiosa fundamental. A natureza prática e fundamentalmente diferente do ponto de vista religioso constitui um domínio ontológico e epistemológico próprio, irreduzível a qualquer explicação ou justificação científica.

Abstract

This doctoral thesis seeks to deepen the meaning of Wittgenstein's idea about the rational unjustifiability of religious beliefs. The starting question that drives it is this: how can we make sense of Wittgenstein's idea that we have no rational justification for our fundamental religious beliefs? The thesis is divided into three chapters, each focusing on different dimensions of the starting question. The first chapter focuses on the themes of rule-following and theories of meaning, trying to link different authors like Saul Kripke, P.M.S. Hacker or John McDowell. The fundamental idea to be defended in this chapter concerns the interconnection of assertibility conditions and truth conditions as a matrix for rule following in community. The second chapter focuses on epistemological issues, starting with concepts such as truth, objectivity, knowledge and context, crossing different contemporary epistemological currents. Picking up on the themes discussed in the first chapter, our ability to follow rules and obtain knowledge is closely linked with Wittgensteinian 'hinges', with the role of context for the constitution of these hinges and with the possibility of conceiving dimensions of reality as objective. This triad is supported by reading the work of authors such as Duncan Pritchard, Michael Williams and Markus Gabriel. The third chapter focuses on the themes of philosophy of religion from the work of Wittgenstein, linking his thought with that of other authors, such as G.K. Chesterton, David Hart and Roger Scruton. In this chapter I try to show how, in the light of the ideas developed, the religious context constitutes an objective context in itself, with its own ontological and epistemic categories, sustained in a specific practical life. In the end I try to show how it is from a realist reading of Wittgenstein's thought that we better understand the meaning of his affirmation of the impossibility of justifying a fundamental religious belief. The practical and fundamentally different nature of the religious viewpoint constitutes an ontological and epistemological domain of its own, irreducible to any scientific explanation or justification.

Palavras-chave: Contexto, Dobradiça, Objetividade, Ponto de vista religioso, Regras

Keywords: Context, Hinge, Objectivity, Religious point of view, Rules

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	13
Introduction.....	14
Chapter 1 – Kripkenstein, Assertibility and Truth	
1.1 Introduction.....	17
1.2 Structure.....	18
1.3 The book: <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i>	19
1.4 Semantic Primitivism: Crispin Wright and John McDowell.....	25
1.5 The Baker-Hacker Critique.....	31
1.6 Defending Kripkenstein.....	34
1.7 Reassessing Kripkenstein.....	44
1.8 Conclusions.....	49
Chapter 2 – From a Realist Point of View	
2.1 Introduction.....	50
2.2 Hinge Epistemology.....	50
2.3 The Contextualist Approach.....	67
2.4 The New Realism of Markus Gabriel.....	80
2.5 Back to Wittgenstein.....	110
2.6 Two Illustrations.	114
2.7 Conclusions.....	117
Chapter 3 – Groundless Grounds	
3.1 Introduction.....	119
3.2 The Religious Point of View.....	119
3.3 The Question of Fideism.....	125
3.4 Wittgenstein within Christian Theology.....	130
3.5 The Religious Robot Scenario.....	151
3.6 Conclusions.....	156
General Conclusions	
1. The Grounds of an Illusion.....	159
2. Theoría.....	162
3. Living and believing.....	163
Bibliography.....	165

Abbreviations

LC – *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*

LFM – *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*

OC – *On Certainty*

PI – *Philosophical Investigations*

RFGB – *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*

RFM – *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*

BT – *The Big Typescript (TS 213)*

TLP – *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Introduction

This doctoral thesis is an investigation on Wittgenstein's epistemology of religious belief. The starting point of this thesis is neither a proposal of a new exegetical reading nor an analytic evaluation of Wittgenstein's arguments. This thesis aims to be an exploration of Wittgenstein's ideas in dialogue with the works of other philosophers in the field, inspired, or not, by his work. This research aims at enriching the debates about the philosophical consequences of Wittgenstein's thought and method. The goal set up for this thesis is to develop an understanding of Wittgenstein's claim that we do not have a rational justification for grounding our religious beliefs. What I propose to do in this investigation is a mixture of both a reading of what has already been said by many different philosophers and how these readings can come together for a fresh view of Wittgenstein's work. My contribution lies in tying these works together and showing how these connections can shed a new light on Wittgensteinian debates.

The main goal of this thesis is to develop an answer to the following research question: How do we make sense of Wittgenstein's rejection of a rational justification for grounding religious beliefs? The path to answer this challenge divides into three chapters, each addressing different areas that are necessary to develop an understanding of Wittgenstein's claim. Before addressing the issue of "religious belief" properly, we need first to be clear in regard to our understanding of the concepts of "meaning" and "knowledge". The first two chapters aim at that: to reach an understanding of Wittgenstein's rule-following debate and to provide a reading of the most prominent epistemological issues associated with his later philosophy. I will try to show how a realist reading of Wittgenstein on these various matters not only is a truthful view to his own legacy but also enables us to connect Wittgenstein with other contemporary philosophers. The reading established in the first two chapters forms the background in which the groundlessness of religious belief gets tackled in the third chapter. The realist understanding of both meaning and knowledge argued for in the first two chapters lays the groundwork for a realist conception of religious belief. I will argue that it is the realist aspect that is instrumental to solve misunderstandings about

Wittgenstein's epistemology of belief and set straight what Wittgenstein meant when claiming that our religious beliefs are groundless.

The first chapter focuses on Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, more concretely the rule-following debate. I will first analyze Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein, the so-called "Kripkenstein", drawing heavily from Martin Kusch's work. I will then present some of the counter-arguments developed by P.M.S. Hacker, John McDowell, and others. The goal of this chapter is to develop an understanding of several issues, such as how Wittgenstein considered possible to follow a rule (even in cases that we had never faced before), what role the community plays in defining the convention to follow, and whether there, or not, objective structures that serve as a standard for rules. The assertibility conditions vs. truth conditions debate naturally also enters in this chapter, and if this is a correct approach to read Wittgenstein's work. My goal is to set a solid understanding of Wittgenstein, through the literature already mentioned and beyond it, in regards to what sustains a rule for meaning and how the community's role connects with the objective structures of contexts.

The second chapter focuses on the epistemological questions addressed by Wittgenstein in his later phase, as well as the epistemological schools influenced by it. As said before, the aim of this chapter is to develop a realist understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of knowledge, "hinges" and context. I will try to show how a realist, objectivist, approach to Wittgenstein's reflections about the context-dependency of language-games, and of the role played by what he calls "hinges" in our epistemic practices, is the most philosophical fruitful reading. I will try to show the strength of my argument by combining Wittgenstein's, and Wittgensteinian, epistemology with the work of Markus Gabriel, a contemporary epistemologist. My goal in this chapter is to argue for a threefold combination of Gabriel's new realism, "hinge" epistemology and Wittgensteinian objectivist contextualism, as a means to lay the grounds for a realist conception of religious belief. Combined with the reflections on meaning and rules from the previous chapter, this triangle provides the tools to tackle the question of the groundlessness of religious belief.

The third and last chapter is the result of the combined conceptual apparatus of the last two chapters, when one addresses the questions of "meaning" and "knowledge" within the theme of religious belief. I will present Wittgenstein's views on mysticism, ritual, and the

difference between the religious and the scientific point of view. From this reading, I will try to show how Wittgenstein was indeed very close to traditional Christian theology. I will argue for this by drawing parallels between Wittgenstein and David B. Hart, G.K. Chesterton and Roger Scruton. By the end of the chapter, I hope to have been able to show the core of my argument: a realist understanding of Wittgenstein's conceptions of "meaning" and "knowledge" is what allows us to understand the sense, and the philosophical implications, of his remarks about the groundlessness of religious beliefs. It is through a realist understanding of the religious point of view, and the religious life, that one grasps the kernel of Wittgenstein's reflections.

Chapter 1 –Kripkenstein, Assertability and Truth

1.1. Introduction

As a starting point for any serious investigation, one should begin by formulating its research question. In this thesis, I propose a reading of the following issue: how to make sense of Wittgenstein's claim that we do not have a rational justification for our most basic (religious) beliefs? This chapter starts by addressing essential issues of Wittgenstein's scholarship: what are Wittgenstein's views on meaning, assertibility, and truth in his later phase? For this very reason, the aim of this chapter is to enter in a dialogue with Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein through its critics and proponents. The purpose of this first step is clear: to be able to develop a rigorous understanding of the later Wittgenstein's epistemology of belief, the starting point has to be a serious study of his thoughts on rule-following and meaning. This chapter is thus dedicated to developing a reading of the literature focused on these questions, and their philosophical ramifications. Since this is a subject with a wide range of contributions, the question of novelty necessarily emerges. My answer to that phantasmatic obstacle is that I believe that by showing Kripke's work in a new light (much due to the insightful work developed by Martin Kusch), and combining his interpretation with arguments from his detractors, I will be able to at least spark some interest in the debate. My goal is, for these reasons, modest and ambitious at the same time, without any contradiction: if on the one hand I am merely reading the long work developed by great philosophers of their own name, and humbly presenting it, on the other hand I am proposing a project of combining opposite views for a fresh take on this matter. One of my masters' teachers, and discussant of my masters' dissertation, Professor Paulo Tunhas from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto, once told the class an interesting distinction between philosophers: while some see differences in the works of apparently close authors, others search for proximities in seemingly distant ones. I aim to develop an investigation that is worthy of falling into the latter category.

1.2. Structure

This chapter begins with a rigorous analysis of Saul Kripke's book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. My aim is to elucidate Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and to draw some important reflections from it. I won't pursue a defence of Kripke's argument as a whole, but a defence of the importance of taking it seriously in order to understand Wittgenstein. It is my goal to show how Kripke made very important remarks regarding the role of community, assertibility-conditions, and the impossibility to reduce the study of rule-following to an empiricist perspective. However, I will also try to show that his attribution of a sceptical solution to Wittgenstein is exegetically incorrect taking into account the whole corpus of Wittgenstein's work; that Kripke's conception of "fact" is too "narrow", and unnecessarily attached to a naturalist picture; and that the assertibility-conditions picture proposed by Kripke, and defended by Kusch, is compatible with epistemological and ontological realism. For the elaboration of this reassessment of Kripke's interpretation, I will rely on the work of some of his critics, namely John McDowell and P.M.S. Hacker, and on remarks of other philosophers like Hilary Putnam and Robert Brandom.

For the investigation of Kripke's Wittgenstein, I will rely on Martin Kusch's *Sceptical Guide to Meaning and Rules*, which is already itself a defence of Kripke's interpretative work. I will present Kusch's discussion of four of Kripke's main critics: Crispin Wright, John McDowell, and the pair G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker. My main concern will be the presentation of each of the author's arguments as well as Kusch's proposal for the correct reading of Kripke's insights into rule-following. I hope to be able to show how Kripke's interpretation can help lead to a deeper understanding of Wittgenstein's insights without committing to the totality of his arguments. I will also argue that the remarks elaborated by McDowell, Wright, and Baker-Hacker can help us as well, containing essential insights for fully grasping the depth of Wittgenstein's ideas on meaning and rules. At the end of this chapter, I will rigorously present the argument that a conventionalist, non-sceptical, approach to meaning (based on assertibility-conditions) does not entail a full rejection of the concepts of truth, realism and objectivity. Quite the contrary, I will argue that assertibility

and truth, rather than being opposed, go hand in hand and are both indispensable to the later Wittgenstein.

1.3. The book: *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*

Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language is a book structured in a quite clear and simple way. It has a preface, three chapters (“Introductory”, “Wittgensteinian Paradox”, and “The Solution to the Private Language Argument”), and the postscript “Wittgenstein and Other Minds”. The second chapter is where Kripke presents his paradox. The third chapter is where Kripke presents his solution to the paradox and the exposition of his conclusions. In the postscript, Kripke draws his attention to the sceptical question of the existence of other minds, in which he develops a critique of the Cartesian notion of the self, exposing his interpretation of Wittgenstein’s insights on the matter.

What is, then, Kripke’s paradox? The thought experiment goes as follows (Kripke, 2004 [1982], p. 9): imagine we are doing the biggest sum we have ever made, for example “ $68+57$ ”. Naturally, our answer would be “125”. Now imagine that a sceptic enters the room and says that our answer is wrong. He claims that we have not been following the rule of *addition*, which would lead us to answer “125”, but the rule of *quaddition* which is exactly like addition up until one of the numbers is the same or higher than “57”; if it is the same or higher, the answer is always “5”. This bizarre rule seems troubling for us, but the challenge the sceptic makes is even more troubling: the sceptic challenges us to find a fact that proves that my previous calculations were being ruled by addition, and not by quaddition, and that justifies in the present moment that I answer “125”, instead of “5”, to the sum of “ $68+57$ ”. Of course this task cannot be solved by doing the arithmetic calculations in front of the sceptic because this is not a question of mathematical knowledge, but of meaning – it simply becomes clearer in the mathematical example, though it applies to the notion of linguistic meaning in general. And the problem would still not be solved because to use the mathematical signs in one way or another is already to presuppose a set of rules which are themselves questionable to the sceptic, and he could continue his challenge of our knowledge of the rule which is being followed.

So we are to find a fact that constitutes my meaning one thing rather than another. The first possible solution that Kripke analyses is the dispositional solution: my mental dispositions for following the rule of addition instead of following the rule of quaddition, and so the mental dispositions of my meaning “125” instead of “5”, are what determines which is the rule I followed and commit to follow in the future.¹ There are three problems with this proposal: first, the application of a rule is not *a priori* finite and has an indefinite number of possible contexts and applications, even new ones that cannot be logically inferred by the present usage, and mental dispositions are necessarily finite due to our human condition; second, two individuals may agree on the results, believing they are computing the same rule, though they are proceeding differently and therefore not being able to determine when they are following the same rule or not; thirdly, this dispositionalist account leaves no room for error, since I may know the correct use of a rule but make a mistake (Kripke gives the example of some people who forget to “carry” when doing large sums). It is the difference between knowing the rules of the game but committing an infraction and not knowing what the rules of the game are at all. The dispositionalist is forced to hold that when someone is making a mistake, and so having different mental dispositions, they are not making a mistake based on the correct use of a rule but following a different rule entirely. If one uses the psychological states to define the rule that is being followed, one is forced to admit that when two people disagree on the result of a sum, for example, they are not both following the rule of addition and one of them is wrong and the other right, but that they are following two different rules entirely. Therefore, for Kripke, the dispositionalist view cannot be correct (Kripke, 2004 [1982]).

The next straight solution Kripke analyses is a variant of the dispositional view. This view, instead of proposing to search for the semantic fact in mental dispositions, tells that the solution could be given by a machine which embodied the rule, thus giving us the right answer every time we inserted the data we wanted it to calculate. But this view does not solve the problem because the sceptic could once again claim that the machine can be interpreted in a quus-like manner. All the instructions one has to give to the machine, in machine language, can in turn be questioned by the sceptic. Also, the finitude of the mental

¹ The question of meaning determinism and semantic commitment is widely discussed by Brandom 1976; Boghossian 2002; Guardo 2012; Millar 2002; Pettit 2002.

dispositions applies in the same way to the machine, being a finite object in itself as well – some numbers will be just too big, as an input or as an output, to compute. Here the physical aspect of machines is not relevant, since what really counts is the software, the program. Again, what would be the criteria for an error, a malfunction in the machine? One needs to already know the correct application of the rule in order to know when the machine is not working well and when it is computing correctly. The standard of correctness is not given by the machine itself, the programmer is needed for that task. Therefore, this mechanistic view of dispositionalism is not a solution either. None of these two solutions is able to address a fundamental aspect of meaning: that meaning is not *descriptive*, but *normative* (Kripke, 2004 [1982]).

The suggestion that one ought to answer “125” instead of “5” because it is the simplest hypothesis, mimicking the kind of method applied in natural sciences, is not even a possible solution since it misses the point: the sceptical challenge is ontological, not epistemological (Kripke, 2004 [1982]). What is at stake here is not the possibility of access to a semantic fact, but rather the existence of the semantic fact. Even an all-powerful God would not be able to grasp this fact. It is not a matter of a cognitive or epistemological deficiency.

What is, then, Kripke’s sceptical solution to the paradox? First, it cannot be a straight solution. The problem the sceptic has drawn us into cannot be answered straightforwardly. Kripke reads in Wittgenstein a sceptical solution, and so creates a new form of scepticism to answer his own sceptical problem. This is probably one of the biggest points of debate among Wittgensteinian scholarship: whether Kripke is misreading Wittgenstein or not; whether one can call Wittgenstein a sceptic, even one of a special kind. I will not deal with such exegetical details. What I think is really important is to see if Kripke followed Wittgenstein in trying to go beyond the problems he himself posited or if he completely turned away from a Wittgensteinian point of view. I argue for a reading of Kripke tending to the former option, seeing in Kripke’s work a genuine trace of a Wittgensteinian approach to philosophical problems, and following Wittgenstein’s desire that his ideas motivated other philosophers to think for themselves, not sparing them the work of thinking (PI 2009 [1953], Preface, p. 4).

Before explaining what the solution consists in, Kripke draws some parallels between Wittgenstein’s sceptical solution and David Hume’s own solution (Kripke 2004, p. 62). Both

of them answer to the sceptic by accepting the sceptic's claim (in this case, that there is no such fact that can determine my meaning 'plus' instead of 'quus'). Rather than refuting the claim, they accept it, only to say that it could never be answered whatsoever, not because it is a sceptical problem with no solution, but because the paradox in itself is nonsensical, dissolving the challenge from within. Wittgenstein agrees with the sceptic that there is no condition, either internal or external, that can count as a fact that determines my meaning one thing rather than another. This is not to deny the objectivity of meaning, but the existence of a superlative fact that has been overlooked by the naive sceptic. Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact. This is seen by Kripke as the corollary of his abandonment of the truth-conditional view from the *Tractatus*. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Kripke sees Wittgenstein shifting to an *assertibility conditions view of meaning* (Kripke 2004, p. 74) looking for the conditions of assertion instead of truth. We need to do away with any *a priori* conceptions and look at circumstances under which certain sentences are accepted; which utterances are made in which contexts and what is the utility of these for our form of life (Kripke 2004, p. 75). This anthropological stance is also followed in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, where Wittgenstein addresses how mathematical expressions, like our case of (qu)addition, can only have meaning in a context in which non-mathematical rules are accepted by the speakers and which give a role for such mathematical utterances. If we try to look for facts and truths about meaning, the sceptical challenge remains unanswered and we are forced to hold that whatever everyone says is meaningless, being every semantic rule questionable. But if we follow the assertibility conditions view, Kripke states, we can answer the sceptic and explain how it is possible that someone means something (Kripke 2004, p. 62).

This view is for Kripke the solution to the private language argument: how do I know that the others mean what I mean by P? This problem only appears because we assume that there is a kind of correspondence between the word and its meaning and that we need to check if everyone is making the same correspondence (what would imply the kind of search that the sceptic could put into question *ad infinitum*). By abandoning this picture we are no longer looking for the correct object corresponding to the word, but searching for the circumstances in which an utterance has meaning, dissolving the problem of a private language: it is simply not possible to exist (Kripke 2004, p. 110). A language is only possible

in a context of communication between speakers that are members of a community,² not by reference to some Platonic truths about meaning. This view allows us to escape from the Cartesian picture of the lonely self always doubting the others' usage of words. Private sensations and intentions can only be described because there are contexts in which utterances about them have a sense, not because we have some kind of first-person authority over the meaning of those words (Kripke 2004, pp. 110-111). It is not because they are apparently "internal" that one can assume we know better when it is our case; their meaning is always dependent on the context and the community of speakers that, through its practices, gave rise to the practice of communicating individual sensations.

This rejection of truth-conditions has nothing to do, however, with a critique of objectivity or a defence of vagueness in meaning (Kripke 2004, p. 82). For Kripke, the meaning of "addition" is very clear, completely determinate, and in no way imprecise. The rejection of facts as the grounds for meaning is not a rejection that meaning something is a fact. Kripke wants precisely to preserve objectivity in meaning and to defend the idea that there is a correct way of following a rule, of using a concept. His only criticism is of the explanation of this objectivity through mental dispositions or intentions or any kind of superlative. We should look instead at assertibility conditions. The stability and determinacy of meaning is guaranteed by the community of speakers, where everyone plays the role of judge and agent at the same time. It is an *agreement* through the community that gives the grounds for the standard of correction, the *criteria*, which are themselves both constitutive and regulative of our *form of life* (Kripke 2004, pp. 96-98). This is, for Kripke, the meaning of Wittgenstein's idea that "meaning is use" and that one should look to the usage of assertions to understand their meaning.

1.3.1. Postscript: *Wittgenstein and Other Minds*

In the postscript Kripke addresses the sceptical question of how one knows that the others have minds like our own. His first step is to analyse the meaning of the problem itself, following the sceptical methodology of the book (Kripke 1982, p. 115). He argues that the

² This means that, for Kripke, an individual in isolation, like Robinson Crusoe, cannot follow rules since he lacks the community background. We can only "take him into our community" and apply our own rules to his behaviour.

simple positing of the question presupposes a “clear understanding of what a ‘mind’ is and what is to ‘have’ one” (Kripke 2004, p. 115). “What” has a mind? This leads to the notion of the Cartesian self and the “I” that remains stable when doubting about the external world. Though what Kripke wants to show us first, and what remains as the core of the argument, is that this conception of an “I” that “has” a “mind” is itself a problematic one; a conception Wittgenstein himself attacked fiercely.

In exposing the nonsense of this conception, Kripke reminds us of Wittgenstein’s remarks about the Lichtenberg language (a language conceived without the first person pronoun) (Kripke 2004, p. 123). What the Lichtenberg language shows is that the usage of the pronoun “I” has nothing to do with some mysterious immaterial substance. It is rather a grammatical peculiarity, one deeply tied to our practices and our form of life. Our individual notion of space and identity, related to our biological condition and to our historical existence, is what gives meaning to the usage of the pronoun “I”, not because this pronoun is supposed to refer to an object that lies “inside” of us. The first step to the solution of the problem of knowing if “others have minds like my own” is to question what is this “me” that is supposed to “have” something. By clearing the misunderstanding of the usage of the word, we see that the problem starts to dissolve itself.

The second step in dissolving the mystery of the “I”, demonstrating how it is only a particular use of grammar connected to our form of life and form of communication, is to show that we cannot take the reductionist/materialist path either. We cannot simply identify the self with the brain or the “I” with any kind of physical state (Kripke 2004, p. 137). We are not machines and our grammar shows exactly that: we see ourselves as human beings, not mere physical objects. This impacts on the way we approach the others, as Wittgenstein reminds us about the attitude one has towards another humans: “I have an attitude towards a soul, I am not of the opinion that he has a soul” (Kripke 2004, p. 137). This is the lesson that one has to take from the Lichtenberg experiment: the peculiarity of the grammar of the pronoun “I” is not something that can be solved by natural sciences or by a materialist conception of humans; one has to deeply acknowledge the importance of this particularity of language for the way we perceive others and communicate with one another. It is neither seeing some metaphysical mystery nor trying to reduce the term to a scientific naturalist discourse. If one wants to really dissolve the problem and understand how the sceptical doubt

about the existence of other minds is capable of being overcome, one has to adopt the sceptical solution that Kripke finds in Wittgenstein: accepting the sceptical claim that “I” cannot know if others have a “mind” like “my own”, because there is no such thing as an “I” that “has” a “mind” (Kripke 2004, pp. 134-135).

1.4. Semantic Primitivism: Crispin Wright and John McDowell

Both John McDowell and Crispin Wright are read by Kusch as offering two versions of a more general conception on the origins of meaning named *semantic primitivism* (Kusch 2006, p. 207). This is the view that meaning is determined by non-inferential rules via direct immediate knowledge of the application. Either from a strict empiricist view or from an (apparent) Cartesian one, both strains adopt the same picture of self-evidence of first-person knowledge that is not based on other knowledge. Let’s take a closer look at their criticisms of Kripke.

1.4.1. Wright’s theory of intentions

Wright defends a sophisticated version of semantic primitivism as a straight solution to the sceptical paradox, named *theory of intentions* (Kusch 2006, p. 211). In his account, there are two aspects of rule-following: metaphysical and anthropological (Kusch 2006, p. 217). The first relates to our concept of person, of rationality. The second refers to the pragmatism of our practices. Before making explicit his own view, it is important to remark that he criticizes the unfairness of the challenge: he considers that the restraint about the challenge of finding a non-intentional fact is unfair since knowledge of my present intentions is non-inferential, and so knowledge regarding my past intentions would also be non-inferential. Here we start to see where Wright stands: for him, intentions, and self-ascribed knowledge about them, are what determine the meaning of an expression. It is the intention that counts as a specification. This kind of non-inferential knowledge of intentions is not, despite appearances, based on a Cartesian picture of an epistemic privilege of the first-person regarding knowledge about intentions and mental states. The picture Wright offers to what counts as an authority for self-ascription of intentions is not a form of cognitive advantage about one’s own mental life, but our conception of the others as rational persons. Wright states it very clearly: “It is part of regarding human beings as persons, rational reflective agents that we are prepared to ascribe intentional states to them” (Kusch 2006, p. 214). For him, the roots of the first-person

authority are the quality and success of the practices of this attribution, not a Cartesian cognitive privilege (Kusch 2006, p. 213). This is why Wright has a double faced account of rule-following: he conceives both a metaphysical explanation for knowledge of intentions and a practical and anthropological justification of that practice.

1.4.2. McDowell's middle-ground

Although McDowell's views are a version of semantic primitivism, he wants to preserve the view that

“we are naturally inclined to protect the intuitive view that thoughts and utterances make sense by virtue of owing, or purporting to owe, allegiance to conceptual commitments” (McDowell 1984 p. 327),

combined with the idea that the notions of right or wrong have to take part in any conception of objectivity. For him the communal aspect is not enough to preserve the investigation-independent patterns that give rise to objective meanings. For McDowell, Kripke's reading gives in to the sceptic in such a way that it becomes a denial that I understand the plus sign. Kripke's thesis, that Wittgenstein accepts the sceptical paradox, is for McDowell a falsification. On McDowell's view:

“Kripke's reading has Wittgenstein endorsing this reasoning, and consequently willing to abandon the idea that there is anything that constitutes my understanding an expression in some determinate way.” (McDowell 1984, p. 331).

McDowell argues that Kripke reads Wittgenstein as being concerned to preserve a role for the intuitive contractual conception. It is wrong, on his view, to stress too much this concern, let alone crediting him with a sceptical paradox and solution. The misconception that grounds all the others lays at the beginning: on the assumption that, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, understanding a rule is an interpretation (McDowell 1984, pp. 47-53).

“How can there be a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation?” (McDowell 1984, p. 339) This is for McDowell the kernel of Wittgenstein's concerns. He suggests that the answer to this question is the thesis that obeying a rule is a practice.

“When I follow a sign-post, the connection between it and my action is not mediated by an interpretation of sign-posts that I acquired when I was trained in their use. I simply act as I

have been trained to. (...) [T]he training in question is initiation into a custom. If it were not that, then the account of the connection between sign-post and action would indeed look like an account of nothing more than brute movement and its causal explanation” (McDowell 1984, p. 339).

We obey the rules blindly. An opinion is something for which one may have a justification. What is at stake here is below that level – the “bedrock” level, where one has no justifications. In McDowell’s words, “what Wittgenstein is trying to describe is a use of language in which what one does is to use an expression without justification” (McDowell 1984, p. 340).

McDowell warns us that we need to “prevent the leaching out of norms from our picture of the ‘bedrock’” (McDowell 1984, p. 341). It is a mistake to think we can “dig down” to a level at which we no longer have application for normative notions, like to follow according to a rule. Here are two representative passages of this warning:

“The key to finding the indispensable middle course is the idea of a custom or practice. How can a performance both be nothing but a ‘blind’ reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on an interpretation (...) and be a case of going by a rule (...)? The answer is: by belonging to a custom, practice, or institution.” (McDowell 1984, p. 342).

Wittgenstein’s point is that we have to situate our conception of meaning and understanding within a framework of communal practices. (McDowell 1984, p. 342) Contrary to what Kripke states, for McDowell the private language argument is not the corollary of the sceptical solution. One needs to show that the assimilation between understanding and interpreting can be resisted in some other way besides locating meaning in a framework of communal practices.

It is known that Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule-following attack a certain familiar picture of facts and truth: that “a genuine fact must be a matter of the way things are in themselves, utterly independent from us” (McDowell 1984, p. 351). McDowell says that

“we can find this picture of genuine truth compelling only if we either forget that truth-bearers are such only because they are meaningful, or suppose that meanings take care of themselves, needing, as it were, no help from us” (McDowell 1984, p. 351).

In his view,

“Wittgenstein’s reflections on rule-following undermine this picture by undermining the supposition that meanings take care of themselves. A particular performance, inner or overt, can be an application of a concept – a judgement or a meaningful utterance – only if it owes allegiance to constraints that the concept imposes. And being governed by such constraints it is not being led in some occult way by an autonomous meaning (the super-rigid machinery), but acting within a communal custom. We have to give up that picture of ‘genuine’ truth” (McDowell 1984, p. 352).

It seems that what McDowell is proposing is a recoil from realism. He makes two points about that:

“First, the recoil has nothing to do with rejection of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, properly understood. That conception has no need to camouflage the fact that truth-conditions are necessarily given by us, in a language we understand” (McDowell 1984, p. 352); And “second, the recoil is from an extreme form of the thesis that states that facts are not up to us, and not a recoil from any form of that thesis whatsoever.” (McDowell 1984, p. 352)

For McDowell, if one accepts the rejection of ratification-independence, one obliterates meaning altogether. There must be a middle position if one wants to preserve objectivity of meaning. Understanding is indeed the grasping of patterns that extend to new cases independently of our ratification, otherwise meaning would be nothing but an illusion. Nevertheless, the constraints imposed by our concepts do not have the Platonist autonomy with which they are credited in the picture of the super-rigid machinery. According to McDowell, “what obscures the possibility of this position is the ‘anti-realist’ attempt to get below bedrock.” (McDowell 1984, p. 353) And he continues:

“But if we respect Wittgenstein’s injunction not to “dig below the ground”, we must say that the community goes right or wrong according to whether the object is, or not, yellow; and nothing can make its being yellow, or not, dependent on our ratification of the judgement that this is how things are.” (McDowell 1984, p. 353).

A bit further ahead in the paper, McDowell argues that

“Wittgenstein combines criticism of the leap picture with conceding how natural it is to think of our understanding as reaching beyond all the examples given. (...) The idea that the

meaning of an expression can be present in an instant is just as tempting about someone else's meaning as it is about one's own." (McDowell 1984, p. 354).

To properly understand what is meant by grasping the meaning instantly, it is important to read it from a certain standpoint:

"'grasping the whole use in a flash' is not to be dismissed as expressing an incorrigibly confused picture – the picture of a leap to an idiolect understanding – but to be carefully understood in the light of the thesis that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation. (...) The 'interpretation' prejudice insidiously tempts us to put a fantastic mythological construction on these conceptions. The right response is not to abandon the conception but to exorcize the 'interpretation' prejudice, and so return them to sobriety". (McDowell 1984, p. 355).

In his view, the anti-realist reading misses the point "that hearing a word in one sense rather than another is hearing it in one position rather than another in the network of possible patterns of making sense that we learn to find ourselves in when we acquire mastery of a language" (McDowell 1984, p. 356). This is the middle ground for McDowell, a path that allows for objectivity in meaning, and by so preserves the picture of understanding as the primary process in rule-following, without negating any of the criticisms Wittgenstein makes to the picture of genuine truths.

Let's then take a closer look at Kusch's analysis of McDowell's position. For McDowell, the "master thesis" of Kripke is the idea that normativity needs interpretation: a signpost can only mean an order if there is an interpretation of it – being the relation between the content, and its normative role, something dependent on an external element of interpreting it as such. The mental content remains "normatively inert" (Kusch 2006, p. 220). This entails, in Kusch's reading of McDowell's view, that adherence to this thesis leads us necessarily to an infinite regress of searching for the criteria for the correct interpretation. There is another option: the non-factualist position that argues for the community as the only standard for correctness, and so meaning attributions are nothing but acceptance in a linguistic community. This view is also flawed, and implausible, for McDowell. His reading focuses on Wittgenstein's assertion that "there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation", since for him this is what accounts for a way of holding to factualism while

rejecting the “master thesis”. For this McDowell stresses, as referred before, the roles of customs, practices, and institutions as the guarantees for a conception of meaning which does not rely on local, private, interpretations.

Training, in order to (re)act blindly when following a rule, is the key for McDowell’s solution. It is not a matter of opinions or agreement on an interpretation, but an agreement in customs, in the form of life. Central to this training is the publicity of rules: only a publicly shared (shareable³) set of customs is capable of generating normativity. To recognize this feature is to recognize that the truth-conditions of meaning are only given through language, already embedded in this customs and practices.

1.4.3. McDowell on Wright

Let me make now a few remarks on McDowell’s criticism of Wright’s theory of intentions. McDowell says that

“the picture Wright offers is, at the basic level, a picture of human beings vocalizing in certain ways in response to objects, with this behaviour (no doubt) accompanied by such ‘inner’ phenomena as feelings of constraint or convictions of the rightness of what they are saying. (...) But the purging yields the picture of what I have been calling ‘the basic level’; and at that level Wright’s picture has no room for norm, and hence – given the normativity of meaning – no room for meaning” (McDowell 1984, p. 336).

For McDowell “a condition for the possibility of finding real application for the notion of meaning at all is that we reject anti-realism” (McDowell 1984, p. 347).

McDowell locates the issue between his reading and Wright’s on the question: “how does Wittgenstein’s insistence on publicity emerge?” (McDowell 1984, p. 356) In McDowell’s own words:

“In my reading, it emerges as a condition of the possibility of rejecting the assimilation of understanding to interpretation, which poses an intolerable dilemma. In Wright’s reading, the answer is this: it emerges as the only alternative left, after the notion of idiolect understanding

³ As in the case of Robinson Crusoe, should we regard him as physically isolated or socially isolated? Is he able to follow rules being established by himself or do we need to take him into our community to attribute him that ability? Here I believe we can be happy with simply referring to the possibility of these customs to be shared publicly.

has been scotched by a self-contained argument that is epitomized by this passage.” (McDowell 1984, p. 356)

McDowell believes that “whereas Wittgenstein’s key thought is that the dilemma must be avoided, Wright leaves the dilemma unchallenged” (McDowell 1984, p. 357). The villain of this piece is the antirealist conception of our knowledge of others. His conclusion is that “there cannot be a position that is both antirealist, and genuinely hospitable to meaning, and that the construal of Wittgenstein as the source of anti-realism, is a travesty” (McDowell 1984, p. 358).

1.5. The Baker-Hacker Critique

One of the main opposing views to Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein is the one elaborated by G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker. The core of their critique centres on exegetical questions, more importantly the attribution of a sceptical solution to Wittgenstein, and the abandonment of truth-conditions in his later phase. They argue that these two points are misread by Kripke, and that they do not involve a faithful reading of Wittgenstein’s writings.

In their reading, Wittgenstein would never agree on a sceptical solution since he developed throughout his whole life numerous critiques of scepticism. More than once Wittgenstein claims that sceptical doubts are nonsensical, so how can a sceptical solution be a true reading of his ideas? Also, in the Baker-Hacker reading, Wittgenstein did not abandon a truth-conditional view of meaning. For them, Wittgenstein did not follow a truth-conditional view of meaning in the *Tractatus*, he developed it only in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In their interpretation, practice is what sustains these truth-conditions, and that is why only in his later phase he adopts this view. Meanwhile in the *Tractatus* there are no truth-conditions for atomic propositions.

Kusch develops a rigorous analysis of the Baker-Hacker case, discussing the main objections they have against Kripkenstein. Regarding the first of these objections, the label of scepticism and common-sense philosopher attributed to Wittgenstein, Kusch concedes that Kripke moves Wittgenstein a little bit too much to the common-sense side of the fence. This is not convincing, though, and Kusch concedes to Baker and Hacker that Kripke “errs in characterizing Wittgenstein as a common-sense philosopher”. Characterizing Wittgenstein

as a common-sense philosopher would entail that Wittgenstein would agree with the view that meaning is given by a fixed set of correct beliefs, namely common-sense beliefs, which is a mistaken view of his writings. In regard to the label of sceptic, Baker and Hacker consider it is a complete misreading of Wittgenstein's works since he develops extensively in many occasions criticisms of the unfounded sceptical doubts. In their view, the remarks Wittgenstein elaborates about the impossibility to refute directly the sceptic, being only possible to defuse the sense of the sceptical doubt, are more than enough evidence that Wittgenstein would never agree with a sceptical solution. Regarding the sceptical challenge itself (how my past usage of a concept allows me to determine how I shall use it now), Baker and Hacker don't see any evidence of that discussion in Wittgenstein's work.

Regarding the question of meaning-determining facts, Baker and Hacker point out that Wittgenstein never intended to criticize ordinary language and everyday expressions like "I knew I meant x". His aim is to criticize philosophies who take these expressions and search for a metaphysical justification for them. In Hacker's words: "Wittgenstein was concerned to expose misconceptions of this internal relation which generate mythologies of symbolism (viz. of rules as 'logical machines' generating consequences independently of their use)" (Hacker 1986, p. 334). These misuses are the muddy waters that philosophers drag words to, in Wittgenstein's view. Kripke's interpretation falls short in this point. The search for a fact that Kripke proposes is not in accord with Wittgenstein's conception of a fact. For Wittgenstein a fact is not a spatial-temporal entity. Also, he would not disagree with the claim that what makes "that p" true is the fact "that p". This kind of deflationary theory of truth is affirmed quite clearly by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.⁴ The link between "p is true" and "it is a fact that p" is, for Wittgenstein, a grammatical convention and it is precisely this kind of grammatical assertions that for him were the kernel of philosophical confusions and pseudo-problems (Kusch 2006, p. 244). This fundamental difference between ordinary speech and philosophical discourse is not taken into account by Kripke, according to the Baker-Hacker reading. Another important point is that they see Kripke's interpretation as missing Wittgenstein's own solution to the problem of rule-

⁴ "For what does a proposition's 'being true' mean? 'P' is true = P. (That is the answer)" (RFM, p. 117)

following: “to follow a rule is not to interpret rule-formation or instruction, it is to master a technique or a custom” (Kusch 2006, p. 246).

In regard to the question of isolation, the Baker-Hacker reading claims that an individual in isolation can in fact have customs, institutions and practices. The question is not empirical, but conceptual. It is the possibility of being applied to a variety of cases that determine the question of rule-following, not the actual existence of a group of agents. They see Kripke’s reading as focusing too much on the community, setting their reading on the *individualist* side against *communitarian* interpretations of Wittgenstein (Kusch 2006, pp. 248-249). This also relates to their argument for the correct reading of the concept of practice: for Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein’s remark “and hence also obeying a rule is a practice” is to be read as a focus on “doing”, on actions, as opposed to interpretations and theories. They read Wittgenstein’s passages about the possibility for an individual in isolation to follow rules, and to share these rules with an observer, as evidence that Wittgenstein would follow their individualist account of rule-following. Putnam accuses Kripke of the same erroneous communitarianism when he claims that “[§199] does not say ‘It is not possible that one person in isolation could obey a rule’” (Putnam 1996, p. 244). The question is not, as stated before, about the communal aspect. What makes rule-following meaningful, and possible, is the regulated “doings” that are publicly shareable, the *regularity*. It is a question of focusing on the regularity of the application of the rule, not on the contingent fact of these actions being actually shared by a community or not. Their reading sees the shared agreement as a *framework condition* of rule-following, opposed to Kripke’s *constitutive* reading. In Kripke’s reading, it is the actual agreement that constitutes the criteria for the rule; in the Baker-Hacker (and Putnam’s) reading this agreement is only a framework, necessary for rules to be actually followed, but it doesn’t play a role on the criteria for the rule itself.

One of the more exegetical criticisms elaborated by Baker and Hacker is related to the history behind the *Philosophical Investigations*. They claim that by considering §§201-2 to be the centre of the book, Kripke is misconstruing the very book since these sections were only added in the final (fourth) version, in 1945-46. For them these sections are not focused on scepticism or the importance of the community to understand rule-following. This is also related to Baker and Hacker’s disagreement with Kripke’s move of situating the “real” private language argument in the sections before §243. On their view, the sections that Kripke

calls an application of the private language argument (§243-315) do not talk only about sensations. Instead, they read them as being focused on all kinds of private ostensive definitions.

Finally, let's address the question of assertibility-conditions vs. truth-conditions as the criteria for meaning in language. Baker and Hacker deny Kripke's claim that Wittgenstein abandoned a truth-conditional view of meaning elaborated in the *Tractatus* on three grounds: first they deny that Wittgenstein had a truth-conditional theory in the *Tractatus*; second, they claim that there is no discussion about facts in the *Philosophical Investigations*; third, in their reading, the remarks Wittgenstein elaborates regarding assertibility-conditions are not enough to establish that he defends such a general theory of meaning. This quote sums up quite clearly the objection:

Wittgenstein clearly denied the intelligibility of the canonical form of explanation of meaning favoured by truth-condition theorists. Does it follow that he embraced anti-realism or assertion-conditions? Not at all". (Hacker 1986, p. 328)

1.6. Defending Kripkenstein

1.6.1. From Wright

Drawing some remarks from Kusch's criticism of Wright's theory of intentions (Kusch 2006, pp. 211-219), let's start with his option of abandoning the "flat-footed response" to the sceptic: for him, this is an argumentative and substantial alternative, chosen by its better qualities. But is that so? For the sceptical question is not an epistemological one, it is not a solution to answer "I just know that I mean addition instead of quaddition". That can be a possible answer to an epistemological challenge similar to Kripke's, but his focus is ontological. So, by dismissing this alternative as not even a possible one, some of the first remarks made by Wright already seem to be trembling. In his theory of intentions, Wright leaves no space for objectivity of meaning. By rejecting it, Wright abandons one of the main cores of meaning determinism: that meaning can be determined in advance causally and normatively. This option brings his reading closer to Kripke's than of the other semantic primitivists.

Another troubling aspect of Wright's theory is the apparent dissonancy between his anthropological account of our practices and his metaphysical justification for it. This can be an example of digging below the bedrock, since one of the main objectives of Wittgenstein's later philosophy was to eliminate any metaphysical explanation of something that can only be observed. There simply is no metaphysical mystery behind the fact that part of our practices lie in attributing to others authority in reporting intentions. Again, Wright's proposal of a naturalist account on the first-person avowal is not incompatible with Kripke's sceptical solution since both try to ground the objectivity of meaning, and of rule-following, in the biological and anthropological conditions of our form of life. On Kusch's view, one should see Wright's criticism not as opposed to Kripke's sceptical solution, but as a complement regarding the practical and pragmatic aspect of our first-person avowals.

1.6.2. From McDowell

In *A Sceptical Guide to Meaning and Rules*, Kusch presents us with an interesting, even if somewhat inconclusive (in his own words), critique of McDowell's arguments against Kripke's interpretation. For Kusch, McDowell is rejecting many of the meaning-determinist arguments in order to find a middle ground between a view that a concept is "neither a pattern of application that extends of itself to new cases" nor a step-by-step "creation as we proceed" (Kusch 2006, p. 227). But for Kusch this reading of Wittgenstein is not that far from Kripke's sceptical solution. The importance of training to follow a rule blindly is present in both readings, and McDowell's insistence on factualism is not incompatible with Kusch's reading of Kripkenstein. The main goal of his criticism of McDowell is to show how he is more closely related to Kripke's interpretation than he is to the meaning determinists. Neither objectivity nor factualism are at risk with Kripkenstein, as Kusch demonstrates.

McDowell claims that Kripke's main thesis is that "there is nothing that constitutes my understanding an order in a determinate way" (McDowell 1984, p. 337). This is not what Kripke states, though.⁵ Kripke does not say that meaning something rather than another is an act of interpretation or that it is dependent on the consensus of interpretation. Kripke only

⁵ "(...) the real point of Wittgenstein's paradox is not that the rule of addition is somehow vague, or leaves some cases of its application undetermined. On the contrary, the word 'plus' denotes a function whose determination is completely precise." (Kripke, 2004 [1982], p. 82)

exposes how meaning something rather than another is not a process independent of our communal life. Quite the contrary, this process is one of the best examples of the normativity of the practices that are constitutive of the human form of life. Regarding conventions as the criteria for rule-following does not mean the same as asserting that meaning is in itself vague, undetermined, or unstable. It is a much more modest claim: that the stability of meaning comes from the grounds formed by our shared practices, customs, and conventions, which are themselves both regulative and constitutive of our language. Even with some possible disagreement on the level of universality of human practices (if one prefers a more cultural view of these or a more humanist perspective), what Kripke is showing is that meaning is not something independent of our human practices and that its origin, and its continuity, are the human practices themselves.

Kripke states that there are no facts that determine the meaning of something. Not in the sense that rules are not objectively structured, as Kripke would disagree with such an anti-realist position. What Kripke is saying is that the normative aspect of meaning does not emerge from natural facts. It is our shared life that gives rise to our use of language as it is. It is not an anti-realist or linguistic idealist claim; Kripke is not saying that our conventions determine the reality in its indifferent existence; that our concepts determine everything that exists; only that we, as community (or communities), determine and form our concepts, and that our practices are what ground our application of concepts.

This conventionalist view of meaning (based on assertibility-conditions) has nothing to do with either assimilation of understanding with interpretation or with anti-realist claims. It is rather a complex and deep argument about how one can dissolve the myth that meaning takes care of itself (in McDowell's own words) without falling into anti-realism. To state that assertibility conditions are invented (like mathematical proofs) by the community is not to claim a linguistic idealism of non-intentional objects. McDowell's concern about digging below the bedrock is not even at stake here. Kripke is not trying to go beyond what is possible to analyse rationally. Rather, he is being faithful to the movement of "looking" instead of "thinking" that Wittgenstein proposes. Kripke is showing how one can follow a rule, how one can know that one is following a determinate rule, and how one can know the correct application of a rule in future cases: the sceptical solution is regarding the existence of a meaning-determinist fact, being therefore an ontological scepticism, not epistemological. It

is a focus on how one cannot but fall into the sceptical trap if one follows the meaning-determinist assumptions of a superlative fact that determines all future applications of a concept.

Following the same line of reasoning, knowing how to follow a rule in Kripke's view is not a blind act of faith or some unstable slippery slope, risking the loss of objectivity at each usage. It is the application of a determinate knowledge, embedded in our actions and reflective of them, with stability enough to decide between right or wrong. The communitarian view of rule-following does not immediately turn every application of a concept into an interpretation – it simply shows that the stable ground is a community of speakers (and agents). It is still an act of understanding: *understanding the meaning of a concept through the knowledge of the rules of assertion that structure its usage in a context*. It is knowledge that can be openly discussed and observed by others, preserving the publicity of language that is transversal to every serious reading of Wittgenstein. Kripke is simply saying that the ratification criteria for this kind of knowledge is, ultimately, when one reaches the “bedrock level”, the agreement on the conceptualized conventions of a practice. Institutions, customs, and socio-practical agreements are what ground rules, not facts. If we assume the existence of this semantic fact, we necessarily fall into the sceptical paradox.

“Digging below the bedrock”, the great villainy for McDowell, is not bringing to the surface the structure of a practice, namely the community's actions that ground a grammatical rule, but trying to justify metaphysically what can only be described. Kripkenstein is in no way trying to go beyond the limits “imposed” by Wittgenstein. Kripke's aim is to clarify a misconception of meaning as independent of our practices in community, and to show how is, in fact, the communal aspect that gives rise to a meaningful language, with objective standards for correctness. Kripke is simply criticizing the thesis that, for the later Wittgenstein, what ultimately decides meaning are empirical facts, since these are dependent on the assertibility conditions that confer them that status in a language-game. Empirical facts are still in need of a convention, and a community, to be meaningfully understood as such, and so they cannot stand as the criteria for knowledge of rule-following. The investigation has, for this reason, to be on the level of the agreement that determines the rule itself. It has to be a conceptual investigation. Otherwise, every investigation falls into an infinite regress.

1.6.3. From Baker and Hacker

Kusch's rigorous defence of Kripke's interpretation gives special attention to the criticism elaborated by Baker and Hacker. For the assessment of their critique, Kusch discriminates eleven objections found in Baker and Hacker's book *Scepticism, Rules and Language*. I will focus primarily on his answers and comments on the objections since most of these have already been presented in the previous section dedicated to the exposition of the Baker-Hacker critique of Kripkenstein.

The first objection aims at the labels of "sceptic" and "common-sense philosopher" being attributed to Wittgenstein. Baker and Hacker deem any labelling of Wittgenstein as a sceptic, and a common-sense philosopher, as a nonsensical reading of his work, unfaithful to the whole corpus of his writings. Regarding scepticism, Kripke argues that although Wittgenstein showed how *general* scepticism dissolves into nonsense, he wouldn't be so dismissive of a more *local* scepticism. Kusch argues that Wittgenstein would agree with Kripke's sceptic label because it is an *ontological* scepticism, and not *epistemological*. In Kusch's own words: "Kripke's Wittgenstein is sceptical about the existence of meaning-determining facts, not about the idea of justification of knowledge regarding such facts". Although Kusch defends Kripke in considering Wittgenstein a local sceptic regarding meaning-determining facts, he concedes to Baker and Hacker that naming Wittgenstein a common-sense philosopher is erroneous. This does no harm to the core of the meaning-sceptic thesis, though. Kusch maintains that the picture Kripke wants to draw is not dependent on the common-sense label. For Kusch, this objection does not take importance from Kripke's remarks on assertibility-conditions and the role of the community since these are not anchored to the "common-sense philosopher" idea. Baker and Hacker fail to see, on Kusch's view, the constitutive-ontological character of the kind of scepticism defended in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Kusch 2006, p. 240).

The second objection takes aim at Kripke's description of the problem of rule-following: how do my past intentions of the use "+" relate to my future usages? For Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein's problem was not regarding past intentions, but how a rule determines its applications. Kripke's formulation is misplaced and foreign to Wittgenstein, they claim. Kusch disagrees with Baker and Hacker. He argues that Wittgenstein's "patient"

(as in the dialogue in the *Philosophical Investigations*) is close to the meaning-determinist as it was thought by Kripke in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Even if Wittgenstein is not formulating the problem exactly as Kripke, Kusch does not see a problem here: after all, Kripke's work is of an *interpretative* nature, not an exegetical paraphrasing. It is perfectly correct to read Wittgenstein's patient as a meaning-determinist that is bound to accept the sceptical challenge (and fail). In Kusch's reading, Wittgenstein shows how the worry of the patient (how do the learner's inclinations fit with the teacher's meaning?) assumes a meaning-determinist picture, while Kripke shows how the meaning-determinist perspective leads to a sceptical problem of how past intentions relate to future usages.

The third objection presented by Kusch is about the concept of "fact". For Baker and Hacker, Wittgenstein explicitly contradicts Kripke's claim that there is no fact that determines the usage of "plus" or "quus". Wittgenstein does not reject ordinary discourses regarding intentions and meaning. What one cannot accept are philosophical theses drawn from these forms of expression. Baker and Hacker also consider Kripke's conception of a fact distant to some of Wittgenstein's remarks regarding facts. Firstly, for Wittgenstein facts are neither spatial nor temporal and thus cannot be part of the world. Secondly, the link between *p is true* and *it is a fact that p* is a grammatical convention. Thirdly, Wittgenstein opposes metaphysical readings of these grammatical statements. But, for Kusch, Kripke's Wittgenstein would agree with all of these objections. They do no harm. Regarding the first point, Kusch argues that Kripke also sees a fundamental difference between ordinary talk of facts (which is to be accepted) and metaphysical super facts (which are to be rejected). When Kripke writes "there is no fact as to whether I meant plus or quus" he means "fact as seen by the meaning-determinist". Also, Kusch argues that Kripke's Wittgenstein is perfectly compatible with a minimal conception of truth-conditions, which renders the other two points of this objection superfluous. Kripkenstein would agree with a non-spatial and non-temporal conception of facts and with the claim that the link between *p is true* and *it is a fact that p* is a grammatical convention.

The fourth objection regards the reading of §§198-201 by Kripke. For Baker and Hacker there is no mention of a paradox in these sections and Wittgenstein himself offers an immediate solution to the rule-following question: "to follow a rule is not to interpret a rule-formulation or instruction, it is to master a technique or a custom" (Kusch 2006, p. 246). But,

on Kusch's view, Kripke does not overlook the importance of mastering a technique or being part of a custom. In fact, these features are central to the sceptical solution. Kripke wishes only to show that the sceptical problem is unanswerable from a meaning-determinist point of view. The paradox shows itself only if one follows the view that Wittgenstein's patient argues for meaning-determinism, but dissolves if one abandons that picture in favour of a meaning-sceptic framework. This objection is, for these reasons, harmless to Kripke's interpretation.

The fifth objection has wide and complex implications. It is focused on the issue of individualism vs communitarianism in rule-following. While the individualists, such as Baker and Hacker, regard the repeatability and publicity of rules as the criteria for meaningful rule-following, communitarians, such as Kripke and Kusch, consider the actuality of the shared practice, the actual existence of a community, as the standard for rules. To answer to the individualist claim, Kusch makes use of his knowledge of his mother tongue (German) to show how Wittgenstein was focusing on the social performativity of rules in §199 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this section, Wittgenstein uses the terms "Gepflogenheiten" (customs, habits, manners, conventions, practices, usages, traditions), "Gebräuche" (singular: use, usage; plural: traditional ways and customs) and "Institutionen" (institutions, involving groups of people). These concepts, Kusch argues, have their usage directly connected to the existence of a community or group. They do not make sense when applied to a singular individual. For Kusch, this is a decisive blow to the individualist reading: the original text written by Wittgenstein implies a communitarian reading of rule-following since these are concepts that would make no sense to be applied to an individual.

The sixth objection elaborated by Baker and Hacker aims at the concept of practice. For them, when Wittgenstein claims that "obeying a rule is a practice" what is evoked is a "doing", an "action", as opposed to an "interpretation" or "theory". Again Kusch disagrees with the Baker-Hacker reading on linguistic grounds. In the original German text, Wittgenstein uses the term "tätlich" which invites a reading of social custom, and ordinary day-to-day practice. This is, for Kusch, evidence of a social focus on rules ignored by Baker and Hacker. Wittgenstein reinforces the social dimension saying that "an intention is embedded in a situation, in human customs and institutions" (PI §337). The answer to the sixth objection is thus simply pointing to the German text of these two sections combined.

The seventh objection of Baker and Hacker to Kripke's reading is about the history behind §§201-2 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. According to Kripke, the core of the rule-following considerations, and so the kernel of the private-language argument, is in §§201-2. Baker and Hacker find this hard to accept since these sections were only added later to the book. Kusch remarks that Wittgenstein often changed the place of his sections, moving them from one context to another. It is, for this reason, not hard to believe that the adding of these sections was intended by Wittgenstein as a way to replace them in the context where they made more sense. Following his previous objections, Kusch notes that if one reads rule-following as a social phenomenon, the place of §§201-2 no longer seems "oddly placed", as the Baker-Hacker reading claims (Kusch 2006, p. 254).

The eighth objection has to do with the question about where the "real" private language argument is located. While Baker and Hacker defend the orthodox reading of locating it in §§243-315, Kripke proposes a radical new view that the "real" argument is located before, in §§138-242. Kusch concedes that Kripke did not elaborate enough on the relationship between the two arguments, but it would be wrong not to see that both are aiming at the same targets and share the same "spirit" (Kusch 2006, p. 255). This concession does not change the fact that if one takes a social reading of rule-following both arguments are strongly related, according to Kusch. This alone is enough to resist the criticism of Baker and Hacker that Kripke was oversimplifying when describing the traditional private language argument as a mere "application" of the "real" argument in the preceding sections. Kusch's reply is grounded on the already stated view that a social reading of rule-following gives a strong sense to understand the §§243-315 as a "special case" of the argument laid down in §§138-242.

In the ninth objection, Baker and Hacker return to the question of rule-following in isolation. They claim, according to Kusch, that Wittgenstein agreed with the view that a private rule-following is possible. They present, in *Scepticism, Rules and Language*, quotes from unpublished manuscripts from Wittgenstein that give strength to their reading. Although these are admitted by Kusch to be "striking passages", he does see room for not taking them as decisive answers to the question. Besides the fact that they are isolated passages, if they would be as decisive as Baker and Hacker claim, why did Wittgenstein take

them from the carefully edited version of the *Philosophical Investigations*? Also, for Kusch, the focus of Wittgenstein is on private ostensive definitions, not on isolated monologues.

Objection number ten is focused on the question of how rule-following relates to agreement. For Baker and Hacker, in Wittgenstein this relation is a *framework condition*, meaning that broad agreement is necessary for rule-following to be possible. They read Kripke as defending the view of a *constitutive criterion*, where the agreement is in itself the criteria for rule-following. Kusch sees this accusation as misplaced since there is no evidence, on his view, of a constitutive reading in Kripke. Agreement with community in responses is not a necessary and sufficient condition for meaningful rule-following. Kripke's aim is precisely the view that searches for necessary and sufficient conditions. But this does not reduce agreement to a framework condition either. According to Kusch, "the existence of a fundamental agreement does not pre-empt the question of whether there is agreement in our responses to specific plus-queries".

The eleventh, and last, objection, presented by Kusch is probably the most important for this investigation. It refers to the question of truth and assertibility. Baker and Hacker reject the claim that Wittgenstein passed from a truth-conditional view of meaning in the *Tractatus* to an assertibility-conditions view in the *PI*. Their criticism was already exposed in the previous section but I will expose it here for a better understanding of Kusch's comments. First, Baker and Hacker reject that Wittgenstein defended a truth-conditional view in the *Tractatus*. Second, they claim that §§1-133 do not have any discussion of Tractarian facts. Third, they reject the attribution of an assertibility-conditions theory of meaning to the later Wittgenstein, even if they concede that the circumstances play a major role in the meaning of some types of sentences. I shall now present Kusch's answer to the three objections elaborated by Baker and Hacker. Regarding the rejection of a truth-conditional view of the early Wittgenstein, Kusch notes that Kripke's claim is not aimed at a comprehensive and full understanding of the *Tractatus*, but merely to note a contrast between the two phases. For Kusch, it is obvious that there is a certain truth-conditional account of meaning in the *Tractatus* that is the aim of Kripke's remarks. Even if Baker and Hacker are right to point out that for Wittgenstein atomic propositions do not have truth-conditions, Wittgenstein is clear when he claims that the truth-grounds of an elementary proposition are the case that it is true. This is, for Kusch, evidence enough that Wittgenstein was thinking

inside a paradigm of truth-conditions for meaning, and it is this change of view that is stressed by Kripke. Regarding the second objection, Kusch notes that Kripke explicitly mentions the first §§1-137, not §§1-133, as an endorsement of a deflationary (redundancy) theory of truth. Also, Wittgenstein attacks the idea that all sentences are descriptions, and this attack has implied an offensive against the idea of correspondence between sentence and fact. For Kusch it is not correct to claim that there is no discussion of facts in these sections since Wittgenstein is aiming at the view defended in the *Tractatus* of a word-world combination, or name-object, which is directly related to the discussion of facts. Concerning the last of the claims, Kusch presents two “provisos”: first, Kripke stresses that Wittgenstein offers only a rough general picture of meaning, not a theory; second, Kripke himself dislikes the term “assertibility” since it privileges assertions over other forms of utterances, but the main point is the focus on the conditions of a move in a language-game. Kusch claims that the Baker-Hacker reading itself is not far from the assertibility-conditions view as proposed by Kripke. He shows how the multiplicity of criteria for understanding is also present in their reading. Even if this conception is somehow vague and sketchy, for Kusch it is still applicable in a loose way. He sees no difference from the way Baker and Hacker themselves propose a “picture of meaning in terms of criteria”.

For Kusch, even though the Baker-Hacker criticism of Kripke is detailed and wide ranged, even on target in some issues, it doesn’t damage the core of Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein. Let’s then sum up the six claims that, for Kusch, are the most important for the meaning-sceptic reading and that resist the objections elaborated by Baker and Hacker:

- 1) Kripke is entitled to call Wittgenstein a sceptic;
- 2) Kripke reads correctly the rule-following considerations and problems;
- 3) Kripke remains faithful to Wittgenstein’s remarks on facts;
- 4) Kripke is correct in adopting a communitarian view of §§198-202;
- 5) Kripke is for the most part correct regarding the relation between the two private language arguments; he does not misread Wittgenstein’s ideas on agreement;
- 6) Kripke is right to claim a shift in Wittgenstein’s later phase from a truth-conditional to an assertibility-conditional understanding of meaning.

1.6.4. Last remarks on the Wright, McDowell and Baker-Hacker criticisms

To conclude this section, I will highlight the main points that I believe to be crucial if one wants to draw something from Kripkenstein's views. First, the rejection of reading Kripkenstein as being against the objectivity of meaning. Kripke does not argue that to follow a rule is a leap of faith or an undetermined act of interpretation. For him, there is a stability in the criteria for correctness. This standard is not given by either a speculative nor an empiricist correspondence between words and objects but through the agreement of the community over a practice (assertibility-conditions), that regulate the rules for a meaningful usage of a proposition. The communal aspect is precisely the grounding for objectivity, not an adversary of it. Second, Kripke's communal view of meaning is precisely what allows for an externalist resolution of various philosophical problems, namely sceptical ones. It is the public nature of language that should be considered; and if one looks at it with attention, one sees that problems regarding the "self", "other minds", intention attributions, pain behaviour, and so on, start to seem less paradoxical. This public, externalist and communal approach gives us philosophical weapons to dissolve some of the most (apparently) intriguing problems. Thirdly, Hacker, McDowell and Wright all stress an important point: the practical aspect of following a rule. But none of them fully grasps the implications of it. If Wright still holds to some metaphysics to make sense of his theory of intentions in the midst of a practical and anthropological account, McDowell does not explain how such practices can in fact lead to normativity of meaning, and Hacker still holds to a truth-conditional view of meaning that ignores the social performativity of rules. Kripke's reading allows precisely for the practical reading without losing touch with the process of normativity, giving an explanation of the process of rule-following without falling into pure metaphysical speculation (the true face of digging below the bedrock).

1.7. Reassessing Kripkenstein

I hope to have been able to show how one can draw important reflections from Kripke's interpretation. However, as observed in the beginning of this chapter, one need not to buy the whole interpretation. Firstly, the dichotomy of assertibility and truth is not one that it is easy to determine through a close reading of Wittgenstein's texts. It can only be used as an illustrative tool since the risks of misleading are high. Wittgenstein never asserts being in one

of the “sides of the fence” in a definitive way, since for him to put forward general theories of meaning was absurd. Secondly, Kripke’s conception of a fact is too narrow and too attached to a naturalist picture. Thirdly, assertibility as a rough picture of meaning is compatible, in principle, with epistemological realism. Kusch’s remarks regarding factualism serve as an initial push for this view, even if he did not intend such a use of his argument.

According to Kripke’s reading, we can encounter friendly remarks from Wittgenstein in favour of a deflationary theory of truth. Kusch develops this question while reflecting on how to combine “truth” with what for Wittgenstein should be the main philosophical question (“in what circumstances does it make sense to assert x?”). Kusch argues that a minimal truth-conditions reading does no harm to the meaning-sceptic. He argues for a combination of factualism, a deflationary theory of truth and meaning-scepticism. His arguments centre around three main points. Firstly, Wittgenstein’s replacement of truth-conditions for assertibility-conditions have nothing to do with the rejection of a meaningful usage of concepts like “true” or “false”. Secondly, in the deflationary theory of truth attributed to Wittgenstein, facts are not truth-makers of propositions, hence cannot explain truth. Thirdly, Kusch proposes a deflationary account of propositions: propositions are not arguments in truth-functions. It is simply a given fact that some sentences in our language-games are true or false but this is not so due to propositions. The categorical opposition between assertibility and truth is something that Wittgenstein himself did not make, and I believe it to be a somewhat artificial interpretation of his work. If it is erroneous to ignore Wittgenstein’s remarks on the social performativity of rules, and to read truth as the metaphysical standard for meaning, to regard Wittgenstein as an anti-realist also falls short from a rigorous interpretation of many of his writings regarding logic, mathematics and practice. To give relevance to the performativity of language and to regard Wittgenstein as a realist are not two mutually exclusive options, but rather, as I hope to show, a combination that structures an interpretation of his work that is true to his reflections.

I argue that both assertibility and truth are indispensable to understand meaning from a Wittgensteinian perspective. Robert Brandom argues for an interesting combination of these categories (“a precise sense in which the representationalist’s concern with truth conditions can be generated within the project of the assertibility theorists”). Brandom’s suggestion is to combine the truth-conditions criteria with the assertibility picture: to see truth

as an auxiliary tool to the process of content evaluation within a particular set of rules of assertion (Brandom 1976, p. 139). In this way, one can talk of truth-conditions in various different cases such as mathematics, arts and fiction, without losing each of the assertibility specifications. Truth is then located in the field of semantics: it serves as the criteria for the relationship between the sentence and its content within a particular context. A true proposition is thus dependent on the assertibility-conditions that regulate the usage of that proposition.

The interdependence of assertibility and truth shows itself even more evident, I believe, if we take seriously Wittgenstein's remarks on what is the grounding of language: *practice*. Here we should follow the emphasis put by both Hacker and McDowell: institutions, costumes, social structures are to be seen as *practical commitments*. Language is grounded in *deeds*, which means that the structure of meaning is grounded in practical conventions ("agreements in doing x in a context C"). Wittgenstein states many times (especially in *On Certainty*) that practice is what grounds grammatical rules; what we *do* is in an internal relation with how the rules *are* (as in the example of counting (LFM, p. 203). Conventions appear as a conceptualization of our actions, as in the example given by Wittgenstein of the baby who first cries and later replaces this cry with words. There is no sceptical gap between assertibility-conditions and truth because the rules that structure and give meaning to assertions emerge from our practical relation to the logical context of these rules. Once again, I recur to Kusch's remarks on factualism: the embrace of factualism does not interfere with assertibility. It is in this sense that I argue against accepting Kripke's attribution of a sceptical solution to Wittgenstein and Kusch's defence of it. Wittgenstein shows on various occasions that scepticism, either epistemological or ontological, dissolves itself in the way it is not sustained by the way we *act*. Ontological suspicions like doubting the existence of the external world are unintelligible and, as Nuno Venturinha puts it: "a suspicion of this kind violates logical grammar, which, more than constituting a theoretical framework, is practically and societally based. What counts as grammatical, as logical in this sense, is what human beings *do*" (Venturinha 2018, p. 86).

If I doubt the existence of material objects, and, while I am doubting it, have a sip from the glass of water in front of me, I immediately show through my action that my sceptical doubt is not a meaningful proposition because it is not grounded on my practical

relation to the context. It is the way we act that dissolves the very meaning of a sceptical doubt, and this is so due to the fact that my action is relating directly to the object or phenomena that my concepts are referring to. The only scepticism that could be roughly appointed to Wittgenstein would be a scepticism towards philosophical theories of rule-following that ignored the ordinary talk of rule-following, not as a philosophical solution to the question of rule-following itself (Putnam 1996, p.245).

The second point where Kripke's interpretation falls short is in the very conception of a fact. Putnam shows how Kripke's claim that "there is no fact that determines if I meant plus or quus" only applies if one follows a physicalist and reductionist conception of a fact. As it was stated before, facts for Wittgenstein were neither spatial nor temporal. The emphasis given to the isolation case is evidence that Kripke is considering the semantic fact to be necessarily of a natural kind. The problem is that this naturalistic view of facts is Kripke's view, not Wittgenstein's (Putnam 1996, p. 258). So the question is even more pertinent: would Wittgenstein really agree with this sceptical label? Here I follow Hacker when he claims that: "misconceived is the suggestion that Wittgenstein's discussion of following a rule was intended to show that there is no objective fact of correctly following or incorrectly following the rule" (Hacker 1986, p. 333). There is no reason to believe that Wittgenstein would not consider the convention of a rule a fact of the world. Wittgenstein does not want to purge our ordinary discourses about rule-following and objectivity. When Wittgenstein gives the example of counting (LFM) isn't he showing that our knowledge of this technique is based on our knowledge of a conceptualized set of practical possibilities, being thus a knowledge of a fact? Namely, the fact that the rule of counting proceeds in *this* way. As Hacker puts it: "the rule and nothing but the rule determines what is correct to do at the 500th step. For the rule and what accords with it are internally, grammatically related, just as an expectation and what fulfils it, a desire and what satisfies it, a command and what complies with it" (Hacker 1986, p. 334). Its steps are internally determined: to follow the rule is to follow the steps determined by the fixed convention. This convention is stable and it is not put to test at each application. Quite the contrary, each application confirms its status as a rule since regularity is a condition for rule-following (Putnam 1996; Hacker 1986). There cannot be an empirical refutation of a rule because the rule is not empirically grounded: a rule is a grammatical convention. As Hacker notes: "It is evident that Wittgenstein conceived

of criteria as being determined by convention, not discovered in experience by inductive correlation” (Hacker 1986, p. 310). This does not mean that I have to rely on an interpretation secured only by a Big Other of the community in order to follow the rule correctly, with the ghost of scepticism lingering around every application. I need only to know the conceptualized technique that emerges from the fixation of a rule in the context that plays its role. It is this practical relation between the convention and the context what determines the criteria for correctness. The steps to follow the rule correctly are grounded on this practical relation between rule and context. The convention is fixed as a rule precisely because of this practical grounding for its steps.

Regarding the compatibility of assertibility with epistemological realism (I will argue for this in more detail in Chapter 2), what are the main conclusions that we can draw for this investigation? Let’s divide the answer in two parts. First, assertibility-conditions are practical rules constrained by ratification-independent phenomena (Hacker 1986; Kusch 2006; McDowell). In this reading of assertibility, grammatical rules are directly connected to the ontological structure of the contexts in which they are rules. Not in the sense of meta-truth-conditions for assertibility conditions, but a reading of assertibility-conditions as being necessarily constrained by objective features of contexts. Second, truth is not something metaphysical, but contextual and practical: “[Wittgenstein] never thought that true is a theoretical term or a metalinguistic predicate” (Hacker 1986, p. 330). What we do is constrained by “how things are” in their context (Venturinha 2018, p. 85). The context in which things exist impose ontological limits to the practical relation between subject and object, and thus determine the very way our rules of language structure the conceptualization of the context and its content: which doubts and propositions are meaningful and which kind of truth-conditions are to be applied (Brandom 1976). If we reject this practical ground, we are left with empty word combinations and pseudo-language-games disconnected to reality. Truths are contextual and dependent on the assertibility rules that differentiate the criteria for truth and falsity according to the ontological structure of each context. Far from being a rejection of truth, my aim is to achieve a deeper understanding of how the concept of truth works within a realist framework of assertibility. This reading allows for a defence of realism about contexts without committing to a classical metaphysical realist idea of a universal nature of propositions and of truth-conditions. This way allows for a defence of a realist

interpretation of Wittgenstein being true to his idea that to consider something true is to consider something correct within a particular discourse; also, this plurality of discourse does not have to entail a loss of objectivity leading us to relativism. Wittgenstein provides precisely the middle ground of a realism that is not blind to the plurality of ontological contexts.

1.8. Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, I will sum up the core of my argument: *meaningful rule-following is sustained by the ontological structure of what constitutes the practical grounds for that rule*. I believe this is a reading that while remaining faithful to Wittgenstein, does not let itself be trapped in a purely exegetical discussion. It maintains the conception of *assertibility* as conceived by Kripke while it also follows the *realist* framework of Hacker, McDowell and Putnam. I am tempted to draw a parallel between this conclusion and the Hegelian claim that form and content are not two separate things, but the form is in itself part of the content: meaning that the form in which we act and conceptualize is not separated from the content of the things which we act and conceptualize upon. This internal relation is what accounts for the possibility of combining assertibility-conditions and realism: rules don't stand in need of an interpretation since their performative normativity is always-already intertwined, in a practical way, with their objective context.

Chapter 2 – From a Realist Point of View

2.1. Introduction

In this Chapter, I will present an overview of some of the work developed in recent years in the field of Wittgensteinian epistemology. How does this connect to the research question of this investigation? How to make sense of Wittgenstein's claim that there is no rational justification for our most basic beliefs, particularly religious beliefs? First of all, the question of truth and objectivity that was raised in the previous chapter relates directly to Wittgenstein's views on scepticism and belief. Again, my goal won't be to pursue the debates regarding purely exegetical questions, but I am especially interested in the consequences of Wittgenstein's ideas for classical epistemological themes like truth, objectivity and realism. I will pay special attention to the programme of hinge epistemology, more precisely the work carried out by Annalisa Coliva, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and Duncan Pritchard, as well as the programme of contextualism, focusing on the work of Stewart Cohen, Michael Williams and Nuno Venturinha. I will then add to the discussion of Wittgensteinian epistemologies the new realism of Markus Gabriel. It is my goal to show by the end of the chapter that it is through this threefold combination that Wittgenstein's ideas regarding context, hinges, truth and objectivity can be better understood. These concepts are in themselves fundamental for understanding the question of rational justification of beliefs. I will argue that Wittgenstein's reflections in his later stage point towards a realist picture of knowledge, where concepts like "truth" and "objectivity", far from being rejected, are revitalized in a different picture than the one we find in the *Tractatus*. My aim is to show how Wittgenstein's work grounds a realist point of view that is neither physicalist nor materialist. I will also argue for an ontological reading of Wittgenstein's language-games, bringing Gabriel's ontological pluralism into the discussion. All these themes are fundamental for understanding the consequences of what was discussed in the first chapter regarding rules and to ground the discussion of religious belief in the next chapter.

2.2. Hinge Epistemology

In Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, we are presented with a dialogical criticism of G.E. Moore's response to scepticism. One of the main criticisms Wittgenstein addresses is Moore's

misunderstanding of the different roles propositions play in the game of doubt. For Wittgenstein, a doubt can only be meaningful as long as it has, in its structure, propositions that are taken for certain, being thus exempt from doubt in that context. This certainty is not universally fixed, being dependent on the language game – a proposition may be taken for certain in one context, but put into question in another. Certainty and doubt walk alongside each other, so to speak: for there cannot be a doubt that puts everything into question, since for its own meaning it needs some fixed propositions. For Wittgenstein, Moore's answer is just a misunderstanding of the role that the proposition "I have two hands" has: Moore is trying to state a proposition that is being taken for certain. This displacement is not free from consequences: some propositions with the status of certainty cannot be stated as empirical propositions, they are part of the very bedrock assumptions of our form of life. The mistake lies in trying to assume that they can be brought to a language game where they become empirical, and thus provable. The mistake is in addressing the sceptical challenge of trying to prove them. For Wittgenstein, these propositions have no meaning outside their role of certain assumptions, being unprovable or senseless if one attempts to justify them like an empirical hypothesis. Wittgenstein's dissolution of the sceptical problem relies, on the one hand, on a practical dissolution (by showing how one's universal sceptical doubt is at odds with the way one acts) and, on the other hand, on a logical dissolution (by showing the logical exclusion of doubt of foundational certainties).

The propositions that are fixed, and that cannot be taken as empirical, provable, propositions, are the hinge propositions. They have the characteristics of a hinge: a fixed mechanism that allows movement precisely because it is fixed. Wittgenstein gives examples of these propositions: "I have parents", "I have never been on the moon", and Moore's favourite illustration "I have two hands". These are part of the bedrock assumptions that govern our language games. They have a practical foundation, sustained by our shared praxis and form of life. It is not a "seeing" but an "acting" that grounds these propositions. These hinges are anchored to our human form of inhabiting the world, forming a deep and complex web of connections between propositions, actions and assumptions.

It is already clear that hinges have a structural role in our practices of language. However, it is not so clear that hinges have a normative feature. But if we look attentively to Wittgenstein's remarks on rule following, we see that there is a clear similarity between his

practical approaches regarding axioms and the role that hinges play – namely their practical foundation. This practical feature of rules and hinges is not something to be taken only in a descriptive sense. What I believe Wittgenstein is trying to draw our attention to is that our knowledge of the world, and so its structure and its justification system, is something grounded in the very way we, humans, inhabit the very same world. He is trying to make us see that “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is true insofar as one is “inside” the paradigm that defines the system in which “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is taken to be true. This clearly has similarities with Wittgenstein’s idea that our system of enquiry is fundamentally based in assumptions that are intricate with our form of life. These assumptions impel us to certain directions of thought, allowing some doubts but denying the meaningfulness of other doubts. This practical orientation of our enquiries can be seen, I defend, as more than descriptive, reaching a normative status, since it has a directional role in the very justifications and questions one can give and ask.

Hinges are also what allows for the distinction of contexts and language games. Not only in their formal role (determining the context in which the meaning of a word or sentence should be taken) but also in their practical role of governing the appropriate description of an action. The uncovering of hinge propositions is not a mere theoretical exercise, but a practical investigation, bringing to the “surface” the rules that govern the different practices. This structural role of hinges can be understood as normative since it determines in advance the meaning of propositions, and the actions to be carried aligned with the paradigm. Once again, the practical features of hinges are what makes it possible for them to be seen as normative. Following Coliva’s characterization of “hinge epistemology” as “a theory about justification (and knowledge) which gives center-stage to Wittgenstein’s notion of hinges” (Coliva 2016, p. 6), I will present the ideas of three of the main proponents of this school.

2.2.1. Coliva’s framework reading

In this subsection, I will present the hinge epistemology developed by Annalisa Coliva taking as a reference point her chapter “Which Hinge Epistemology?” of her book *Hinge Epistemology*, co-edited with Moyal-Sharrock. The work on this subsection was published in the conference proceedings of the Oficina de Filosofía Analítica 12 (OFA12) organized

by the Mind, Language and Action Group of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto in 2019⁶.

For Coliva, to fully understand Wittgenstein's ideas, it is necessary to take into account the context of his writings and the historical period. However, one cannot be stuck in the historical contextualization and lose the philosophical fruitfulness. This tension can be resolved by being explicit about the claims one wants to make: if it is an exegetical work, evidence and contextualization is needed; if it is a development of an idea, then it should be promptly stated. In trying to go beyond the exegesis and state clearly what hinges are, Coliva makes a list of the features that can be used to identify this kind of propositions (Coliva 2016, p. 9):

- 1) Neither true nor false
- 2) Neither justified nor unjustified
- 3) Neither reasonable nor unreasonable
- 4) Therefore, they can neither be known nor unknown
- 5) They cannot sensibly be called into doubt
- 6) Thus, for these reasons, they aren't empirical propositions but rules.

For Coliva, these features of hinges are accounted differently in each of the four readings of *On Certainty* (Coliva 2016, p. 11):

- 1) Therapeutic Interpretation (James Conant) – Skepticism is deemed utterly and radically nonsensical. Skeptical doubts are expressed outside any context of use: they are meaningless.
- 2) Framework Reading (Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock) – Hinges are rules which can't be subject to epistemic appraisal. Hence, skepticism raises a doubt where doubt cannot rationally be sustained. Therefore, skeptical doubts are nonsensical, not because they are meaningless but because they are raised where it makes no sense to raise them.
- 3) The Naturalist Reading (Peter Strawson) – Skeptical doubts are neither meaningless nor irrational, just unnatural.
- 4) The Epistemic Reading (Crispin Wright and Michael Williams) – Hinges are not rules but propositions that, in context, cannot be evidentially justified.

⁶ Henriques, Ricardo N., *On Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology: Coliva's Framework Reading*, Oficina de Filosofia Analítica 12, Universidade do Porto. (2021)

In the framework reading of Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock, hinges are certain because their normative role exempts them from doubt. If we maintain that hinges, while being rules, are still propositions – on a fairly relaxed notion of proposition – we could claim that, as such, they can be the object of a propositional attitude of certainty which parallels the kind of attitude we bear to our most well-entrenched, yet fully explicit rules. We do accept them and hold them fast, we behave in accordance with them, expect others to act in accordance with them and pass them on to our children through education and training.

Coliva maintains one specific version of the framework reading (Coliva 2016, p. 13). First, hinges are not just meaning constitutive rules but rules of evidential significance as well. They are propositions that play a rule-like role and are therefore exempt from semantic and epistemic appraisal. They allow us to acquire and assess evidence in favour or against ordinary empirical propositions. That evidence is dependent on holding them fast, hence it cannot give them epistemic support. Therefore, hinges cannot be justified. Some hinges are neither true nor false, while others are paradigmatically true and not possibly false.

Secondly, Coliva does not follow the ineffabilist claim: since hinges are not bipolar, they are not propositions and, therefore, they can never be said in proper language-games (Coliva 2016, p. 14). For Coliva, Wittgenstein broadens the notion of proposition. Hinges convey a certain picture of reality and properly give rise to a *Weltbild* – that is, to a world picture. Yet, they have a normative function, rather than a descriptive one, because they guide us in selecting what can be evidence for what. Thus, they guide us in the generation of justification for various kinds of ordinary empirical propositions.

Thirdly, Coliva holds that we do express hinges on various occasions and in doing so we do voice them as certainties in perfectly legitimate language-games (Coliva 2016, p. 14). For example, in the case of children when we are teaching them. They can be a more preparatory or clarificatory language-game, but they are genuine nonetheless.

Fourthly, Coliva thinks that the anti-sceptical strategy presented in *On Certainty* actually depends on an entailment between the irrationality of raising doubts with respect to rules, which, as such, cannot be subject to epistemic evaluation, and the semantic meaningfulness of those doubts (Coliva 2016, pp. 14-15). Sceptical doubts are ultimately nonsensical, devoid of meaning. However, we can also find the view that they are nonsensical because they are

ill posed. They appear to make sense to us because we project meaning onto them from the circumstances in which doubts are raised meaningfully. Rules are what we can recognize *post hoc* as held fixed by our actual linguistic and epistemic practices.

Fifthly, Coliva holds that the title *On Certainty* is totally appropriate for two different reasons (Coliva 2016, p. 15). First because this text deals with hinges, that is to say, propositions whose status of certainties depends on their role of basic rules of our conceptual scheme and epistemic practices. Their certainty is of a grammatical (even logical) nature, not of a psychological or animal one. The reason why we cannot doubt them is that there cannot actually be reasons to do so. This is because reasons for doubting would depend on accepting those very hinges, and a real doubt about them would deprive us of the possibility of actually making sense as we raise that very doubt. Second, there is also a sense in which our attitude with respect to them is rightly characterized as certainty, as opposed to knowledge. For we do implicitly accept them as rules: we hold them fast and behave in accordance with them.

Finally, the framework reading is not committed to reading Wittgenstein as neither a foundationalist nor a relativist (Coliva 2016, pp. 15-16). Hinges are such that we bear no epistemic relation to them and, without that much, it seems to me there really is no room for foundationalism. Rules are entrenched in a practice that could have been different from what in fact is. It is metaphysically possible that our form of life had developed differently, thereby giving rise to different linguistic and epistemic practices. Wittgenstein was not an epistemic relativist, he simply pointed to the groundlessness of our *Weltbild*.

Hinges belong to logic: to the norms that regulate our investigations (Coliva 2016, p. 17). Part of this is that certain propositions are exempt from doubt. Saying that it belongs to the logic of our investigations that certain propositions are not doubted simply means that it is a constitutive element of our empirical inquiries that, whenever evidence is collected for or against any empirical proposition, certain propositions have to be kept fixed. Hence, it is constitutive of empirical inquiries, and not just a fact about our nature or pertaining to pragmatics, that certain propositions are held fast. However, this does not mean that hinges are reasonable. They simply are a requirement to collect evidence for ordinary empirical propositions. Hinges are a requirement of reason, not a product of reason. Hinges must stay put, and thus behave like rules, for us to be in a position to acquire evidence and, therefore,

engage in the kind of practice that is constitutive of epistemic rationality itself. Hinges do not express any epistemic relation between a subject and a proposition. Rather, they express the kind of certainty that says “here a doubt is impossible”.

The key idea is that justification and knowledge don’t take place in a vacuum. Justification of knowledge claims always depend on there being certain hinges, which, as such, can’t themselves be justified or known. They are constitutive of the practice that in turn determines what being epistemically rational amounts to. Some of them can change with time, others are foundational of the human form of life. That is not to say that they are metaphysically necessary but only that they play such a fundamental role in our *Weltbild* that, from within it, we cannot find any reason to doubt them.

To conclude, in Coliva’s framework reading the animal element is preserved in the sense that it is acknowledged that hinges are what they are in virtue of a human practice that has developed contingently, and not has a result of ratiocination (Coliva 2016, p. 21). However, it is the normative element, which on her reading of Wittgenstein is the core aspect of *On Certainty*, that is given centre-stage insofar as certain unwarrantable propositions are allowed to play a constitutive role with respect to evidential justification and knowledge and, therefore, with respect to epistemic rationality itself.

2.2.2. Moyal-Sharrock’s enactivism

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock sees in Wittgenstein’s solution to the problem of regress in basic beliefs a ground-breaking achievement. For Moyal-Sharrock, this contribution is so important that it should mark a “third” Wittgenstein. This solution, on her view, consists in arguing that the foundations of our knowledge are composed of certainties that are ungrounded and non-propositional manifesting themselves in the ways of acting. This denies the logical possibility of universal sceptical doubt since it refuses the idea that the foundations of knowledge are justified and subject to knowledge themselves (Moyal-Sharrock 2016).

Our basic certainties are ungrounded, but we hold them fast due to logical conviction. We cannot be “mistaken” about a hinge certainty, it is a possibility that is logically excluded. For Moyal-Sharrock this means that Wittgenstein himself would not agree with a contextualism *à la* Michael Williams. It is not that grounds could be given on demand, but

the certainty itself, for it to be a hinge, has to be conceptually groundless. If it could have a justification, it would mean that it is not a genuine hinge certainty.

Another point of disagreement with the contextualist reading offered by Williams is the legitimacy of doubting hinge certainties: on Williams' view, sceptical doubts about hinge certainties are accepted in the context of philosophical debates. For Moyal-Sharrock this goes against Wittgenstein's view; in her reading there is no context that allows for these doubts to be uttered for their indubitability is conceptual and not contextual. As we have seen, a hinge can never be doubted. What may happen is that we mislead a doppelganger of a hinge, a proposition that looks exactly like it but is not playing the same role, for a genuine hinge. On Moyal-Sharrock's view, hinges are fixed, since their role of rules is not contextual but *logical* and *conceptual*.

This means that what may look like a doubt may not be a doubt. Even when one is presented with doubt-behaviour, this may be just that. For Moyal-Sharrock, sceptical doubts are not doubts at all (and not unnatural doubts as Williams claims). Genuine doubts need reasons and grounds besides their formal articulation. This is how, for Moyal-Sharrock, Wittgenstein defuses the possibility for a universal scepticism: by pointing to the certainties that underpin the foundations of our epistemic language-games, including the sceptics' own certainties. The sceptic is not allowed to put into question such universal doubts because his own scepticism is grounded on such certainties. This unsustainability of the universal doubt is of a *conceptual*, not pragmatic nature. The difference between knowledge and certainty is *categorical* and not merely contextual.

Moyal-Sharrock also sees in this objection to the sceptic the objection to the idea that at the basis of knowledge there is more knowledge. These certainties that ground our epistemic investigations are not known: they are *non-propositional* – ways of *acting*, *not* of *seeing*, hence they are unjustifiable and arational. It is possible, however, to analyse them verbally in order to unfold their conceptual role, since they perform the role of rules of grammar of propositional beliefs. But for Moyal-Sharrock, inasmuch as hinges perform this role, they cannot be propositions. This is also because Moyal-Sharrock sees a need for a bipolarity of propositions in Wittgenstein: a sentence is only a proposition if it is possible to be true or false. This means that when we think we are formulating a hinge in a proposition,

we are merely articulating its doppelganger: an empirical proposition that looks exactly like a hinge (Moyal-Sharrock 2016, p. 25-26). This doppelganger can thus be doubted like any other empirical proposition, tricking us into the possibility of formulating a genuine “hinge proposition”. As Moyal-Sharrock puts it:

Indeed, the enacted nature of our hinges is such that Wittgenstein claims they are not even sayable – that is, uttering a hinge, qua hinge, in the flow of ordinary discourse is to speak nonsense; it is to utter a rule where no reminder of the rule is needed. (Moyal-Sharrock, p. 33)

I believe that this rigidity is far from what Wittgenstein had in mind. Let us recall Wittgenstein’s famous passages of the hinge metaphor:

That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *indeed* not doubted.

But it isn’t that the situation is like this: We just *can’t* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.

My life consists in my being content to accept many things. (OC, 341-344)

First, let’s agree with Moyal-Sharrock’s criticism of the pragmatic account for the impossibility to doubt hinges. It is not a pragmatic decision, but rather a grammatical feature. It is not a question of being unable to know everything due to a physical or cognitive limitation, but a feature of the process of doubt and knowledge acquisition. We *cannot but* make assumptions in order to *know*, since we must have certainties to have doubts and to claim knowledge it must be possible also to doubt that knowledge. It seems clear that for Wittgenstein the intertwining of knowledge-doubt-certainty is not a contingent limitation of our current methods or a “flaw” in our biology but a positive logical feature of our *episteme*.

Second, Wittgenstein’s remarks are targeted not only to our epistemic language-games, but to our life in its multiple practices. It is part of the logic of language-games that certain assumptions are made, some commitments groundlessly admitted, and some

propositions assumed without rational justification for it. It is not merely a fact of our epistemic practices, but of all of our practices within language, that doubt hinges on certainty.

I believe that Moyal-Sharrock goes astray when she interprets Wittgenstein's claims regarding the logic of our epistemic practices as normative prohibitions regarding the meaning of utterances of hinges. Of course, this stems from her rigid reading of propositions, something that is also rejected by Coliva. Wittgenstein broadens the notion of proposition in the *Investigations* and, as we have seen in Chapter 1, propositions can be used for many different purposes: their assertibility-conditions are diverse and dependent on the very context where they play that role. It may be the case that in one language-game some hinges can in fact be uttered with meaning and others cannot. Also, uttering a hinge with meaning does not imply that we can doubt it. I can state that a hinge of this thesis is my assumption that I know how to write sentences in English, but the possibility of stating it meaningfully does not entail that I could doubt it – in the same way Wittgenstein allows for the expression “I know I am in pain” to assert a certain kind of feeling in a particular situation (for example the frustration over someone doubting a pain expression).

The problem with Moyal-Sharrock's enactivist reading is that in her efforts to close the door to any form of relativism, she forgets to take into account one of Wittgenstein's most important insights: that only within a context we can talk about hinges. They are objectively contextual and this “contextuality” manifests itself in the multiplicity of language-games. Hinges cannot be holistic since their belonging to a context is a necessary condition for them to play that role. This does not stop us from agreeing with Moyal-Sharrock in considering hinges a non-epistemic ground of epistemic language-games. However, if we consider hinges to be a property not of the proposition, but of the context where it plays that role, aren't we able to preserve the contextualist picture and the framework reading of Coliva and Moyal-Sharrock? I believe that it is indeed possible if we consider their non-epistemic character and groundlessness as objective features of the context where they play the hinge role and not to the hinge itself. This suggestion is, as I will show a bit further on, heavily inspired in Markus Gabriel's treatment of the conception of existence and how it is rather a property of context (Fields of Sense) and not of the object.

The main issue with Moyal-Sharrock's rejection of the attribution of a propositional status to hinges lies on her acceptance of a bipolar picture of propositions:

On Wittgenstein's bipolar view of the proposition, for a sentence to be a proposition, it must be susceptible of truth and falsity. (Moyal-Sharrock 2016, p. 32)

We saw in the previous chapter that Wittgenstein's picture of meaning based in assertibility-conditions does not entail a full rejection of truth-conditions, but nevertheless rejects the idea that it is "truth" and "falsity" that determine the status of a proposition. Instead of following an easier path and accepting the broadening of the notion of proposition beyond the bipolar conception, Moyal-Sharrock is obliged to deal with the multiplicity of roles and uses of hinges in various language-games as "doppelgangers" of hinges: sentences that are exactly like hinges but are mere twins that don't play a conceptual-rule-like role. This is an obvious complication that derives from the fact that Moyal-Sharrock, in fixing hinges beyond their contexts of application, has to come around Wittgenstein's fundamental insights about the multiplicity of propositions, and their uses within different language-games. What determines that a particular sentence is a hinge in every context? Isn't the positing of this very question an assumption of the existence of a God's point of view? Isn't Wittgenstein exactly against this kind of limit-determination from the "outside" of language? Wittgenstein is clear about the *immanent* character of any language critique: we are always-already within a context that relies on certain hinges being held fast without rational justification. Hinges themselves are contextual: their normative role does not arise from a metaphysical status, but from their structural role within a particular context that determines how concepts are used. It is only within a context that a hinge plays such a normative and grounding role. A universal hinge would entail a universal context, something that is rejected at the very core of Wittgenstein's insights regarding language-games. The positing of universal, fixed, hinges thus entails a universal, and thus metaphysical, language-game - something fundamentally nonsensical according to Wittgenstein.

Sceptical doubts are nonsensical because they lack practical grounds within a context, not because they lack a context where they can be meaningfully stated. What makes them meaningless is not the lack of a context where they can be *understood*, but the lack of a context where they can be *practically sustained*. This is, I believe, the key to understand

Wittgenstein's realism, and I believe that Moyal-Sharrock misses this important point of Wittgenstein's later phase. Nevertheless, her remarks on the normativity and practicality of hinges are to be retained for this investigation.

2.2.3. Pritchard's non-epistemic reading

Duncan Pritchard is one of the most important names in the school of hinge epistemology. His contribution is vast and rich, introducing important concepts for the discussion. For a clear understanding of his input for this investigation, I will focus only on two of his major topics of work: his notion of "über hinge commitments" and the concept of "epistemic vertigo".

2.2.3.1. Über hinge commitments

Pritchard takes Wittgenstein's remarks regarding the logical immunity to doubt of the framework propositions seriously. He reminds us of Wittgenstein's claim that the grounds for doubting have to be more certain than the doubt itself. They have to be logically immune to doubt, which means that they cannot be put into question in that specific language-game. This also means that they cannot play the role of rules and empirical questions at the same time. They have to be taken for certain. What is not rationally doubted, in Pritchard's reading, cannot be rationally believed as well (Pritchard 2012, p. 3).

Taking the example of Moore, Pritchard finds in Wittgenstein the claim that if one doubts whether one has hands, this is more a question of doubting our eyesight than doubting about the existence of our hands. This is so not due to some particular empirical question regarding eyesight or hands, but due to the fact that they play different roles in the language-game of perception. This is an essential feature of our language-games: to present reasons and offer justifications, one is always-already assuming hinge propositions as their grounds. This is why a universal rational of our beliefs is untenable, on Wittgenstein's view.

All rational evaluation is, thus, necessarily local. This implies that "there cannot be a satisfactory rational way of terminating the regress of reasons" (Pritchard 2012, p. 4). In Wittgenstein, we find the idea that at the "bottom" of our chain of reasons, we do not find more reasons, but rather a kind of "primitive trust" and commitment that is not rationally sustained. These grounds are just there, they are lived and interiorized through practice, not

through rational argumentation. They reflect a way of living, grounded in particular practices that have no other reason to exist other than their own internal structure.

With this reading of Wittgenstein as the background, Pritchard wants to develop a satisfactory Wittgensteinian proposal to deal with the “transmission problem”. This problem arises if one wants to keep the transmission principle and still follow Wittgenstein without falling into scepticism. The transmission principle claims that if one knows P in virtue of rational support R, and A is competently deduced from P, thereby believing in A while retaining rational support for P, then A is known in virtue of R. But this principle puts into question Wittgenstein’s claim that we cannot know hinge propositions, thereby forcing us to opt between retaining this principle and opening the door to scepticism (since to maintain both the transmission principle and Wittgenstein’s structure of reasons would necessarily lead to considering these examples of knowledge not-rationally sustained, since it does not stem from hinges), or follow Wittgenstein entirely and reject a highly intuitive principle.

Pritchard synthesizes three different ways of developing a Wittgensteinian proposal. The first is a form of epistemic externalism, which grants the possibility for knowledge even in the absence of grounding reasons. The second is the epistemic internalist reading: “the idea is that where we are obliged, on pain of cognitive paralysis, to be committed to certain propositions which we have no reason for thinking are true, then, as long as there is no reason available for thinking those propositions to be false, one has a default rational basis – an entitlement – for these commitments.” (Pritchard 2012, p. 9) The third is the non-propositional reading. On this view hinges should be seen as “animal” commitments that do not stand in need of a rational justification, since they are neither beliefs nor propositions but ways of acting.

These are all unsatisfactory,⁷ so Pritchard wishes to develop a variation of the non-propositional reading:

⁷ For Pritchard, the externalist reading fails by letting go of the transmission principle and for not giving an account of how we could attain knowledge; the internalist reading forces one to concede that knowledge of hinge propositions is not possible; and the non-propositional reading fails for not giving an account of how we could engage in serious philosophical reflection without a propositional attitude towards hinges, which would entail embracing a mystery.

What is key to resolving this problem is to realise the precise nature of our hinge commitments. In particular, I want to argue for a way of thinking about the Wittgensteinian account of the structure of reasons which, while broadly in keeping with the non-propositional reading, is able to circumvent some of the mystery which this reading generates. Moreover, this new proposal also has the added advantage of being consistent with the transmission principle, and hence offers a straightforward way of resolving the transmission problem. (Pritchard 2012, p. 12)

If there is one thing that hinge commitments share, it is that each of them reflect what Pritchard calls “über hinge commitments”. These are transversal to subjects and sustain the hinge commitments. Pritchard gives the example of the über hinge commitment in the truth of our hinge commitments. In his words:

If we focus for a moment on the über hinge commitment, it ought to be clear why such a commitment must necessarily be groundless. For whatever one offered by way of rational support for such a commitment would clearly already presuppose the truth of this commitment. The groundlessness of the non-über hinge commitments then follows in virtue of the fact just noted that they effectively simply codify that agent’s groundless über hinge commitment. (Pritchard 2012, p. 12)

And he also says:

That is, if one is to have any commitments at all – and indeed, any beliefs or doubts – then by Wittgensteinian lights the über hinge commitment must be in place. But that is just to say that it is not the kind of commitment that could ever be responsive to rational considerations. (Pritchard 2012, p. 13)

This view allows for both the stability of our über hinge commitments, the necessarily backdrop of all rational evaluations, and for the plasticity of particular hinge commitments that may change over time. The tenet of Pritchard’s non-epistemic reading can be put in the following way: while hinge commitments cannot be known, nonetheless they should be treated as propositional attitudes. One of Pritchard’s goals is precisely to clean the mysterious outlook of the non-propositional reading while “preserving its spirit”. The non-epistemic reading combines the inability to know hinge propositions and at the same time preserves the ability to know non-hinge propositions. To conclude, Pritchard writes:

For on this view one cannot believe a hinge proposition, much less believe it on the basis of a rational process such as this. And the reason for this is not that we are unable to form propositional attitudes to the proposition expressed in our hinge commitments (as the non-propositional reading would claim), but rather simply that we couldn't form the specific propositional attitude of belief. (Pritchard 2012, p. 15)

Pritchard's non-epistemic reading is thus a conciliation between the transmission principle and Wittgenstein's account of reasons. His account allows for both the negation of traditional knowledge claims about hinges while maintaining their propositional attitude.

2.2.3.2. Epistemic vertigo

For Pritchard, the crucial element of a genuine philosophical paradox is the fact that it exposes a "deep tension in our pre-theoretical commitments within a given domain" (Pritchard 2020, p. 2). One way to approach such a challenge is to focus on those pre-theoretical commitments, or assumptions, and revise them in such a way that the paradox is no longer present. This strategy is an overriding of the paradox. However, one can also follow an undercutting strategy. This view argues for the illusory character of the apparent tension in our everyday life. Both strategies are not straightforward solutions, since those could not be in the market due to the nature of the challenge itself.

Regarding the sceptical challenge of knowledge of the external world and the Wittgensteinian response, we can see the vestige of this ambivalence towards the answer to the sceptic: even if we undercut the paradox, there is a remainder of anxiety – what Pritchard calls "epistemic vertigo". This anxiety is also present because this skeptical paradox is of immense existential importance (Pritchard 2020, pp. 4-5). In this response, Wittgenstein is read as showing through a series of examples both the implausibility of doubting the rationality of a hinge commitment and the very idea that these commitments are rationally grounded. The groundless certainty that Wittgenstein is talking about is present in all rational practices as a necessary condition for doubt, knowledge and belief. These hinge commitments are not rationally grounded in the sense that we are not offered reasons to accept them; rather, we are shown practices that already presuppose them in their rules. As Pritchard puts it very clearly: "no one teaches you that you have two hands, for example, but lots of things that you are taught presuppose this commitment." (Pritchard 2020, p. 6)

Pritchard organizes the sceptical paradox in the following triad:

- I. We can't have rationally grounded knowledge of the denials of radical sceptical hypotheses.
- II. We have the closure principle for rationally grounded knowledge.
- III. We have lots of everyday rationally grounded knowledge. (Pritchard 2020, p. 7)

Pritchard takes Wittgenstein's comments about the arational character of our hinge commitments to be an expression of an impossibility for them to be proper beliefs since they have no propositional attitude: "our hinge commitments cannot be the kind of propositional attitude that is acquired in a closure-based inference via a paradigm case of a rational process like competent deduction" (Pritchard 2020, p. 8). In this sense, hinge commitments are not beliefs, therefore closure-based inferences do not take part in them and we need not to give up the closure principle, since closure does not apply to hinge commitments. This is for Pritchard the upshot of Wittgenstein's undercutting response to the sceptical challenge and putative paradox. If we accept this idea, the triad is no longer inconsistent and we can accept the three claims without any sort of contradiction (Pritchard 2020, pp. 8-9).

Does this mean that we are "hard-wired" to be anti-sceptics? Pritchard thinks so. He reads Wittgenstein as to be claiming that we are "psychologically incapable" of seriously considering the sceptical challenge; for the undercutting strategy does not wish to change anything in our practices. Quite the contrary, Wittgenstein's undercutting response to the sceptic wishes to show how the apparent tension only arises when philosophers take language out of their ordinary, pre-theoretical, context and metaphysically inflate them through a faulty philosophical rendering (Pritchard 2020, pp. 9-10). This is the result of an alienation that cannot be fought back. One cannot simply return to a pre-philosophical state. The therapeutic task of philosophy is to lead us to another perspective, one more aware of this unavoidable alienation, and thus a different form of philosophical detachment. This alienation creates an intellectual ambivalence regarding our epistemic position – the already mentioned "epistemic vertigo". So, for Pritchard, this alienation is both unavoidable and important, in the sense that makes us aware of the groundless nature of our beliefs. The "epistemic vertigo" is the awareness of this groundless nature, which, ironically, is in itself a perfectly rational anxiety. But this groundless nature is not a flaw in our system of beliefs and we are also aware of that.

We are not in need of a deeper grounding, but in need of an acceptance that there is no such ground. Philosophical theorizing may give some comfort to this anxiety, but for Pritchard the therapeutic role of philosophy should be to offer a stable view within the intellectual detachment caused by the alienation. This is the most we can aspire to (Pritchard 2020, pp. 12-15).

Pritchard's non-epistemic reading has a consequence: how can we then go on with our epistemic practices accepting this vertigo? Is this anxiety bearable from a detached position? I would like to challenge the idea that living with this anxiety, and accepting it, is the most we can aspire to. I believe that a realist reading of Wittgenstein's hinges can offer us a more optimistic path, as I will try to show in the following sections.

2.2.4. Last remarks on hinge epistemology

To conclude our analysis of the hinge epistemology programme, I will summarize the conclusions of this section. Hinge epistemology touches on an important point of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*: the "hinge" insight is fundamental to dismantle a certain picture of rationality and belief. I will sum up the most important conclusions for this investigation regarding hinges:

- 1 – Hinges are of a practical nature;
- 2 – Hinges are not rationally sustained: they are what sustains rationality;
- 3 – Hinges result from a direct, practical, relation between subject and context: a relation grounded in actions that sustains the conventions codified in language;
- 4 – Hinges are property of the contexts in which they play that role.

It is the practical character of hinges that allows them to be used as a theoretical tool against radical scepticism: the sceptical doubt is not practically sustained (*hinges* and *deeds* are not in accordance).

How does this then relate to the purpose of this investigation? There are four main connections, directly tied to each of the conclusions regarding hinges.

First: The practical nature of hinges is precisely the consequence of practical assertibility-conditions of meaning. The conventional rules are codifications in language of a practical ground with a normative power: hinges on which theoretical discussions rest. Deeds are constrained by how things are, which in itself results in different practical uses of concepts.

Second: Hinges are a constitutive element of rationality itself. They cannot be rationally sustained because they are what sustains rational justification. This does not mean they are irrational, but that they are arational (Pritchard).

Third: Hinges are codified in language as rules of agreement. Not only as an agreement between members of a community, but between subjects and contexts: agreement in the actions that are allowed by how things are, thus resulting in a particular practice. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these rules are not arbitrarily construed. Rather, they are the result of a direct relation between a subject and a context that is modally robust (Gabriel). The propositional form of hinges is, thus, the codification of these agreements: the symbolization of a practical and direct relation.

Fourth: In order to maintain a realist picture about meaning and knowledge, I argue that hinges are a property of the context in which they play that role, and not a property of the proposition that plays that role. As will be seen further, this draws directly from both Nuno Venturinha's contextualism and Markus Gabriel's realism. It is this theoretical move that I believe to be the key to solving many misinterpretations of Wittgenstein's metaphor of the hinge, namely the dissolution of the sceptical problem. It is the practical and objective nature of hinges that allows for the dissolution of scepticism.

2.3. The Contextualist Approach

In this section I develop the idea that *contexts* are primarily responsible for determining the scope within which one can talk about truths. To substantiate this idea, let's analyse some important names of an epistemological school that focus precisely on the concept of context: the school of epistemic contextualism. In this section, my aim is to present an overview of the main points of this school of thought to reflect on the epistemic usage of the concept

“context” within the Wittgensteinian philosophical framework. I believe that it is through the threefold combination of a form of epistemic contextualism with insights from hinge epistemology and Markus Gabriel’s new realism that we can achieve a deep understanding of the consequences of Wittgenstein’s thought to epistemological questions. Given that we have already covered one of the three pillars – hinge epistemology – let’s look now at the second one.

For contextualist epistemology, contexts are the primordial epistemic concept. What differentiates contextualists is the understanding that some of them have of the very meaning of “context”. While some (such as Stewart Cohen) tend to read it in a relativist way, others tend to read it in a realist, objectivist fashion (for example, Nuno Venturinha or Michael Williams). It is from the latter understanding that we will draw most of our conclusions since it is precisely a realist reading of Wittgenstein’s epistemology that this research is attempting to develop.

2.3.1. The relativist reading

Stewart Cohen argues for a relativist conception of knowledge where the epistemic standards are intersubjectively determined according to the context of attribution. Let’s consider first his notion of a defeater. A defeater can be obvious, although this obviousness is psychological. Cohen stresses the importance of the relative level of reasoning ability to determine this obviousness.

We can conclude that knowledge has a social component. Whether a person’s reasons give him knowledge depends on intersubjective standards for discerning the effects of defeaters. If knowledge does not entail ideally good reasons, then the intersubjective standards determine the level of opacity up to which a possessed undermining defeater (that is itself undefeated) will undermine knowledge. If knowledge does entail ideally good reasons, then intersubjective standards will determine the level of opacity up to which a possessed undermining defeater will undermine knowledge without the possession of a subjectively evident restoring defeater. (Cohen 1987, p. 11)

For Cohen, the fact that knowledge has a social component reveals the way that defeaters are also intersubjectively determined, according to the reasoning ability standards of the community. Thus

attributions (or denials) of knowledge are indexical or context sensitive. The standards that apply are determined by the context of attribution. The truth-value of a knowledge attribution will depend on the status of the defeater the subject possesses, relative to the standards that apply in the context of attribution. (Cohen 1987, p. 15)

This is the tenet of Cohen's contextual view of knowledge: the standards for truth are determined intersubjectively within a particular context of attribution. However, Cohen does not want to advance an ontological thesis about what makes different contexts have different criteria. His point only regards the relation between truth and intersubjective standards. Cohen gives an example of how this relativist reading would apply:

I may look out my window and claim that New Jersey is hilly while a giant may assess New Jersey as flat. Each claim can be correct. There is no contradiction, since the contexts of attribution yield different standards. Surely I would not want to claim that what the giant says is false owing to his distorted perspective. (Cohen 1987, p. 16)

Different perspectives do not contradict each other, like the example of the giant. This is so because the relevant epistemic standards in play are determined by the context of attribution. The giant's affirmation that New Jersey is flat is valid according to his standards, to his context, in the same way as our affirmation that New Jersey is hilly. The truth-value of a proposition is relative to the context and the intersubjective standards.

Cohen's contextualism contains an interesting answer to the skeptic. Although Cohen does not wish to advance an all-out anti-sceptic response, he tries to conceive a possible path to ground the rejection of sceptical scenarios. His main point is that these scenarios fail to be a relevant alternative in everyday contexts: "we presume that knowledge is something that we have in everyday situations. Skeptical arguments threaten this presumption." (Cohen 1987, p. 17) It is a matter of not being a relevant alternative in a situation, and therefore not appearing in our everyday lives. It is not a matter of falsehood but of relevance considering the alternatives: "Skeptical alternatives, although not known to be false fail to be relevant." (Cohen 1987, p. 18) We just do not see a use for the sceptical point of view and their relevance fails to meet the practical demands of our lives.

Cohen claims that sceptical alternatives appear to us as not relevant. However, if we follow his idea that sceptical arguments deny our presumption of everyday knowledge, and

assume that our everyday knowledge is sustained through our practices, the onus turns to the sceptic. It is the sceptic who has to show how our practices are wrong. The grounding for our everyday knowledge is the accordance with reality that is present in our practices. We could not follow practices that were contradictory in practice. It is the sceptic that has to show how he would sustain his doubt *practically*: what different deeds he would follow to go in accordance with his criticism. The failure to conceive this is evidence of the nonsense of the sceptical scenario:

One way to explain our tendency to vacillate between skepticism and common sense is to suppose that the probabilistic standards in effect (and thus the relevance of alternatives) depend on the context of attribution. (Cohen 1987, p. 19)

For Cohen, the probability standards in play determine the relevance of alternatives within a context of attribution. These are the determinant factor for the rejection of sceptical hypotheses: their low probability determine their non-relevance. He writes:

So the truth of a particular knowledge attribution depends on the standards that operate in that context. In day-to-day contexts, when skeptical worries are not an issue, the standards that apply determine that skeptical alternatives are not relevant (unless of course the actual probabilities in the circumstances of evaluation are sufficiently high). This explains our confidence in the truth of our everyday attributions of knowledge. (Cohen 1987, p. 19)

On Cohen's view, we just do not find the sceptical alternative relevant in our daily life. This is the source of our confidence in such forms of knowledge. The sceptical alternative does not present itself as a relevant alternative within the context of knowledge attribution:

Perhaps it is too much to expect a knockdown argument against skepticism. All we can hope for is a workable option that enables us to avoid skepticism. We avail ourselves of that option for no other reason than we want to avoid skepticism. (Cohen 1987, p. 20)

Ultimately, for Cohen, we can only affirm that we do not follow sceptical alternatives for their failure to be relevant. We avoid them because we want to avoid them. Cohen's conclusion is that "there is a context sensitive standard of *probability* that determines the relevance of alternatives" (Cohen 1987, p. 21). In the end, to reject scepticism is to show how the skeptic cannot refute common sense.

2.3.2 The objectivist version

We have seen the main points of Cohen's relativist contextualism. Now let's focus on an objective understanding of contexts. For that we start by analysing Nuno Venturinha's version of contextualist epistemology and then look at Michael Williams's own realist account of these subject-matters.

In his book *Descriptions of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology*, Venturinha presents us with a version of epistemic contextualism that preserves the notions of objectivity and truth. Venturinha starts by presenting how his contextualist picture of meaning determination can be applied to understand how anyone is able to know which rule of convention to apply (to know which context is at stake). It is the context that determines and constricts which rules of language are to be applied (which language-game is being played). In the same way as hinges, they are not subjectively determined, but objectively contextual. "The world as a depository of facts" is Venturinha's core thesis. In a similar fashion to Gabriel's new realism, Venturinha sees mental events as being first and foremost something "out there" ("meaning just ain't in the head!" (Putnam), and not part of a private inner world (the Tractarian solipsist).

Venturinha wants to address the complications derived from the correspondence theory of truth through a reading of Bernard Bolzano and Immanuel Kant. In his reading, the correspondence theory of truth leads to an unbearable relativist perspectivism since it would necessarily create an epistemic gap between different systems of knowledge: for example, between different animals. The recognition of certain facts would then be directly determined by the cognitive system that would perceive such facts, leading thus to a form of relativism that would be entirely dependent on the epistemic perspective. More than a mere relativism, the Kantian categorical separation of the world of appearances and the world in itself can lead to a form of solipsism. To solve this impasse, Venturinha brings to the fore Bolzano's "propositions in themselves".

The main consequence of this proposal is that despite all differences between different cognitive systems, there is a common ground that is accessed in manifold ways (Venturinha 2018, p. 23). It is reality in itself that allows for propositions to be uttered with meaning, even if no one would ever utter them. The state of affairs is independent of the subjects. Subjects

are able to grasp its truth because truth in itself is already a quality of propositions in themselves.

According to Venturinha's reading of Bolzano, the ability to recognize truths is contextual, and thus always partial. But reality is "there" by itself, with no need of subjective recognition to subsist. Even if certain features are never recognized by any being, they still exist by themselves. This limitation of truths to "bits of truth" is by no means a rejection of the ability to reach truths in themselves. It is a necessity derived from the independence of reality as such if we want to escape a solipsistic attitude.

Following Wittgenstein, Venturinha stresses the public character of language as a means to show the objectivity of rules of meaning and how they can be objectively grasped even though they may be formed within specific cultural contexts (Venturinha 2018). That is not to say that all cultural differences can be surpassed or that one can belong to a culture by simply knowing some rules of language. It is only that not all cultural differences are unsurpassable, and that the public feature of the rules of language-games is applicable to all language-games, even the ones that are culturally grounded.

We can see that the grounds of our perspectives, far from resulting from a solid and extensive inquiry, are grounded on much more direct evidence. It is here that the later Wittgenstein enters the picture, illuminating the practical features of language. This direct evidence is precisely the practical grounds of rule-following that structure meaning. This is also what is at stake in Wittgenstein's reflections on the concepts of "certainty" and "doubt": there are certain things we take for granted in order to allow others to be doubted. This is why, as we have seen previously in this chapter, Wittgenstein rejects any possibility of a universal doubt: a doubt, to be such, always have to take for granted some things. Also, the certainties that structure our doubts were not (in many cases) formed through empirical investigations, but simply accepted as evident without the possibility of their negation in that language-game. This distinction between *local* and *global* doubts is at the core of the systematic view of evidence that Wittgenstein proposes. Wittgenstein is not searching for the truth-conditions of knowledge ascriptions but, as Venturinha writes, he wants "to shed light on the *thereness* of our evidence" (Venturinha 2018, p. 52). Hinges produce the grounds for the scientific investigations that we develop much after we get in touch with objective

features of contexts. The possibility of our grasping these theories *hinges* on our direct relation to certain phenomena that are ontologically independent. Far-fetched sceptical scenarios are excluded by the very evidence that the situation imposes on us (Venturinha 2018, p. 52).

This groundlessness is not a flaw of our *episteme*. Rather, this groundlessness is *constitutive* of our *episteme*.⁸ According to Venturinha, Fernando Gil also highlights the primary level of evidence that we grasp before any kind of rational judgement. This is the reason for his conjunction of “evidence” and “assent” (*assentiment*) (Venturinha 2018, p. 54): our intentionality is in a strict relation of dependence with what is “out there”.

Our experience of the world relies on a combination of assumptions that form the background of our thoughts and judgements. These are not the focus of our attention. Their role is to remain “hidden” in the background, to form the structure of how we experience things. For Venturinha, knowledge of situations involves the assumption of others and of an “external” world. To judge and conceive different possible scenarios of reality (zombies, artificial intelligence, for example) one needs to have many unquestioned presuppositions already in place. We stand fast to a background that allows us to develop our beliefs into more complex structures of situations. Knowledge is therefore always context-dependent. Epistemic demands can only be meaningful when limited to a situation:

What happens is that if we raised standards so high, knowledge would be almost unattainable. (...) we need to relax our epistemic demands if we want to say that we know such-and-such in a pragmatic way. (Venturinha 2018, p. 84)

Wittgenstein’s main difference to contextualist epistemology lies in his focus: while contextualists are looking for situations in their immediate presentation, Wittgenstein is looking at the hinges that form the background of contexts and determine their truth. In Venturinha’s reading of Wittgenstein, key epistemic operators are formed through the natural course of the human form of life. There is a kind of ontological primacy of these human categories over social determinations. Our rule-following process stems from an objective shared context. This necessarily brings sceptical paradoxes to a troubling position: the

⁸ I venture to say that we have here a parallel with Žižek’s reading of the Lacanian conception of a constitutive lack within the subject. I will return to this point later on.

scenarios are not actually conceivable within our human form of life. The sceptical suspicion cannot be maintained at a practical level. They violate the logical grammar, which in turn is a violation of the practical grounds that sustain it. Logical grammar, in a Wittgensteinian sense, pertains to what humans being do, and the background assumptions formed by their deeds. This means that “I cannot ultimately go beyond the simple admission of my belief in it” (Venturinha 2018, p. 87). Hinges function as the solid background on which our epistemic practices work. Pritchard’s “epistemic vertigo” is the residual effect that stays after our hinge commitments have scared off epistemic angst.

Venturinha’s reading of Bolzano contains another important reflection for this investigation: the context already contains *hinges in themselves*, being those grasped and held fast through the accordance of a practical relation between the subject and the context. The normativity of a hinge as a rule is a codification in language of a practical relation between subjects and objective contexts. Hinges are “out there in the world”: their subjectivized form (as a rule of a language-game) is merely the symbolic expression of an accordance in deeds (actions within a praxis) between a subject and a context.

Why is Venturinha’s contextualism a more interesting approach for the present investigation than Cohen’s? First, it allows for an ontological reading of the concept of context and to see it as more than a mere situation. It understands the concept of context with modal robustness that enables a pluralist and realist approach to epistemological questions. It does not give room for relativism or for an anti-realist position in general since Venturinha’s contextualism *constrains truths to particular contexts, without denying the objective status of either truths or contexts*. Second, it does not commit to either an absolute view of knowledge nor to a determinist background of human action. Venturinha’s contextualism starts with a free epistemic agent that is capable of making *mistakes* and *choosing* a better theory over another. Third, Venturinha stresses the impossibility of answering to the sceptic in his own terms: the solution is a Wittgensteinian one, namely to dissolve the meaning of the sceptical question in the first place.

The primacy given to the context for an epistemological investigation is an important point of contact of this investigation with the contextualist school. Truths are contextually determined and structured (Venturinha 2018). Our knowledge is always partial since there

are parts of the contexts that escape our grasp. But this does not imply that the truths we grasp are not objective or that they do not refer to real properties of a context. Quite the contrary: our limited grasp is evidence of our grasp of a more fundamental truth, namely that reality is multiple in itself. However, any attempt to grasp this multiplicity as a whole is doomed to fail as nonsensical metaphysics (Venturinha 2018). This is why we can only grasp truths contextually because a truth is always dependent on a particular context for it to have any meaning. There is a need for a limited scope, otherwise there is no possibility to apply criteria of truth and falsity.

Michael Williams' reading of Wittgensteinian hinges, and his subsequent epistemic contextualism, is also an important grounding for the line of research defended in this investigation. His account of an epistemic and situational approach to hinges goes in the same way as the view defended here: that it is the role, and not the content, of a sentence that makes it play the role of hinge in a language-game. Hinges cannot be stated meaningfully while they play their role, not because of their normative and grammatical content (as in Moyal-Sharrock's or Coliva's reading) but due to the structural role they play in that context. When moved to another language-game, or to another move within the same language-game, where they no longer play that rule-like role, they can be stated as meaningful propositions without any form of metaphysical baggage.

2.3.3. Williams' non-foundationalist realism

In his paper "Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism", Michael Williams argues against the idea that there cannot be a satisfactory response to the sceptical challenge about our knowledge of the external world. This pessimistic view regarding the chances of a philosophical response to the sceptic should be, according to Williams, put under scrutiny. One of the main reasons for a re-evaluation of this view is the fact that the underlying presuppositions are not explicitly stated and there lies the source of the sceptic's confusion. Therefore, Williams first tries to show how the "intuitiveness" of the sceptical challenge is far from being self-evident. Quite the contrary, it is grounded on a mistaken view about "knowledge", "the world" and how "knowledge about the world" is context-sensitive and interest-relative. "[T]here is no danger in conceding that the sceptic cannot be refuted on his own terms if those terms are not ones we are bound to accept" (Williams 1988, p. 417). The

strategy to attack the sceptic has to be focused on the assumptions made by the sceptic, namely the foundationalist presuppositions, which are far from grounded. The refutations have to start on the very formulation of the sceptic's questions, rejecting his assumptions and thus rendering his attack hollow. This is in fact the only way to refute the sceptic: if we accept his terms, we are bound to agree with his conclusions. The conditional correctness of scepticism relies on this point. That is why the attack must first start on the terms that the sceptic proposes, refuting the presuppositions on which they are hanging.

The key to Williams' argument is to undermine the intuitiveness of the sceptical arguments by challenging the foundationalism that it presupposes. According to Williams:

Foundationalism is the view that our beliefs arrange themselves into broad classes according to certain natural relations of epistemological priority. Beliefs to which no beliefs are epistemologically prior are epistemologically basic. Their credibility is naturally intrinsic, as that of all other beliefs is naturally inferential. (Williams 1988, pp. 418-419)

The path from foundationalism to realism is then laid clear:

[...] according to foundationalism, the intrinsic and inalienable epistemic characters of our various beliefs [...] determine what can, in the last analysis, be called upon to provide justification for what. [...] Foundationalism, then, rests on a more general doctrine that I would like to call "epistemological realism". (Williams 1988, p. 419)

Foundationalism, and its own version of epistemological realism, rests on the idea that there is an objective structure underlying all empirical justification. There is a hierarchy of the epistemological status of justification, according to the fully objective structure that grounds it. Therefore, there is a right or wrong answer to the question "what should I believe in?" This view is intimately connected to ethical naturalism: the idea that our own moral and epistemic constraints are imposed by nature, and not by our own interests and purposes. This characterization of foundationalism, however, is not supposed to paint the picture that scepticism depends exclusively on foundationalism. Williams merely wants to point out how a powerful argument for scepticism about our knowledge of the external world rests on foundationalist assumptions.

Another feature of Williams' critique of the sceptical challenge is its assumption of "the world" as an object in the market to be known from an external position. This assumption

can be deconstructed in three elements: “a detached examination of the totality of our knowledge of an objective world.” (Williams 1988, p. 423) Williams wants to challenge this view. For him, “the world” is not an object nor a totality. It is not a special kind of knowledge, and we are led astray by a metaphorical use. We infuse a metaphysical baggage to the idea of “knowledge of the world” and assume that there is an object (“the world”) that can be known from an external point of view. This leads Williams to side with a deflationary-inspired approach regarding knowledge and justification: the burden of proof of a substantial notion of these terms, one that explains these notions according to an objective hierarchical underlying structure, belongs to those who claim that there has to be some detached knowledge of a totality that we call “knowledge of the world”. His conclusion is, then, that we have to understand knowledge-claims, justifications and explanations as context-sensitive and interest-relative. We have to let go of the idea that a proposition alone has some sort of a substantial epistemological status. Only within a context of application, and therefore subjected to the purposes and interests of a particular context, we can talk about justification and criteria for truth. The view that argues for an “end” to the context-dependency of our epistemological practices rests on foundationalist assumptions that are themselves by no means self-evident. Williams wants to show that these assumptions are far from being justified and rest on ideas that have a misconstrued metaphysical baggage. In his words:

To treat “our knowledge of the world” as a genuine totality, as even a possible object of wholesale assessment, is to suppose that there are objective epistemological relations underlying the shifting contexts and standards of everyday justification. It is to assume that context-sensitivity does not go all the way down, there being rather an underlying objective structure of justificational relations that philosophical reflection brings into view and which allows us to determine, in some general, uniform way, whether we are entitled to claim knowledge of the world. (Williams 1988, p. 425)

The three central ideas (*detachment*, *totality* and *objectivity*) are not to be dissociated from one another. They are fully intricate: insisting on the idea of detachment is also a way of insisting on the idea that we need to have a knowledge of the world as a whole and that there is an objective detached structure in order to be known. The foundationalist-realist project in epistemology, by insisting on these interconnected threefold features, is also advocating for an idea of a representative case: that the practical constraints we face on our everyday

practices should be set aside in philosophical reflection and the focus should be directed to the ideal situation, without any contingent impediments. These, according to the foundationalist-realist pictured by Williams, are not relevant for the epistemic status of a proposition. However, as Williams points out, a proposition alone has no epistemic value, and if we take out the practical considerations that form the everyday application of epistemic practices, we also take the contextual elements that make that epistemic practice appear in the first place. Practical constraints are not impediments to a clear and pristine view of epistemological issues. Rather, practical constraints form the body of interest-relative and context-sensitive elements that are essential for the epistemic questions to rise in the first place. What is in need of justification or how this justification should take place is contextually determined: the criteria that determine the rules of inquiry, justification and relevant error-possibilities are determined by the context and the interests at hand.

[...] in the ordinary course of things, our need to get on with other than epistemological enquiries practically excludes considering them [the sceptic's bizarre alternative scenarios]. This in turn means that what we ordinarily call "knowledge" may only be knowledge-for-all-practical-purposes. (Williams 1988, p. 427)

The target, for Williams, is to undermine the sceptic's Platonism and commitment to an objective justificational structure. This kind of semantic realism goes hand in hand with the foundationalist epistemological realism assumed by the sceptic. Challenging this view is not tantamount to bringing up contingent obstacles to the foundationalist project, nor to see these obstacles as practical limitations. Rather, the criticism must draw from the very structural constraints of our inquiries, showing how these practical limitations and particularities are what give a certain direction to the investigation: they reflect the purpose and goals. To argue for a detached view is to smuggle a "substantive theoretical view of justification under the guise of a modest methodological constraint" (Williams 1988, p. 429).

In Williams's understanding, at the core of realism lies the idea that truth is not an epistemic notion: for what is true of the world is independent of what we think is true. This view is tightly connected to fallibilism, the idea that we can always get things wrong. However, none of these two ideas leads a clear and obvious route to scepticism. To go from one to the other, one needs to accept the foundationalist propositions since no epistemological

conclusions can be drawn from logical or metaphysical premises alone. The apparent connection between realism and scepticism is merely the reflection of foundationalist assumptions working in the shadows. The real connection is not between a realist conception of objectivity and scepticism, but rather between the notion of knowledge of the world as a whole and scepticism: it is the project of knowing the world as a unified totality that sets the stage for a sceptical scenario about that knowledge. Foundationalism needs to operate as an unjustified presupposition for there to be a path between realism and scepticism. It is the assumption that there is a total structure of the world in the market to be known that opens up the gates of sceptical scenarios, both about the world and our knowledge of it.

The idea of a logical gap between appearance and reality is not sufficient to threaten us with scepticism, Williams argues. It is the foundationalist assumption in play that binds us to one of the sides of the fence:

No logical claim, not even one having to do with statements about appearance and statements about reality has any intrinsic epistemological significance. The epistemological significance of the logical gap between the knowledge we have of appearances, experiential knowledge, and the knowledge we would like to claim of the physical world, derive entirely from the assumption of some natural dependence of the latter kind of knowledge on the former, so we cannot argue from the gap to the dependence. (Williams 1988, p. 432)

Only if we argue that all beliefs about the world derive from experiential data (an idea contested by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*) we are in a compromised position about our knowledge of the world. The foundationalist assumption does all the job: if we reject the foundationalist assumptions about justification of experiential knowledge, the logical independence of information about our experience and information about the world is reason enough to reject the sceptical scenario. To concede an epistemological asymmetry we need to presuppose a priority of experiential knowledge over knowledge of objects.

Understanding knowledge as interest-relative and context-sensitive is to refuse the idea of a “knowledge of the world” as a natural kind of knowledge with theoretical significance (Williams 1988, p. 435). To conceive it as such, we are already within the foundationalist realist assumptions. We can know things about the world, and this implies that sometimes we are not dreaming. We know we are not dreaming by virtue of things we

know about the world. But the procedure to test this knowledge is not necessarily the same in all situations. There cannot be a way of knowing one is not dreaming that is independent of all knowledge of the world. However, we are faced with a threat only if we believe that the knowledge of the world is in need of a more primitive grounding. Once again, we see that the “intuitiveness” of the sceptical scenario is no more than the reflection of foundationalist assumptions about knowledge. If we follow the same assumptions, we are led to the same conclusions as the sceptic. The task is, then, to undermine these assumptions and show that if we refuse the terms of the sceptic’s challenge, the scenario falls apart. Pessimism about our prospects to come up with a decent answer to the sceptic only emerges when, consciously or not, one accepts the sceptic’s foundationalist presuppositions. The burden of the proof has to be shifted to the sceptic and we need to force him to justify his “intuitive” theoretical assumptions. The fundamental connection is not between realism and scepticism, but between foundationalism and scepticism, which is a doctrine that is far from being self-evident.

The undermining of the sceptical challenge is not, according to Williams, directed to the sense of the sceptic’s questions, but to the truth of its theoretical presuppositions. Fleshing out these and challenging their truth is to make sense of them. The two strategies are then exclusive. In Williams’ words: “questions and propositions neither make sense nor fail to make sense of their own accord. It is up to us to make them whatever sense we can” (Williams 1988, p. 439). By undermining his theoretical assumptions, and forcing the sceptic to justify them, we are perhaps preventing the sceptic from asking his questions. This is not, however, due to a lack of sense or impossibility to understand. As a result, Williams see no more grounds for being an epistemological pessimist than for being an epistemological realist.

2.4. The New Realism of Markus Gabriel

In this section, I present Markus Gabriel’s new realism both in ontology and epistemology. For the presentation of his ideas, I focus my analysis on his 2014 book *Fields of Sense – A New Realist Ontology*. I briefly present the structure and contents of the book and then present and discuss the points that are relevant to the present investigation. I draw parallels with Wittgenstein’s thoughts that I believe to be relevant to this investigation as they emerge and then summarise the connections in the last subsection. I start by addressing Gabriel’s

ontological reflections, namely what “existence” is, the impossibility of the existence of the world (and therefore of metaphysics), and what fields of sense are. Then I focus on the epistemological consequences of his ontology: his realist account of knowledge and his defence of truth and objectivity.

2.4.1. A pluralist ontology

Gabriel wants us to abandon the search for the right world-view, since all world-views fail precisely because they are world-views. However, Gabriel’s ontological pluralism is not a pluralism about truth, as we will see later on. Truth is still the norm of thought. Gabriel wants us to look into the plurality of facts that exist, and how their difference in origin does not determine their “level of reality” in any way whatsoever. His pluralism is a realist one, meaning that the focus of Gabriel’s ontology is the preservation of objectivity of all facts, and not merely the ones related to the natural kinds. Let us first look at his notion of existence and how he develops his pluralist realism from that particular understanding of the concept.

2.4.1.1. The concept of “existence”

For Gabriel, “existence” is not a proper property. What Gabriel means by this is that there is no neutral conception of existence, no bare existence, no pure property that all things that exist share. Gabriel’s definition of existence is *to appear in a field of sense* (a context):

Existence is appearing in a field of sense. To exist is to objectively appear in a field of sense, where the relation of appearing is in no way generally restricted by any local human-all-too-human conditions of grasping it. Appearing is fairly inhuman. What appears comes forth; it stands apart from a certain background. (Gabriel 2014, p. 166)

This idea draws directly from Frege’s conception of context and sense. This means that for a field of sense to exist, it has to appear in another field of sense, and so on and so forth. The other implication is that existence is not a property of the object, but of the field of sense: “The real trick here is to understand existence as a field property, as the field’s property to encompass something rather than nothing.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 86) The field of sense attributes existence to the object, since without a field of sense an object is not even an object. The configuration and structural features of the field of sense determine the ontological features

of the object. Therefore, there cannot be a concept of existence that is neutral, since for it to be meaningful it has to be relative to a particular field of sense.

Let us speak of “the metaphysical fallacy”: when someone is misled by the fact that she inhabits a given domain with an overall predicate and overgeneralise by regarding this contingent overall predicate as a necessary overall one. For instance, the identification of existence with the property of being spatio-temporally extended is a case in point. As animals living in the universe that appears to be a giant (maybe infinite) container in which we only observe things that are thus extended, we are easily prone to a fallacy of misplaced concreteness of this sort. (Gabriel 2014, p. 59)

One of the main targets of Gabriel’s proposal, on par with postmodern relativism, is naturalistic scientism. For him, this view commits the metaphysical fallacy above quoted: overgeneralisation of a contingent overall predicate to a necessary overall predicate. This fallacy, in the naturalist paradigm, consists in assuming the property of being a spatial-temporal object as a necessary condition for existence. The mistake here is to assume that all existence is in some way related to each other through belonging to this all-encompassing domain of objects that share spatial-temporal extensionality. Existence is always-already tied to a particular field of sense (or context). Existence is not a property that conglomerates all the objects that share it, but a property that is necessarily tied to the particular structure of a determinate context. For objects to exist in the green field of sense, is for them to be green. However, for objects to exist as levels of a video game, their greenness is no longer a criteria for their existence. They might be green (as if one imagines a level being played with a green filter on the screen) but the determination of their existence, in form and content, is tied not to the green field of sense, but to the field of sense of video game levels. What Gabriel is denying is the idea of “bare existence”. Existence is only “as this or that”, and never description free.

The property of existence is, thus, not something belonging to the object, but belonging to the field in which the object appears. This is one of Gabriel’s key theoretical moves in order to disentangle ontology from metaphysics. The main goal is the complete rejection of any view of existence that searches for the all-encompassing domain: “existence, after all, is a property”, although it is “neither a proper, nor a metaphysical, nor a logical property in the traditional sense” (Gabriel 2014, p. 44). He goes on to say: “To exist is to

appear in specific fields of sense where the fields of sense characterise what exactly it is for something to appear in them.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 44). And concludes: “My aim is to [...] find a way of thinking of existence within a realist setting while acknowledging that it is not a proper property.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 44)

One of Gabriel’s main points is precisely the negation of the subject matter of metaphysics: the impossibility of existing an overarching metaphysical rule, or domain, which encompasses all that exists. Existence is, for Gabriel, anarchical and multiple, always-already dependent on the particular contingencies constitutive of a field of sense. The modal robust properties of a field determine a particular mode of existence. Gabriel wants to reject any form of anthropocentrism regarding the existence of objects. There has to be a way of accounting for objects before humans take notice of them and we cannot fall into the Kantian trap of considering ourselves as subjects dwelling only in the realm of appearances. For there to be any truth whatsoever in such appearances, there has to be a connection between appearances and how things are in themselves. There is a non-arbitrary relation between things in themselves and appearances in order for us to be warranted in calling them as such. The property of existence belongs to the field and not to the object. This is a crucial point of Gabriel’s ‘no world view’, and it is precisely the point that I try to bring into the hinge epistemology discussion: to see hinges not as a property of the sentence, or the proposition, that plays that role, but of the context in which that sentence, or proposition, plays the role of a hinge.

2.4.1.1.1. Kant and Frege

In Gabriel’s view, Kantian transcendental idealism generates nihilism, since it has to admit the non-existence of the experience itself, entailing non-existence of everything contained by it. This is the point where Gabriel sees Frege as repairing Kant by giving up ontological monism. Frege admits the plurality of fields of objects: for something to exist is to fall under a concept, meaning that that concept has an extension larger than the empty set. Existence ties to extension, but also to sense. It is sense that allows us to use “former Governor of California” and “retired Hollywood actor” to refer to the same object (when referring to Arnold Schwarzenegger) or use those concepts to refer to two completely different persons.

For Frege, to exist is not to be a member of any concept, but a member of the extension of that concept. There has to be a sense individuating the concept, tied to its extension and not to the “bare” existence. There has to be a specification of the concept and this specification is what grants extension, which in turn grants existence to an object. Modes of presentation are, then, necessary constituents of any form of meaningful thought. To illustrate this idea I will use Gabriel’s own example: if someone asks, “How many eggs are there?” there has to be already in play a contextualization, which allows the question to have any meaning whatsoever. Probably that person is asking how many eggs are in the fridge, and not asking how many eggs exist today in Europe. Individuation is necessary to understand the question and answer it in a meaningful way.

2.4.1.1.2. Existence as multiple

Indeterminacy should not be seen as something to avoid, but rather a mark of our human agency. There is no need to ground this indeterminacy ontologically in the universe, as it is already ontologically grounded in the field of human action. In Gabriel’s view, we should avoid attempts to ground indeterminacy in the universe, as this is again the ontotheological trap of naturalism: reducing every field of sense to subfields of one primordial field of sense, namely the field of objects with spatial-temporal extension. Indeterminacy is objectively part of the field of sense of human action like a stone is objectively part of the field of sense of minerals. This means that there are modal robust properties in indeterminacy not affected by its human origin. For Gabriel, spatial-temporal extensionality does not have the last word on the question of existence: “the meaning of ‘existence’ is not settled by the universe” (Gabriel 2014, p. 105). This also means that any other attempt to unify existence into a single domain, like the symbolic order, or discursive practices, is doomed to fail. The argument is not exclusive to naturalist theories, but to any theory that tries to reduce “existence” to one particular mode of existence. For Gabriel, the question of existence has to start from plurality itself. There cannot exist anything shared by all fields of sense, not even vagueness or fixed limits. In Gabriel’s own words:

[...] the concept of existence, or rather, existence, is manifold (not that it is said in manifold ways, it is manifold). Existence is just not generally a concept. The notion of existence as appearance in a field of sense is essentially malleable: for elements in set theory to exist is to

be bound by an axiom system and rules of inference, for Spanish citizens to exist is to be subjected to a number of laws, for Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* to exist is (among other things) to be part of the history of art, and so on. There is no such thing as an answer to the question of what it is for an object just insofar as it is an object to appear in a field of sense just insofar as it is a field of sense. There simply is no a priori property of appearance in a field of sense that is instantiated in just the same way by everything falling under it. Existence is not the highest genus. (Gabriel 2014, p. 192)

Gabriel's view of existence is, in Wittgensteinian terms, a family resemblance concept with an ontological baggage: there are manifold uses with manifold practices grounding them, and these relate to different modes of existence. "From this perspective, being has analogical meaning; it means all sorts of things, but in a systematically related way" (Gabriel 2014, p. 193). One single modality cannot capture the plurality of being. It is manifold, and the different rules that structure a field of sense show us exactly this. In Wittgensteinian terms, being, or existence, is a family resemblance concept that shows its own plurality in the multiple different language-games in which it appears, with different rules as their hinges. Being is multiple, and there cannot be an overarching sense, or unified usage, that encapsulates all of the possible cases.

2.4.1.2. Fields of Sense

Turning to the second fundamental concept in Gabriel's ontology, what, then, is a field of sense? He writes:

[...] the rules of individuation that turn a domain into a domain and distinguish it from other domains (I will call these rules senses). (Gabriel 2014, p. 139)

For Gabriel, a field of sense is an ontological context, a domain of objects that structure the truth-conditions for its existence. The particular origin of a field of sense is irrelevant, from an ontological point of view, since, for Gabriel, to know if a field of sense has human or non-human origin does not advance into the question of its reality. For Gabriel, a field of sense is objectively real, independently of having arrived into existence through some social process.

Being a human by-product does not make it less objective, since its conditions for existence are independent of what humans think. The truth-conditions of a particular field of sense emerge from its own ontological structure. This ontological structure has to have some level of objectivity if one wants to maintain a minimal form of truth in play. This need is graspable from the fact that we can know things about these fields of sense, independently of their origin. There are truths that we can grasp and thus there are *mistakes* we can make when judging them. It is precisely this point that is crucial for Gabriel: it is the possibility of error, of making mistakes when judging these fields of sense, that makes them objectively real. If one can be wrong about something, it is because there is an objective structure of that field that determines truth and falsity, independent of our judgements. Because the world cannot have such a structure, it cannot exist. The rules that individuate fields, Gabriel calls senses following his Fregean legacy. And he explains:

[...] to exist is to belong to a domain, and accordingly for domains to exist is to exist in some other domain. Existence is a relation between a domain and its objects (its denizens). As a result, objects could not exist alone; they are not absolutes, but only exist as relata. Objects only exist relative to their domain, as existence is the property of their domain to contain exactly them. (Gabriel 2014, p. 140)

Recapitulating the points of the last subsection, for Gabriel existence is not a property of the object. Objects cannot exist alone. “To exist” is for an object to appear in a field of sense, which means that existence is a relation between the field and its objects, as an attribute that the field gives to its denizens. The existence of objects is, thus, relative to the field in which they appear. Therefore, the property of existence is a property of the field and not of the object:

[...] this straightforwardly entails that there cannot be a domain of all domains, or an all-encompassing domain, as this domain would have to belong to a domain in order to exist. The all-encompassing domain cannot belong to any of the domains it encompasses. (Gabriel 2014, p. 140)

This means that a field could not encompass all the other fields since it has to appear in some other field besides his own, to have some form of existence granted. This leads to an infinite chain of fields of sense that one single field, or domain, could never either unify or totalize.

The limits and boundaries of fields of sense, like the limits and boundaries of language-games, cannot be determined a priori. One has to *look* into their practice and describe them in a piecemeal way.

2.4.1.2.1 The concept of object

Gabriel's definition of an object is quite simple and gets its inspiration from Carnap:

I claim that objects are bundles of facts, that is, bundles of everything that is true about them.
(Gabriel 2014, p. 237)

For Gabriel, "an object is anything that can become the content of a truth-apt thought". It is the possibility of being referred to, by either humans or any other being, that grants an object its identity. Not the actual reference by someone, but the mere possibility of having been referred to had someone been around. It is a similar approach to Hacker's reading of Wittgenstein's private language argument, stressing the public character of language. We could individually refer to every single object that exists in every field of sense, but we could not refer to all objects in one stroke. Gabriel wants us to abandon the view that for the fields to be constituted there is a conscious, or unconscious, active antecedent that creates and fills up the fields. His view is closer to Graham Harman's in the way both of them read transcendental frameworks and ideological distortions as objects themselves. Appealing to these categories leaves the problem of constitution untouched, according to Gabriel, since then we would have to explain their constitution and so on and so forth. There cannot be a pure constitution out of nothing nor a primeval subject that decides the constitution of domains. Constitution amounts to a relation between the act and the domain. "The ontological difference between fields (domains) and objects cannot generally be a construction or projection; it cannot depend on us being around, as this fully undermines the relevant independent existence of objects." (Gabriel 2014, p. 199) Let's translate this into Wittgensteinianese: to talk about the world is a kind of nonsense that goes beyond the limits of communication. It is *unsinnig*, and not merely *sinnlos*. This is a fundamental difference because it shows how there is no practical grounds for this nonsensical concept. Once again, a realist reading of Wittgenstein fits perfectly with Gabriel's rejection of any possible sense for "the world": subjects develop a practical relation with contexts (fields of sense) *because* contexts objectively exist. This objectivity structures the rules one needs to follow in order

to make meaningful assertions within the relevant context. Without this objective grounding (the non-existence of the world is impossible, and not merely contingent), there is no sense whatsoever for expressions about the world. The fact that an unrestricted totality cannot exist blocks any attempt to make sense of the concept of “the world” in the way philosophers talk about it. Gabriel evokes in this regard Wittgenstein’s views in the *Tractatus*:

Of course, Wittgensteinian nonsense is a more general problem, as it is not restricted to the notion of the world. At least, most interpreters do not put the problem of the world centre stage for the discussion of nonsense in and according to the *Tractatus*, which, however, might be a mistake given that the work begins with a definition of the world (the moment of creation) and then goes through seven propositions (the seven days of creation) to the last day when the transcendental subject creating the text has to rest and remain silent. But therein hangs a tale and I do not wish to engage in Wittgenstein exegesis at this point. It suffices to emphasise that Wittgenstein was certainly aware of some problem with the problem of the existence of the world and unfortunately thought that the existence of the world itself would remain a mystery, something mystical, not to be stated in language, but maybe experienced. But that is just to say that we can whistle it, where we cannot. (Gabriel 2014, p. 201)

If the world had followed the rule of being no other object than itself, we would not know how to follow it, due to the lack of its practical ground. We would never know in which situations we should follow the rule and how we should follow it. There cannot be any meaningful rule to be followed regarding “the world” since there could not be any form of practical grounds sustaining our practice. There is nothing to be gained in replacing the world as an object with the world as a horizon. What Gabriel wants is to overcome the very idea of a worldview, be that an object or a horizon.

Fields and concepts are not one and the same thing, even though many times fields are concepts. For Gabriel, the obsession with falling under a concept is not healthy to philosophy and, on his view, it stems from the same mistake of searching for the most fundamental, or categorical, form of judgment, thought or proposition. Gabriel denominates the relation between an object and a field as *appearing*. Objects appear in fields of sense. These objects may, or may not, fall under a concept, and it is perfectly thinkable that many objects will never fall under a concept. Being an object is something essentially functional and directly related to the particularities of the field and of the object appearing in it. The

relation is not defined a priori, but it is grounded directly in the particular rules that structure that field.

For an object to appear in a field of sense, and therefore to exist, it does not need to be construed under human representations. Fields function as a form of background that enable objects to come forth and be graspable by us. Plurality and multiplicity, in Gabriel's view, are not features of our human *episteme*, but characteristics of "reality" itself. The division of labour in our sciences is grounded in the very division we encounter in the different fields and objects these sciences study. Plurality is always-already part of existence in the sense that any form of existence is always one among many. If there is something rather than nothing, then there is a plurality of fields of sense. What defines an object is its function in a determined field of sense. There cannot be an overarching property set in advance to find an object. One has to meddle within a field of sense and grasp the object within that field. Insofar as that field exists, it will also be an object appearing within another field of sense which in itself also has to function as an object, and so on and so forth to infinity.

2.4.1.2.2. Objectivity

Following Leibniz, Gabriel argues that there are an indefinite number of substances, and so an indefinite number of fields of sense with their own ontological structure. Gabriel's fields of sense are the entities responsible for attributing existence to objects that appear within them. They ontologically determine the appearance of objects, independently of human subjectivity. For Gabriel, fields of sense are objective and mind-independent, independently of their possibly subjective nature. His argument is that if our modes of representation that constitute subjectivity are not in themselves objective, we are stuck in an infinite regress of representations. From an ontological point of view, it is irrelevant if the nature of an object is social, natural, or of any other kind. For Gabriel, what appears in a field of sense objectively exists, no matter the ontological nature of the field of sense in question. No field of sense has a monopoly of the concept of existence nor can it be the all-encompassing field of sense of all fields of sense. "[T]he structure of subjectivity, that is to say, of self-awareness of topic-neutral awareness, either is all-out maximally robust or at least has some relevant modally

robust properties” (Gabriel 2014, p. 217). For Gabriel, subjectivity has to have at least some modally robust properties. In other words, subjectivity is objective.

There are an indefinite number of fields of sense and all of them fully exist in their own right. This pluralism is not to be mistaken with relativism, since Gabriel is precisely arguing for the objective existence of fields of sense, their objects and our possibility to gather knowledge about them. This plurality of fields of sense grounds the scientific division of labour and is as objective as the fields of sense and their denizens.

2.4.1.2.3. Modality

Another Fregean point of Gabriel’s new realism is his approach to modality. In his usage of the term, he refers to the Fregean tradition of approaching modality in terms of modes of existence. I will follow his sense of “modal robustness” in this investigation, and not the Kantian or Kripkean senses of the term. With this in sight, we can better understand why Gabriel claims that fields are modally robust. They are not creations of epistemic subjects nor horizons that guide our epistemic practices. They are “out there”, with objective structures that govern the objects appearing within them. This connects with the question of the meaning of hinges. I want to borrow this step from Gabriel and bring it to that debate. If one follows Gabriel’s ontology, hinges are the fundamental rules of these objective structures of fields of sense. They are the rules that govern the particular existence within a field. They are not projections of our epistemic bias, but the grounds of fields that exist independently of our thoughts. Our ability to grasp hinges is simply evidence of our realist *episteme* – our ability to know how things really are.

Here we once again see how close Gabriel’s new realism and Wittgenstein’s views on the question of existence and ontological primacy of context are. “I see no reason to privilege any particular kind of fact or object over others from the standpoint of ontology” (Gabriel 2014, p. 159). His aim is not to deny the obvious fact that some objects are the result of human interaction and decision. Since we are abandoning the picture of a unified totality, there is no contradiction nor problem to assume different origins for different objects. What nonetheless cannot be denied is that their existence, after the moment of their creation, is modally robust. From an ontological point of view, construed objects and non-construed objects are on the same level ontologically. There is no ontological privilege of non-

construed objects. States of mind have an objective structure, even if they are mind-dependent. They have facts and one can conduct an investigation about them. Their origin does not interfere with the possibility of both their objective existence and our objective knowledge about them.

2.4.1.2.4. Plurality

The plurality of fields of sense is a necessary condition for any understanding of existence whatsoever, on Gabriel's view. There is a sheer multiplicity inherent to existence that is not unifiable into one single domain, or reality.⁹ Objects do not confine themselves to one single field of sense, nor all fields of sense fall under a concept: "As an arrangement of cells and as an artwork, my left hand is in different fields" (Gabriel 2014, p. 160). In these different fields, my hand appears as a different object with different facts about it and different properties attributed according to each of the different rules structuring the fields. All of the properties in each of the fields are objective as well. And he writes:

Another way of looking at this is through reversible figures such as Wittgenstein's famous duck-rabbit. What I am effectively saying is that there is both a duck and a rabbit. Yet, the duck and the rabbit are different fields. (Gabriel 2014, p. 160)

Gabriel uses Wittgenstein's example of the duck-rabbit as an example of how the multiplicity of fields works: there is both a duck and a rabbit, however, both exist in different fields. This is an interesting bridge since Gabriel equates his own pluralistic framework with Wittgenstein's awareness of the multiplicity of uses in language and, more concretely, related to the duck-rabbit example, the phenomenon of *aspect blindness*. This relates directly to the purpose of this investigation: one can only reach certain (objective) fields of sense when one *engages* within a practice to *see* something as an object within a specific field (to see it as a duck or a rabbit):

Ontologically, the rabbit, the duck and the black ink on white paper are all equal; they all equally exist. (Gabriel 2014, p. 162)

⁹ Could we say that there is an internal, even perhaps necessary, connection between existence and infinity? I leave this question open.

There cannot be an overarching totality that can be used as a general or overall view of existence. Fields of sense are all on the same level ontologically. There is no privilege of a field over any other, insofar as they are all objective in their own mode of presentation. Each has their own structure of rules and norms that determine what it is to exist in it. This is one of the horns of Gabriel's attack on naturalistic scientism: spatial-temporal extension is not a valid criterion to privilege one field over another. The rabbit, the duck, and the black ink on white paper all exist in their own field of sense, and it cannot be intelligible to try to group them into one single field. Again, we see a similarity with Wittgenstein, I believe. Gabriel's goal is to set things clear and to show how a particular way of thinking, and talking, leads us into philosophical black holes where we take things that exist in their own regard, as being contradictory to each other.

The differences we postulate about reality and illusions are not sustained ontologically: from an ontological point of view, both a road and an illusion on the road exist in their own fields of sense. There are facts about illusions, as there are facts about fictional universes, as there are facts about roads in European countries today. All of these facts belong to different fields and the differences we find between the fields are both ontological and functional. One has to delimitate the context if one wants to ask about the meaning of existence. In all of these fields, the answer to the question will follow different rules in order to be meaningful and true:

[...] for a social fact to obtain and for a social object to exist is for them to be related to the logical form of declarative speech acts, that is: existing by being accepted as existing. Accordingly, for a mountain to exist is for it to exist as a thing referred to in the logical form of an assertive speech act. It is not produced by our reference to it, but we assert that it is so under the assumption that its existence always already antecedes the speech act. (Gabriel 2014, p. 174)

Gabriel's pluralism is still deeply realist: language does not create (and divide) reality; it is reality itself that is plural and multiple, and we can grasp that multiplicity through the multitude of concepts and representational schemes we develop. When we negate the existence of an object, Gabriel argues, we are negating existence in one particular field of sense, and not denying the existence of that object absolutely, in any possible field of sense. Facts about objects are mind-independent even if the object itself is the product of human

work. The facts about the object are modally robust, in the sense that they do not depend on subjects thinking them as true to be true, even if they were originated by human thought. The way things come to existence is not important to the question of whether their properties are objective and modally robust. The mind-independence of facts about objects does not cling onto the origin of the object.

Gabriel reads the Kripkean road based on his causal theory of reference as leading to an untenable position where we cannot refer to objects we have never referred before, meaning we could never refer to new objects. Assertions about the existence or non-existence of objects are only meaningful for the fields in which the objects appear (or not). It does not help to clarify the meaning of the object we are asserting. Any assertion about the existence or non-existence of objects is always-already a question posed within a determinate field of sense. We cannot ask about existence without a delimitation of the context of appearance: “to assert existence is to claim that some object or objects appear in a field of sense, and to negate existence is to claim that some object or objects do not appear in some field of sense or other” (Gabriel 2014, p. 178). Gabriel follows Meinong in the sense that to deny the existence of an object in one field of sense is to affirm its existence in another field of sense. The motivation for this is ontological, not semantical. To negate existence in one field of sense is to affirm it in another.

2.4.1.3. The no-world view

Regarding the question of the existence of the world, Gabriel presents two possible attempts for defending its existence. The first would be to consider the world to be the maximally big field that encompasses all the other fields of sense. This option does not work since this maximal zoom-out is something ruled out by the very concept of existence that Gabriel uses. The other option would be to affirm that the world exists as one field of sense among others. However, this option would not work as well, since the world to be as such would have to contain every other thing and itself, causing a metaphysical duplication of every object. This means that the world as such (the all-encompassing domain, the absolute totality, the One) *cannot* exist, since to exist is to appear in a field of sense. It is not that the world happens to

not exist, but it is impossible for it to exist and it can never exist. The world's non-existence is necessary.¹⁰

Gabriel's no-world view has the absolute rejection of ontotheology as one of its main goals. He wants us to see how any attempt to know about "the fundamental level of reality" is nothing but a misconceived idea about ontology and epistemology. It is not a matter of empirical discovery, but of meta-metaphysical impossibility. There cannot be any discipline or science able to capture the meaning of everything that exists because there cannot be an unrestricted totality of sorts. "I am myself a meta-metaphysical nihilist. Meta-metaphysical nihilism is the view that metaphysics has no object" (Gabriel 2014, p. 187). The question of the existence of the world, on Gabriel's view, comes down to the impossibility of a field of sense being contained in itself or not contained in anything at all. The world cannot appear alongside the other facts nor can it encompass all other facts and itself.

2.4.1.4. Impossible worldviews: mathematicism, naturalism and constructivism

2.4.1.4.1. Mathematicism

As mentioned, Gabriel's new realism rejects any form of unified discourse in ontology. Therefore, one of his targets is Alain Badiou's set theoretical ontology, a form of mathematicism. His main objection concerns the methodology: mathematical formalism cannot give us philosophical insights by itself, without some form of interpretation. The reason for this is that mathematical symbols do not have semantics but only syntax, which is the formalist view. It is their lack of semantics that allows mathematical symbols to be easily manipulated by computers. Since they do not have a meaning to grasp, neither the computer nor the formal system can contradict themselves, and thus it is unwarranted to say that it speaks. For Gabriel, we should abandon altogether the idea that formal systems are languages. They share similarities, but we cannot abandon natural languages for some alleged

¹⁰ It may be interesting to bring Karl Popper's idea that one of the risks of metaphysical realism was precisely going astray with the metaphor of the world. For Popper, the fact that we are able to find laws that structure our reality (Popper was thinking primarily of empirical sciences) can lead us to think of the world as a thing, an object, a "crystal ball" that contains all reality inside. For the laws of the world, on Popper's view, do not explain the world, they merely describe it, leaving the mystery of its existence open to question. (Popper 1983, pp. 167-168)

contradiction (if that even makes sense), while we can, and very often do, switch between formal systems to the one that better suits our purposes.

Set theory unaided by philosophical reflection does not prove anything of any importance for philosophical reflection. Set theory by itself is not a candidate for ontology, as it only contains information about the meaning of “existence” under some sort of interpretation of its results. (Gabriel 2014, p. 120)

Understanding is, for Gabriel, the keystone for meaning, and thus for contradiction.¹¹ Where there is no interpretation, there can be no discussion about the meaning of a sign. That is why Badiou’s set-theoretical ontology fails, on Gabriel’s view. For Gabriel, “[s]et-theoretical ontology is just one instance of mathematicism” (Gabriel 2014, p. 123). Badiou wishes to leave set-theory alone in the hope that it will by itself reveal ontological truths. However, the only ontological analogies he might make based on set theory are highly dependent on his own preferred interpretation of set theory and of the particular section of it. The ontological “revelations” of set theory are no more than projections of his own bias of interpretation. If used as a metaphor or analogy, I believe Gabriel would not have trouble with Badiou’s work. The issue lies in Badiou’s attempt to make mathematical discourse absolute, that is, the ultimate ground for the discussion of Being. Not only does this mathematicism enter in direct conflict with Gabriel’s thesis of the no-world-view, since Badiou is privileging mathematical discourse over others in the same totalitarian fashion of ontotheology, but Gabriel is also against Badiou’s idea that there can be a meaningful formal system without any form of interpretation whatsoever. The discoveries of set theory about the meaning of “existence” will always be confined to its own ontological domain, never achieving a metaphysical status, since that would go directly against Gabriel’s thesis that the world does not exist. “In order to have a theory, you need to account for the meanings invested in generating the theory” (Gabriel 2014, p. 125). Badiou’s proposal is just a renewed version of Plato’s mathematicism, on Gabriel’s view. It is fundamentally metaphysical since it argues that everything that exists can be studied mathematically. It is this idea of totality that Gabriel sees as once again the crucial mistake of any form of all-encompassing discourse or theory: there is no world, so

¹¹ Here it is interesting to see the difference between his interchangeable use of “interpretation” and “understanding”, and the discussion addressed in Chapter 1.

there cannot be a unified totality captured in one single discourse (or language-game, to bring Wittgenstein's terminology into the picture).

For Gabriel, Badiou contradicts himself in preferring a highly contentious interpretation of set theory as the preferred method for his ontology without the One. His option necessarily leads to a unification of all domains into the domain studied by set theory:

Badiou himself paradoxically constantly invokes a good example for the shortcomings of mathematicism, namely love, or rather falling in love. (Gabriel 2014, p. 222)

Badiou's view is tantamount to just another world-view, even if he claims to be doing ontology without the One. "No politics is responsible for my belief that there are more moons in our solar system than one or, to play it safer, for my belief that there are stones" (Gabriel 2014, p. 223). The beliefs formed in one field of sense are independent of what is going on in another field of sense:

The senses individuate a field of sense about which a limited number of things can truly be said. (Gabriel 2014, p. 224)

Although Gabriel is firmly opposed to Badiou's mathematicism, he recognizes Badiou's merit in attempting to develop a philosophy that accounts for the sheer multiplicity of existence. However, on Gabriel's view, it is Badiou himself who does not follow through with his own original insight by raising the mathematical discourse into an absolute level of comprehension – and thereby unifying multiplicity into one single domain.

2.4.1.4.2. Naturalism

Another target of Gabriel's rejection of worldviews is naturalism. According to Gabriel, naturalism is a form of ontotheology in the sense that it wants to conceive existence as something necessarily related to totality, which is precisely the metaphysical misstep that one should avoid. This form of materialism is not scientifically provable nor philosophically consistent with the great majority of the history of philosophy. It is more an example of an ideology than a genuine philosophical approach to grasp the truth. Contemporary naturalism misunderstands the difference between what decisions relate to a theory and what are descriptions of how things are "deep down". The confusion starts right off the beginning by assuming a "fundamental level" of a unified reality, fuelling the psychological projection of

a worldview onto the world itself. The multiplicity that underlies individuals is a sign of the multiplicity regarding existence. For there to be many individuals, there have to be many different properties that individuate them, and not one single property, “existence”, that at the same time is all-encompassing and differentiates objects between them. The concept of existence (and its rules) is necessarily tied to the particular properties of objects that individuate them in order to have any meaning whatsoever.

The disenchantment of the world is just a reflection of the zoontology present in the naturalist ideology, Gabriel argues. This view is no more than a fantasy of our “human all too human” features. It is not a scientific view, but a metaphysical one, grounding the majority of scientific discourse of our times. The implicit nihilism makes no sense for Gabriel since it denies the meaning of something that does not exist, namely the world. It is not a matter of re-enchanting the world, but of denying its very existence, and thus any view that argues for a disenchanted view of it for the simple fact that it makes no sense to have a view about something that absolutely cannot exist. This is the ultimate meaninglessness that nihilism confronts itself with, its own:

The problem with over-generalised metaphysical fundamentalism of any kind is the tacit monism according to which everything that even so much as exists is part of a single, all-encompassing domain. Naturalistic fundamentalism goes on to identify this domain with some actual fundamental stratum, fundamental natural reality, where something belongs to that stratum if it somehow grounds some phenomenon not strictly speaking belonging to the stratum. This whole project is hopeless, because it rests on the mistaken identification of ontology and metaphysics (that is, ontotheology). (Gabriel 2014, p. 127)

The metaphysical position behind the majority of ontotheologies today is monism, which argues that everything comes from one single substance, or one fundamental reality. This metaphysics underlies many of the naturalist claims that the role of physics is to uncover this fundamental layer of all reality. Then, again, for Gabriel this is no more than another example of mythopoiesis, in the sense that is one single narrative attempt to explain the meaning “of it all”:

[...] scientific naturalism is still involved in mythopoiesis in the production of an overall narrative designed to explain the world and its meaning or utter lack of meaning. (Gabriel 2014, p. 128)

“Science” used in the singular, is the epistemological equivalent to “world”, on Gabriel’s view. There is no unified totality or reality. Therefore there cannot be a unified science that has this non-existent totality as its epistemic object.

2.4.1.4.3. Constructivism: overmining or undermining?

Gabriel’s pluralism is also a firm rejection of any form of constructivism. He wants to preserve the mind-independency of objects and their discourse-independent existence.

I reject transcendental asymmetry and the associated constructivism. The scientific division of labour is not as such arbitrary and cannot be sustained if it is not directed at truth. Referring to how things are in their domain is not generally constructing a domain first and then locating things in the constructed domain. (Gabriel 2014, p. 151)

The metaphysical constructivist research regarding the world is as meaningless as a search for the biggest natural number. Gabriel explores this metaphor more deeply with the “list” example.¹² For this reason, it is wrong to identify “everything” with the content of one particular investigation. The problem is not with physics, sociology or any other particular science, but with the elevation of one particular science to metaphysics, which is necessarily meaningless, according to Gabriel.

Reductionism is the claim that the explanations needed in order to account for some objects under some description ought to be replaced by explanations needed in order to account for the same objects under some other description. *Prima facie* reduction, as it were, leaves the illusion intact. (...) Elimination, however, gets rid of the illusion in one stroke by denying its very existence such that no need for reduction can even possibly arise. (Gabriel 2014, p. 142)

Gabriel rejects both reductionism and eliminativism regarding ontology. For him, reductionism leaves illusions intact, giving no account of them except that they stem from a more fundamental layer of reality. This gives us no knowledge of the illusion. In the eliminativism case, Gabriel notes that we are left with nothing, denying the very object that

¹² “Now we decide to write a list including all the facts in this world. This list would be a representation of the totality of facts, a world-picture. The problem is that the world-picture would have to be part of the world if the world really is the all-encompassing domain and not just a restricted totality such as all the beer in my fridge. In this case, then, the fact that there is a list changes the world quite drastically; it adds more objects (the writer or thinker of the list) as well as more facts involving the fact that there is a list of the totality of facts. There will always be another list we can write in order to achieve a world-picture and any list will (slightly) change the world by adding facts and objects to it.” (Gabriel 2014, pp. 17-18)

we are trying to understand: “The real problem for both reduction and elimination generally is that they owe us an account of the structure of illusion; they owe us an account of phenomenisation.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 143) Bringing Harman’s distinction between overmining and undermining, Gabriel summarizes the two traps that ontology must avoid: the search for the all-encompassing domain and the search for the most fundamental domain, respectively:

The overminer is looking for an ultimate science and its ultimate domain of objects, but is unable to reach his goal. The underminer loses everything in the act of attempting to ground it. Both are wrong because they assume either that there has to be something all-encompassing or something most fundamental.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 144)

As mentioned before, Gabriel’s proposal is a form of meta-metaphysical nihilism in the sense that it denies the very existence of the object of metaphysics. It is an illusion without content, a by-product of our human imaginative capacities and need for answers. Gabriel goes as far as calling the “world” a fear concept: a conceptual tool originated from our fear of infinity. “We can refer to every single object. Yet, [...] we cannot refer to all objects at once, as this would amount to a world view, and world views are impossible in any sense of impossible.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 146) Both religious and scientific world-views are wrong because both are world-views. “That there are indefinitely many fields of sense is therefore accessible a priori, what they are is only accessible a posteriori, which is itself a fact accessible a priori.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 207)

2.4.1.5. The contingency of necessary rules

Gabriel sees necessity as field-immanent modality:

[N]ecessity is a field-immanent modality characterising a relation between objects in a given field, namely a relation that could not be otherwise. (Gabriel 2014, p. 214)

Necessity is all about the formal role that a concept plays in a language-game and its practical ramifications. I believe there is a parallel here with the Wittgensteinian concept of “hinges”: what makes a hinge as such is the role that it plays, not the content of the sentence. This relates to Wittgenstein’s distinction between rules and empirical propositions within the structure of a language-game. The rules cannot themselves be part of the language-game;

they have to remain as the limit, the boundaries, the grounding. They cannot be part of the game since they play the role of rule: a rule cannot be a rule of itself, only a rule of something else. For a rule to be put to test (or doubt) it has to be moved from the language-game where it plays that role to one where it is no longer a rule but a proposition subjected to other rules that structure its own investigation.

This brings up Wittgenstein's discussion about the impossibility of "reddish green". Statements about the impossibility of a "reddish green" or a "round square" are not empirical propositions put to test through hypothesis, but rule-like propositions that define the scope and the limits of a language-game. They play a structural rule – the hinges on which colour and geometrical statements hang on to have some standard of correctness and thus meaning. The impossibility lies in the role they play, not in some particular content. It is not due to the particular properties of "red", "green", "round" or "square", that some combinations are impossible to make between these concepts. Rather, it is the role they play in their respective language-games that does not allow for them to be put into question. It is the role that the context attributes to them that makes such combinations impossible under the penalty of the whole structure of the language-game falling apart. In this sense their impossibility is necessary; for this language-game to be played, for this field of sense to appear, these rules could not be otherwise: "Round and square do not relate to each other as p and not-p." (Gabriel 2014, p. 234) The conditions of possibility for existence are field-dependent.

2.4.2. A realist epistemology

Gabriel wants to develop a realist epistemology that argues for our access to the objective properties of things. We are not dwelling in the realm of appearances and even appearances have modal robust properties that we can objectively know. The way to argue for this realism is precisely to follow the ontological pluralism previously presented: there are different forms of knowledge that correspond to different fields of sense and different modes of existence.

2.4.2.1. Pluralist Realism

Gabriel's pluralist realism in ontology implies a pluralist realism in epistemology:

If we give up the idea of any privileged mode of existence, how can we avoid relativism?
(Gabriel 2014, p. 191)

For Gabriel, one obtains knowledge when one arrives at a true description of some feature of a field of sense. It is possible to achieve objective truths since the fields of sense in which some propositions are true are not dependent on human subjectivity to have these propositions as true about them. Truth is dependent on the field of sense, but not of the recognition by a subject as something as true. What is true can take as many forms as there are fields of sense, but their independence of human subjects is always-already present at the moment they become true.

Returning to a theme discussed in the previous section on contextualism, the incompleteness of our epistemic practices should not be seen, Gabriel argues, as a sign of our insufficiency in grasping things in themselves. This totalitarian demand forgets the fact that our knowledge is necessarily partial and that this does not in any way mean that our knowledge is strictly knowledge of appearances and not of things in themselves. The realist point conveyed here is that we can in fact *know* how things are in themselves, even if they appear to us only in a relative way to our own epistemic and cognitive capacities. This relativity does not amount to either relativism or idealism since we can in fact grasp properties of how things are in the way they show themselves to us in the realm of appearances. To use Gabriel's own example, "the softness of a surface tells us something about the surface and not just about how the surface feels for us" (Gabriel 2014, p. 82). If there is evidence of our ability to grasp things in themselves, it is that we grasp the very multiplicity that shows itself through the manifold ontological contexts. Thus Gabriel writes:

I shall defend epistemological pluralism, by which I mean the view that there are different forms of knowledge, such as sociological knowledge, mathematical knowledge, sensory and epistemological knowledge. These forms of knowledge differ not just by being about different kinds of objects or different fields of sense, for that matter. They are individuated by more specific conditions, such as the condition that we cannot know anything by hearing it without using the sense or combination of senses needed for hearing that something is the case." (Gabriel 2014, p. 318)

Gabriel wants to keep a more moderate version of his own pluralism to protect himself from a possible relativist ghost haunting his realism. He does not want to take into account other forms of knowledge besides know-that. However, from a Wittgensteinian point of view, this worry is unwarranted. We need only to take into account the different rules that ground the

various meanings for “knowledge” and the different criteria that are present in language-games for someone to claim “I know”.

2.4.2.1.1 Pluralism as an anti-sceptical strategy

Gabriel uses his pluralist realism as a weapon against Cartesian universal scepticism. Gabriel’s argument is quite simple: if there cannot be a universal domain, there cannot be a universal knowledge; if there cannot be a universal knowledge, all knowledge is therefore piecemeal. If all knowledge is piecemeal, so it is any form of doubt. Therefore, there cannot be a universal doubt. The fact that we can only have plural and local knowledge is reason enough for us to reject a universal sceptical doubt putting all our knowledge into question since this universal knowledge could never exist.

Similarly to Wittgenstein, Gabriel rejects the very meaningfulness of the universal sceptical challenge. It is not a matter of answering straightforwardly to the sceptic but of dismantling the meaning of their challenge. The grounds for the challenge to be formulated are already mistaken since they presuppose a conception of totality that is rejected by Gabriel’s pluralism. There cannot be a universal knowledge since this would amount to having a field of sense of all fields of sense, which is an impossible demand in Gabriel’s terms. Knowledge can only pertain to a particular field of sense and so can doubt. A universal doubt is as nonsensical as the idea of the world since both start from the premise that there is such a totality to be known and doubted. The path is quite clear and similar to the no-world view: any universal claim is doomed to fail, be that sceptic or dogmatic.

2.4.2.2. Truth or truths?

Gabriel’s pluralism stops at the concept of truth. In his view, rather Fregean, “we find the laws of being true and do not produce them” (Gabriel 2014, p. 98). On his account, truth is not plural and the same truth-process goes across the board through all fields of sense. It is a manifestation of the absolute itself. All fields of sense follow the same mode of being true, and all truths follow the same criteria, independently of their ontological particularities. For Gabriel, this is what allows him to claim the same modal robustness for truths across all fields of sense:

[...] as soon as the relevant form of modality is settled by a relation between a field of sense and the object in question, there is an absolute fact of the matter determining the range of modal variation. There is no additional relativity. (Gabriel 2014, p. 276)

When we reach an objective truth, we reach the absolute in the form of “being true”. When grasping a truth, we are grasping an independent, non-relative and non-arbitrary process: “Grasping a modally robust fact is grasping the absolute.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 290) In preserving the same notion of truth across the board, Gabriel wishes to avoid the post-modernist anarchical view of knowledge. The modes of being true may vary, but they all share the same actuality. An assertion about the existence of an object in one field of sense will obey to specific criteria of that field of sense. In the same way, a truth about an object is dependent on the ontological particularities of the field of sense in which the object appears. However, both will be true with the same ontological and epistemological strength. The modes of being true differ according to the ontological particularities of a field of sense, but the same modality of truth is present in all fields of sense. Different criteria will be in play, with practical differences, but all following the same laws of being true.

2.4.2.3. Knowledge and the division of labour in science

As mentioned before, on Gabriel’s view the scientific division of labour has to derive from the ontological plurality of field of senses if it is to have any objective ground whatsoever:

The finitude of cognition and knowledge boils down to the fact that we cognise and know objects under some of their descriptions, which is not an obstacle, but rather an enabling condition for successful epistemic states. (Gabriel 2014, p. 231)

A domain is not a priori of its content, as if we would have to fill it with objects and organize them together. It is the other way around: our own way of organizing objects together holds true *because* they were part of the same field of sense, even if we had never noticed them. The division of labour in science follows the very same division of labour regarding fields of sense. Different facts demand a different science. Multiple forms of knowledge obey different rules and criteria:

[I]f knowledge cannot be unified by specifying any alleged universal and substantial structure holding knowledge as such together, there correspondingly is no position from which to undermine knowledge in one stroke. Epistemological pluralism, therefore, is a bulwark against scepticism. (Gabriel 2014, p. 329)

I see a possible parallel with Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* here. Even if we do not ascribe a form of epistemic pluralism to Wittgenstein, he does tell us about the impossibility of a general scepticism because our language-games rest on hinges that are context-dependent. For something to be known, and thus to be subjected to doubt, something has to stay put and function as a bedrock for that knowledge. A doubt always rests on certainty: "The fact that we have mathematical, sociological, literary and epistemological knowledge undermines the idea of an overall possible defeater of all these forms of knowledge." (Gabriel 2014, P. 329) Again, the division of labour in sciences is already in itself a sort of bulwark against the possibility of a radical universal scepticism:

Undermining knowledge forever remains a piecemeal activity and can only be achieved by knowing something about some form of knowledge, which demonstrates that it is mere pretence, that is, a set of maybe systematically related failed knowledge claims. But there is no position from which we can undermine knowledge as such by knowing, for instance, which ultimate condition would have to be undermined so as to block us from knowing anything whatsoever. (Gabriel 2014, p. 329)

Again we see his anti-sceptical strategy based on pluralism. The fact that knowledge is always local means we can only put this knowledge in doubt locally. If there is no epistemic standpoint from which we can *make sense* of the overall unification of knowledge, then there is no epistemic standpoint from which we can *doubt* the overall unification of knowledge. Sceptical universal doubts presuppose the same metaphysical premises that Gabriel is attacking. Both Gabriel and Wittgenstein share the idea that a universal doubt is nonsensical: while Gabriel rejects a universal body of knowledge to doubt, Wittgenstein points to the formal impossibility of doubting everything without assuming some things as certain.

2.4.2.4. The objectivity of thought

Gabriel wants to defend a fully-fledged realism in the sense of admitting truth as an objective relation of an object with its field of sense, which in turn is what constitutes a fact. He remarks:

Thinking is a legitimate part of what there is. It is a fact among other facts. If Britney thinks that it is raining in London, her thinking is as much a fact as that it is raining in London. Both facts are objects insofar as we can think about them. (Gabriel 2014, p. 351)

Not only are these facts real and independent of anyone having ever noticed them to be facts, but also we can grasp them directly through truth-apt thoughts. Gabriel is an ontological and epistemological realist, considering that facts are truths in an ordinary sense and we can know them directly through our truth-apt thoughts articulated in language. Returning to Putnam's criticism of Kripke, Gabriel, like Putnam, rejects a naturalistic world-view that privileges material objects and natural kinds for conceptions of facts. For Gabriel "[a] true description is a fact" (Gabriel 2014, p. 232) and "all true thoughts are facts – they are true of something" (Gabriel 2014, p. 233). Individuation is always contextually determined. This determination is a normative feature embedded in the inferential facts that constitute the rules of identity for an object in a determinate field of sense. There is no ontological reason to exclude all facts that do not stem from natural kinds.

Gabriel wishes to argue for a fully realist epistemic position. This means that what structures the norm of thought is the modal robustness of facts that compose a certain field of sense. It is not the subject who projects their own norms, forming and defining reality, so to speak, but rather the modal robust properties constitutive of reality that imposes a certain structure on our thoughts. "It would still be the case, even if no one had ever noticed" – this is Gabriel's main point and focus of his new realism. Gabriel claims: "psychology could not study the mind in the sense of the 'private in the head' for the simple reason that there is no such a thing." (Gabriel 2014, pp. 339-340) Gabriel is very close to both Putnam and Wittgenstein here. His realist account of the mind matches perfectly with Wittgenstein's private language argument and his criticism of internalism. There is no private world within our minds.

Thinking itself is part of what there is, and thus it is not just about what there is [...]. Thinking has to be “out there” as much as any other object we are able to refer to in such a way that we get it right or wrong. (Gabriel 2014, p. 340)

Gabriel’s Fregean tradition is evident here: thoughts are as objective as the things we think about. On his view, “[Frege’s] arguments against psychologism about all aspects of thought are still valid” (Gabriel 2014, p. 342). For example:

For, even if psychologism were true, the fact remains that it was true before someone acquired the then correct belief that it is indeed true. There will, thus, always be a sense in which the belief the psychologist holds about thinking is true regardless of any belief about it. If successful, Frege’s argument against psychologism is an argument for realism. Some truths are necessarily independent of our beliefs; something is the case whether we recognise it or not. Something is the case anyway. (Gabriel 2014, p. 343)

Here again Gabriel himself bridges his thought with Wittgenstein’s:

I take Wittgenstein not primarily to be attacking sense-data conceptions of mental content, but psychologism about thinking, thereby also pointing out the crucial shortcoming in Frege’s theory of thought. This is what Cavell apparently means when he sees Wittgenstein as undoing the psychologising of psychology. (Gabriel 2014, p. 345)

However, in the last part of the next quote, it is possible to see that their proximity has limits:

In order for the objectivity condition to be met, thoughts have to be modally robust entities in the following way. An entity is modally robust if it has modal properties anyway. Rocks are modally robust. There would have been rocks had no one ever believed such. Some thoughts are not modally robust; in particular, some thoughts are about thoughts. We also know that we have not exhausted the nature of thought itself. Thought itself has some modally robust properties we have not discovered yet, which is why there still is philosophy. (Gabriel 2014, p. 345)

The last part of this quote is probably one of the most contentious points between Gabriel and Wittgenstein. Was it not precisely this modal robustness of objects in philosophy that Wittgenstein was attacking? It is precisely the illusion of some form of modal robustness in the object of study of philosophy that leads philosophers to “take language on holiday” and forget how language is actually used in ordinary life. This disagreement between the two

philosophers relates to a wider difference between them: Gabriel is a classical philosopher in the sense criticized by Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, I believe that I have shown some points where their works interestingly combine, and Gabriel himself refers to their philosophical proximity.

2.4.3. Connections with Wittgenstein

Would Wittgenstein see Gabriel as one of the philosophers who “muddled the waters”? Would Wittgenstein agree that his ideas were to be considered compatible with such a classical philosopher? Gabriel is clear in his disagreement with Wittgenstein over this point.¹³ Gabriel takes unapologetically the side of the classical conception of philosophy: to present arguments and discuss thesis. How is then possible to put together such different philosophical methods? I believe the answer lies in their shared, common picture: even though their methods differ, their ideas share the same movement and spirit. More than just being parallel or similar, Gabriel recognizes Wittgenstein’s influence directly and I believe that Gabriel himself introduces interesting and powerful ideas that can be used to further understand the implications of Wittgenstein’s own work. The reader will judge the merits of this attempt, with the sureness that I did my best to show the fruitfulness of this philosophical conjunction.

Isn’t Gabriel’s no-world view, in a sense, an example of the application of Wittgenstein’s ideas (although not the method) for the dissolution of certain philosophical problems? A certain picture lead us astray and muddled the waters when taken to have metaphysical value, namely the picture that there is such a thing as an absolute totality – the *world*. When people talk ordinarily about the world they do not mean the absolute totality of everything that exists. Expressions like “your world is different from mine”, “we have different world-views” or “she is the best football player in the world” do not refer to an absolute totality, but to the circumscribable set of possibilities within a delimited context (Venturinha 2018). Gabriel is trying to show us exactly that point: there cannot be an absolute

¹³ “Like Wittgenstein, who made similar observations in his discussion of world-pictures and their relation to mythology, they came to the conclusion that philosophy should not be presented as a series of arguments or as a theory. Here I disagree. Being informed about the failure of ontotheology presupposes insight into fallacies involved in the formation of ontotheology. Overcoming ontotheology just means giving different arguments in the regions opened by ontotheology.” (Gabriel 2014, p. 23)

totality, namely the world; but ordinary expressions about the world can be meaningful if understood as reference to a particular field of sense, not to the field of sense of all fields of sense. I believe there is another important parallel between Gabriel and Wittgenstein: there are *family resemblances* between the different uses of the word existence, which mean that there are multiple contexts in which different uses emerge through the multitude of practices (multiple actions and deeds relating directly to the manifold meanings).

Gabriel couldn't be closer to Wittgenstein on the rejection of the question of the existence of the external world: "The trouble with the problem of the external world is not that it results from external questions, but that it is utterly ill-posed and simply rests on false assumptions." (Gabriel 2014, p. 152) Interestingly enough, both focus on the nonsense of the very question itself, but on different points of its nonsense. Gabriel, with no surprises, focuses on the nonsensical assumption of a "world" as an external unified totality. For Gabriel, this object does not exist and it is merely a product of a fantasy. Consequentially, a doubt over its existence is nonsensical.

2.4.4.. Conclusions

There are three main sets of conclusions to retain from this last subsection. I will organize them according to the structure previously presented.

2.4.4.1 On ontology

From an ontological point of view, I wish to draw from Gabriel conclusions related to his pluralist realism. More concretely, I wish to combine his ontology of fields of sense with some elements of hinge epistemology and contextualism in order to give an enriched account of the implications of Wittgenstein's work. This translates into seeing contexts as fields of sense, and language-games as strong candidates for either these contexts or regions of them. My intention is to read an ontological emphasis in Wittgenstein's remarks about the specificity and particularities of language-games: the practical differences that lie in the background, and form the body of rules of a language-game, is as such due to the ontological configuration of the context, or field of sense, that that language-game pertains to. This is the first main conclusion I draw from combining Wittgenstein, Wittgensteinians, and Gabriel.

2.4.4.2. On Epistemology

The fundamental epistemological conclusion I draw from the section on epistemology is a natural consequence of the ontological conclusion presented before: since these language-games refer to real contexts, with an objective structure, *our ability to master a language-game translates into our ability to grasp the objective structure of the context in question*. This means that I follow Gabriel's idea that we can in fact know how things are in an objective fashion. My thesis is that our ability to master a language-game, its rules, and practical features, is evidence of this objective knowledge. Even when we are dealing with appearances, illusions and subjectivity, the argument goes untouched since these will always have some objective structure or other in order for them to be able to have truth-apt thoughts. I follow Gabriel completely in regard to this matter: the objective structure of appearances is a necessary condition for their modal robustness and their truth-conditions; our ability to play a language-game is precisely a case of mastering these objective features. Our confrontation with the multiplicity of possible language-games and rules is the confrontation with the infinite that Gabriel wishes to affirm in his no-world view: the inherent ontological multiplicity. We can grasp this multiplicity directly through the very mastery of a multitude of uses in different language-games.

2.4.4.3. Gabriel and Wittgenstein

To conclude this subsection, I will briefly sum up the main conclusion regarding the differences between Gabriel and Wittgenstein. This amounts to the very conception of philosophy. Gabriel is a classical philosopher who believes in the possibility of presenting theses and arguments in philosophy. Although Gabriel recognizes on several occasions the importance, and relevance, of Wittgenstein's work, he sets himself on the other side of the isle regarding this particular question. Gabriel believes that philosophy still has work to do as long as there are regions of thought that we still have not accounted for. Wittgenstein could not be further away from Gabriel on this matter. Repeatedly he wrote against this classical conception of philosophy and he practiced a different kind of philosophy himself. Perhaps the two would not agree on several issues addressed here and both would disagree with me for even trying this conjunction. However, the sympathetic position from Gabriel towards Wittgenstein and Wittgenstein's praise of whoever tried to dispel illusions in philosophy leads me to believe that the no-world view developed by Gabriel would catch Wittgenstein's interest.

2.5. Back to Wittgenstein

Let me take as starting point the following quote from Wittgenstein:

One could say “every view has its charm”, but that would be wrong. What is correct is that every view is significant for whoever sees it so (but that does not mean one sees it as something other than it is). Indeed, in this sense, every view is equally significant. (RFGB, p. 529)

From the readings developed in this chapter, I shall try to sketch what would a realist reading of Wittgenstein, inspired by hinge epistemology and contextualism, look like. I first focus on the concepts of “context” and “objectivity”, followed by what a Wittgensteinian “ontological pluralism” would be. My aim is to present a fully realist, ontologically and epistemologically, reading of Wittgenstein’s notions like those of “context”, “hinge commitments”, and “rules”, inspired by and grounded in the literature analysed. I believe that an objectivist view of these concepts, one that allows for their mind-independent and modally robust status, is a truthful reading of what Wittgenstein wrote about these topics.

2.5.1. Context and objectivity

Starting with a general conclusion from the readings of the previous sections, *we can know the truth of things but only within their context of existence*. Following Gabriel’s articulation of the matter, I argue that there cannot be an all-encompassing context which contains all the other contexts, since it would then be needed for another context to exist to encompass that same context, leading to an infinite regress. Similar to Graham Harman’s object-oriented-ontology, I defend a flat conception of contexts: their existence is, from an ontological point of view, on the same level. The relations between them are essentially practical and one can only talk of their interactions when we are already within a context that has the *relata* of other contexts as its objects. This is the view I believe to be the most philosophically fruitful reading of a combination of Wittgenstein and Gabriel’s no-world view.

Turning our attention to the concept of truth, and its relation to the context, we can say the following: the grasp of a truth within a context is manifested in the apprehension of a true description that, in turn, entails an objective existence of a thing (Venturinha 2018). The grounds for the standards of what is true are part of the thing itself, revealing themselves

in the very form of the practice. Relating to the discussion in the first chapter, it is an evidence of the realism both of meaning and knowledge: it is not as if meanings are detached from things in themselves, creating a metaphysical unsurpassable distance, forcing us to a sceptical leap in each application of the rule; it is rather the objectivity of things that determine the convention within a language and the step to be taken next. Propositions get their meaning from the practice that grounds the rules of a language-game. If there is a lack, an impossibility of description, and a necessity to only show and say nothing, it is part of the objective structure of the context – and this indeterminacy is revealed and grasped through the practice itself. *The indeterminacy, or incompleteness, of our expressions, are expressions of the indeterminacy, or incompleteness, of things in themselves.* It is not as if we are stuck in practices and language-games that are historically situated, vague, imprecise, and we can never go beyond this transcendental horizon. *It is the object itself* that is historically situated, vague or imprecise, and cannot be apprehended outside of its particular language-game. The very separation between subject and object is part of the objective structure of the context, including its own necessary historical structure. We grasp directly the objectivity of things, including their own incompleteness and vagueness, historicity and relativity. Indirect discourses work because the thing itself does not allow for a direct description – and they work because they stem from a practical relation with the objective structure of the context, allowing for truth and error to emerge.

Through this lens, we can see knowledge as the possession of a true description within a context – what is true is not so due to the agreement of a community independently of the context, but due to the objective structure of the context itself, which already contains the triad (community-subject-object). The logical and epistemic rules of a context, which determine what is true, are grasped through our practice. It is in virtue of the fact that we have a direct relation to things that we are able to reach true descriptions, and thus attain knowledge in a truly objective sense. Things can only be known in the context in which they exist, but they can be *really* known through the grasp of true descriptions within the context in which they exist.

Let me try to provide an illustrative example of what has just been said: imagine you are walking down the street, drinking a can of soda and after you finish it you throw it in the appropriate recycling bin. All of the following events happen: you felt good about yourself,

you contributed to an ideological practice (namely, recycling), you fed the small flies that were around the bin, and you helped the finances of the company building the bins (with more being used, they get to sell more to the municipality, for example). One can make an investigation about any of these, apply methods of inquiry and reach objective truths about each one. But it is necessary to contextualize each object of analysis in order to capture some of the manifold truths. In each of the contexts there will be different criteria for what is true and how to reach it. If one wants to know about why the flies like to drink the rest of soda in the can one does not need to know about critique of ideology or about psychoanalysis in the same way as someone who studies the societal and psychological phenomena related to recycling. Following Gabriel and Venturinha: one can only reach true descriptions when the object of knowledge is grasped within a particular epistemic context. It is a requirement that it is meant to be read both as normative, orienting good epistemic practices, and as descriptive of our process of knowledge-acquisition.

2.5.2. Epistemic Realism

I argue in this investigation for a reading of Wittgenstein's reflections on epistemology that is both contextualist and realist. This reading of Wittgenstein argues for the existence of objects and phenomena that are independent of human subjectivity (the "thereness" of Venturinha, or Gabriel's "maximum modally robustness") and also that our access to these objects and phenomena is direct (we can know objective truths about them). Making a small detour to 20th century French philosophy, aren't we close to the Lacanian concept of *anamorphosis*? Following Slavoj Žižek's formulation of it: what may appear as a flaw of the subject is, instead, a positive property of the object, meaning that what can only be expressed indirectly, and elusively, is not so due to our epistemic limitations, but due to the elusive reality of the context itself. Our historical and social horizons are not barriers between the subject and the object: they are part of the object itself, in the sense that they are part of the objective structure of the context that attributes existence to the object. The truths about an object are necessarily articulated through language in order to be known, and conventions for a meaningful language are grounded in the deeds that the context in which an object appears determines. This is not to say that their existence is dependent on our concepts, quite the contrary: our concepts are the ones that depend, to exist as meaningful signs, on the independent ontological structure of the context.

There is a practical relation established between the knowing subject and the object of knowing. This relation is necessarily contextual: not as an epistemic limitation, but as an ontological determination that structures the *episteme*. This relation is directly due to its non-linguistic dimension: it is what grounds meaning itself. Assertibility rules are formed through the symbolization of this relation. Objectivity is thus achieved when a true description is obtained through practical engagement (establishing a direct relation between the subject and the object – the grounding deeds of a language-game) with a context (Gabriel 2014; Venturinha 2018). The context imposes its own *grammar* – assertibility rules emerge from the objective structure of the context – that is revealed in the practice. The *logic* of a language-game, to use Wittgenstein’s terminology, is a reflection of the *life* of a context. It shows the mind-independent structure through the limits imposed on rules. The possibility of error, of going against the truth of a context, is evidence of the existence of a structure that is mind-independent – the human all too human conventions may establish the assertibility rules, but these are reflections of the practical relation that is not itself dependent on conventions. Objectivity is thus possible, not as the result of some magical correspondence between words and objects, but as a true practical relation expressed through language.

2.5.3. Ontological pluralism

Let me depart here from something that Drury recalls apropos Wittgenstein: “...he was fond of quoting the proverb, 'It takes many sorts to make a world', adding, 'That is a very beautiful and kindly saying.’” (Drury 1996, p. 148) As previously mentioned, one of the aims of this chapter is to combine Wittgenstein and Gabriel’s pluralist realist. I follow Gabriel’s junction of epistemology and ontology, seeing Wittgenstein following a similar approach. In this investigation I argue that a realist conception of knowledge must admit some form of ontological indeterminacy in order to make sense of the indeterminacy of our expressions of knowledge. Metaphors, for example, are not a lesser form of expression in need of a direct translation (which usually results in a simplistic reduction of the complexity of the phenomenon). Some contexts demand such a form of metaphorical and indirect expression. Precisely because of that direct relation to the signified, and to its structural ontological indeterminacy, metaphors can be even more accurate than descriptions oriented by the principles or methods of the natural sciences, for example. For one to know what it means to be in love, to use as an example of something fundamental of our existential and religious

condition, there is no advice to be gained by reading a book of biology. It is a kind of ontological and epistemological demand, with pragmatic and semantic consequences, that the contexts (or fields of sense, to use Gabriel's expression) exert upon us.

Another aim of this investigation is to develop an ontological reading of Wittgenstein's language-games. This amounts to reading Wittgenstein's concept of language-game as being directly related to different modes of existence. This is, once again, what I believe to be an important parallel between Wittgensteinian language-games and Gabriel's fields of sense. The parallel is in seeing a context as an objective self-determinate domain that creates different ontological features of objects. This ontological plurality is shown through the very multiplicity of language-games and the variety of rules. Gabriel's meta-metaphysical nihilism becomes even closer to Wittgenstein in this light: there is no world, only an incomplete multiplicity of contexts – there is no language-game of all the language-games, but multiple language-games pertaining to different ontological domains. The plurality of language reflects an ontological plurality in itself. This may sound contentious, as it seems that I am inflating Wittgenstein with metaphysics, but my idea here is quite the opposite. I do not wish to turn language-games into what they are not; I only wish to draw attention to the fact that the different rules that are in place in different language-games are the reflection of a practical structure that is not dependent on language. My goal is thus not to metaphysically inflate language-games, but only to develop a reading of Wittgenstein that pays attention to the ontic level (the practical objective structure of a context).

2.6. Two illustrations

I would like to present two examples that I have formulated to better illustrate the reading of Wittgenstein that I am proposing here. The first one comes from a videogame called "Elder Scrolls Online", a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG), and the second is a simple description of an everyday situation, namely finding out where a city is. The first example aims at illustrating the realist aspect of rules and conventions, while the second example is an attempt to show the fruitfulness of understanding hinges as belonging (in a realist way) to the context.

2.6.1. First Example – How Wittgensteinian rules are present in Elder Scrolls Online

This first example aims to show a parallel between the structure of language-games and the structure of videogames. This parallel pertains to the assertibility rules that structure the existence of an object within a given context and the programming rules that structure a videogame and its elements, objects and actions. The example goes as follows: in Elder Scrolls Online, a MMORPG, we have three types of “sacks” that the player’s character can encounter and loot: seasoning sacks, flour sacks and regular sacks. The latter, regular sacks, can contain multiple random objects, while the former two are specific for those objects (seasoning and flour, respectively). When a sack is empty, the word EMPTY appears below the name of the object (when the cursor points to it). This means that when a seasoning sack or a flour sack is empty, either SEASONING SACK (EMPTY) or FLOUR SACK (EMPTY) appears, accordingly. However, when empty, a seasoning sack, a flour sack or a regular sack are graphically the same. Their object model in the game is exactly the same. However, formal rules are directly intertwined with their content, which means that even though graphically they look exactly like an “empty sack”, an “empty seasoning sack” or an “empty flour sack” they have different criteria for identity and for usage. This means that even though they look the same within the game, an “empty seasoning sack” and an “empty sack” are indeed different things with different programmed rules. An empty seasoning sack is not lacking *anything*, only *seasoning*, which is the only thing that it can contain. This is the result of a difference in the formal rules of these objects: the rules of the language-game that predetermine their identity within a context. We can do different things with these objects according to the specific programmed rules for their identity. The lack of part of the object’s identity gives us a glimpse of the rules that structure its existence. These lacks reveal some elements of its structure, not in a positive way but by showing what it is by what is lacking. I believe that this example can shed light on other matters, outside of the videogame universe. We can have two objects empirically similar (even almost identical) but the concepts that structure their identity, since these emerge directly from a practical engagement with the objective context in which they appear, show a (onto)logical difference between them only grasped through its formal structure. In a similar sense, isn’t this also what Žižek claims in his reference to the joke of the man that asks for a coffee without cream but only gets coffee without milk? The lack is a constituent of the identity of the object, which means that lacking seasoning or lacking flour is directly intertwined with the fact of being a seasoning sack or a

flour sack. The lack is inscribed into the very rules of the context that attributes existence, and thus an identity, to the object.

One of the main uses I see for this example pertains to the concept of belief. The absence of a religious belief is not proof of the existence of a scientific one. And the other way around: the lack of a scientific theory that amounts to some form of assumption is not to be taken as faith in the religious sense. Beliefs are not neutral in regard to their structure. A religious belief will have different rules and a different form, as it appears in a different ontological context of scientific beliefs, for example. A religious belief cannot be “enriched” or “justified” with scientific discoveries. A religious belief, like a coffee without cream or a seasoning sack without seasoning, is determined by the ontological formal structure that determines its existence independently of what is contingently the case; it is the very context of the religious belief that, logically before it has any content whatsoever, determines its ontological and epistemological differences from other beliefs.

2.6.2. Second Example: Hinges belong to contexts, even in books about the history of football

The second example aims to illustrate the idea defended here that hinges belong to the context where they play that role, and not to the proposition nor the subject that holds that commitment. The example goes as follows: I am sitting in my living room, chatting with a friend, and suddenly the question of where the city of Liège is pops up. We both don't have our smartphones with us (and we both are too lazy to go pick them up), so we decide to clear the question by looking at a football history book standing right next to us on one of the bookshelves. This book has a list of all the European clubs that have participated in European football cups. We both know that there is a club called Standard Liège, but this information alone does not help us any further. However, searching in the book, we can see that the club Standard Liège competes in the Belgian football league, and we therefore conclude that Liège is in Belgium. At the moment of inquiry, the book already contains hinges (namely that Liège is in Belgium) that we do not. In fact, we are searching for precisely that hinge, in order to answer our doubts, while holding others (that what is in the book is reliable, for example, or that there is only one club called Standard Liège). It is not the case that we share a hinge with the book, because we do not, but that we go looking for it in order to answer our question.

We go looking for a fact that in one case is a hinge (in the context of the book) and on the other an empirical proposition (the context of the conversation between me and my friend). The hinges are therefore completely dependent on the context and the limits imposed by the context to both the subject and the existent objects. The main point of this illustration is to show how hinges are “out there”, as functional concepts of contexts and language-games. They are not fixed propositions of our own human nature, but functional roles played by propositions according to the demands of a particular context. As previously mentioned, hinges are essentially practical, as they form the very limits of deeds within a certain context.

2.7. Conclusions

We can now sum up the conclusions of this chapter and highlight the main arguments for the present investigation. I will divide the conclusions into three sets, each pertaining to a section of the chapter.

2.7.1. On Hinge Epistemology

From the readings of the main proponents of this Wittgensteinian epistemological school, we get tools to build an understanding of Wittgenstein’s epistemology that gives relevance to the grounding practical commitments. Language-games are sustained on hinges that are of practical nature. However, the realist picture I am proposing here sees these hinges as being “out there”, that is, belonging to the context in which the language-game operates. They are not the property of the proposition, nor of the subject, but of the context where the proposition performs as a hinge. Hinges, then, have a normative power, impelling the subject in a certain direction. This normativity stems from the objective structure of the context they belong to. The direction a hinge gives is a reflection of the properties of the context itself. Hinges are essential to understand Wittgenstein’s epistemology, but should not be seen as personal commitments. Instead, I argue that the greatest contribution of hinge epistemology is precisely to give relevance to the notion that exemplifies Wittgenstein’s realism the best. Hinges are important because they show features of the objective structure of a context (its practical ontic level), and not because they are supposed to show the personal commitments of a subject. In this realist picture, hinges are like windows to objectivity, giving us glimpses of the mind-independent features of contexts.

2.7.2. Contextualism

From the school of contextualism, I wish to draw the primacy given to contexts, even in the relativist version. The main contribution to be taken from this school is the idea that truths are context-dependent. The ontological ramification of this insight is that there is an objective structure underlying each epistemic context. We can thus affirm that contexts determine the criteria for existence, as they determine the criteria for knowledge. Knowledge is the result of our successful practical interaction with a context and its codification in language through a true description. The laws of being true are determined by the context and thus the multitude of contexts generates a multitude of types of knowledge. “To know that *p*” is a description of a practice that allows the subject to reach the objective properties of a context.

2.7.3. Gabriel meets Wittgenstein

From Markus Gabriel’s new realism, we get the grounds for developing an ontological reading of language-games, combining his insights with a pluralist realism. In this light, the multiplicity of language-games is evidence of the multiplicity of fields of sense, each with its own ontological structure. The idea behind Gabriel’s meta-metaphysical nihilism, that there is no world, is parallel to the claim that there is no language-game of all language-games. It is a similar articulation of Wittgenstein’s rejection of metaphysics, under a more classical and traditional tone. Gabriel’s treatment of the concept of existence can be equated with the idea of a family resemblance concept with ontological baggage, as he himself argues. The idea is that Wittgenstein’s reflections on the multiplicity of rules and language-games are not arguments for a relativist point of view, but for a pluralist realism that allows for the structure of contexts to be taken objectively. A form of life is not private but shared, and in constant interaction with things external to it. Wittgenstein was not arguing for a solipsistic linguistic idealism, but a communal pluralist realism. Gabriel’s ontology of fields of sense is a powerful tool to help us argue for that reading.

Chapter 3 - Groundless Grounds

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 3 I directly address Wittgenstein's ideas about religion and religious experience. I give particular attention to some questions, namely, whether Wittgenstein was or was not a fideist, what an overall rejection of the possibility for rational justification of religious beliefs means, and what the role of practice and ritual to the understanding of religiosity within the Wittgensteinian framework is. I focus on the work of Thomas Carroll in order to see how his proposed solution for the labelling of "fideism" through the concept of "trust" can be helpful to this research. I also draw parallels between Wittgenstein's conception of a religious point of view and G.K. Chesterton's "Elfland", Roger Scruton's cognitive dualism and David B. Hart's work on the Christian revolution. My aim with the addition of these three philosophers is to enrich the investigation and to search for parallels between Wittgenstein's ideas and other notable Christian thinkers. My main goal for this chapter, as well as for the entirety of the thesis, is to find a stable reading of what Wittgenstein, and Wittgensteinians, have already said, to work with it and to go beyond it. I intend to focus my efforts on the widening of perspectives and exploration of the trails his ideas may take us, rather than a pursuit of an exegesis of his remarks regarding religious belief. I do, however, present his ideas and analyse some of the secondary literature. A last introductory note: during the course of my PhD research, I had the chance to present two papers on Carroll's fideism and religiosity in robots at the International Wittgenstein Symposium in Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria, in 2019¹⁴ and 2022¹⁵, respectively. Both papers are included as sections of this chapter.

3.2. The Religious Point of View

To start from the original point of discussion in religious matters, what is at stake between an atheist and a religious point of view of the world? Is this a discussion of two different *Weltanschauungen* within the same world or two different worlds entirely? I will start by

¹⁴ Henriques, Ricardo N., The Impossible Religious Robot: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Religious Sensibility in Non-Humans, *Contributions of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society* 27 (2019): 102-104.

¹⁵ Henriques, Ricardo N., Was Wittgenstein a Fideist?, *Contributions to the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society* (2022): 73-75.

affirming that, according to the reading of Wittgenstein proposed here, there cannot be an argument between the two positions precisely because the two positions will necessarily rely on different rules for the meaning of their language-games. Their difference is fundamental and unsurpassable from within. The atheist position is an essential negation of the context which constitutes the religious position. That is why fideism is not a good term to describe Wittgenstein's view: fideism still presupposes that both positions share the bare minimum for the understanding of their concepts and disagree because there is no possible common ground for truth. What I claim is that their difference is at the level of the *grounds themselves*: there is a difference in the very nature of the practices of the form of life, thus logically excluding the possibility for a shared meaning (and a possible disagreement over their truth).

The atheist position is in itself a metaphysical negation of the religious point of view, not an opposing thesis. The religious position is an affirmation of the reality of the religious point of view, which can translate into an affirmation of the objectivity of a context. The religious points of view is an affirmation of the reality of the field of sense of religious experience, thereby rejecting any reductionist or eliminativist strategy that privileges material concepts. The religious point of view is not in opposition to the scientific view regarding natural kind objects, but rather affirms an ontological specificity of the spirit that escapes the grasp of science. The religious point of view focuses on a moral, spiritual dimension of life that is as objective as rocks and stones, only in a different fashion. The religious and the scientific points of view are not competing for the better thesis to account for the same events, but rather they compose two different ways of approaching the phenomena of life that go beyond the spatial-temporal extensionality.

3.2.1. Wittgenstein contra Frazer

Perhaps one of the works that most clearly contains Wittgenstein's ideas regarding religion and religious belief is the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. Edited posthumously, this book contains Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer's anthropological work on the Papua New Guinea indigenous people. In this section, I analyze the most important points of the book and develop an overview of what Wittgenstein's ideas were in order to establish a basis for comparisons with other authors further ahead. My interest is to spark new connections and new implications of Wittgenstein's work, more than a pursuit of purely exegetical work.

The starting point of the critique of Frazer's work is that he sees Papuan natives as savages, with primitive forms of reasoning and nonsensical rituals from a scientific point of view. This last point is precisely the focus of Wittgenstein's critique: *one cannot hope to understand religious practices and rituals if one looks at them as if they were scientific endeavours – one has to adopt a religious point of view in order to understand them*. What, then, is this religious point of view? What characterizes it? How is it different from the scientific one? Wittgenstein is quite clear in this regard: the scientific explanation is the one that searches for the causes of an event; the religious perspective, on the contrary, contemplates the event in its absolute state, and tries to grasp the symbolic meaning. It is a search into the "why" and not the "how". It is a transformation in the subject's way of seeing the world and therefore also of acting upon it. An attitude shown through different practices with the purpose of contemplating life and keeping alive a certain moral view.

Is it, then, all in the eye of the beholder? This investigation aims to show that this is not the case. It is not merely a change in the subjective perspective, but a change that allows the subject to interact with an ontological context of its own. This is a rule-based interaction and is fundamentally practical. For Wittgenstein, a subject-object relation surpasses the subject-object dichotomy: *an objective structure grasped only through a practice of the subject*. This is present in his remarks on Frazer's anthropological work, where he criticizes the idea that "magic" is a lesser form of science: "Frazer's representation of human magical and religious notions is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as mistakes." (RFGB, p. 32) For, on his view, magic and science do not even compete for the explanation of the natural world, let alone share the same epistemic structure. "Magic" (or religion) is a context of its own, with its own rules, practices and rituals, that enable the subjects to grasp reality in a different manner. Thus Wittgenstein says:

What is nonsensical here is that Frazer presents it as if these people had an entirely wrong (indeed, insane) notion of the course of nature, while they really only entertain a somewhat peculiar interpretation of the phenomena. That is, if they wrote it down, their knowledge of nature would not be fundamentally different from ours. Only their magic is different. (RFGB, p. 56)

It is an attitude towards life that opens up a whole field of sense, to use Gabriel's term. The ground for these practices is precisely the objective structure of the context, therefore

enabling the subject to enter in a practical relation with the object of contemplation: “Baptism as washing. – An error arises only when magic is interpreted scientifically.” (RFGB, p. 38)

There is indeed a mistake when we take religious practices and propositions as if they were empirical and scientific. When one forgets that their purpose and nature differ from those of the sciences, we may see them as a lesser form of scientific research. This could not be further from the truth. Not only do religious propositions have their own language-game, with their own rules to follow, showing an ontological difference with the objects studied by the sciences, but they also differ in the very practices that ground them. Symbolic practices do not ground themselves in an expectation of cause-effect, but rather as a means to express an attitude. This difference is present in many of our practices, even non-religious ones:

When I am angry about something, I sometimes hit the ground or a tree with my cane. But surely, I do not believe that the ground is at fault or that the hitting would help matters. “I vent my anger.” And all rites are of this kind. One can call such practices instinctual behaviour. And a historical explanation, for instance that I or my ancestors earlier believed that hitting the ground would help, is mere shadow-boxing, for these are superfluous assumptions that explain nothing. What is important is the semblance of the practice to an act of punishment, but more than this semblance cannot be stated. (RFGB, p. 54)

If one attempts to understand religious and ritualistic practices, one needs to adopt the contemplative perspective that the members of a community and followers of a particular tradition, have. Wittgenstein is very clear about this: it is a mistake to try to understand religious practices through the lenses of science, for religious practices do not get their grounding from a scientific point of view. It is a question of “form of life” that is at stake here. The hinges of religious practices differ from the hinges that play a role in scientific language-games. They show an ontological difference between the two contexts and this also demands a difference in the position from the knowing subject:

A religious symbol is not grounded in an opinion
Error only corresponds to opinion. (RFGB, p. 36)

For these reasons, historical, or empirical, explanations are not up to the task of explaining religious and mystical phenomena. If one wants to explain these phenomena as they are, without recurring to a reductionist or eliminativist explanation, and preserve their objectivity,

it is necessary that we adopt a different attitude in order to understand what is going on. That is Frazer's mistake, on Wittgenstein's view: he is looking at rituals and magic as if they were rocks and stones. The ontological features of the religious context do not allow studying it as a natural phenomenon without losing the properties that make it so. If there is any kind of Gabriel-inspired modal robustness in this case, it shows itself in the way that one cannot grasp the truths of religious practices without adopting the religious point of view, or as Wittgenstein puts it in the *Tractatus*: the world viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*:

(...) apart from the kinds of behaviour one could call animal, the intake of food, etc, etc, etc, humans also carry out actions that bear a peculiar character, and might be called ritual actions. But then again, it is nonsense to go on and say that the characteristic feature of these actions is that they spring from erroneous notions about the physics of things. (RFGB, p. 42)

These ritualistic practices are evidence of our form of life, which in turn is evidence of some form of objective structure that is not reducible to the natural world. There are properties and objects of the religious experience grasped only through the light of a religious point of view – one that is looking into the symbolism of an event, and not searching for its causes.

It is of course not the case that the people believe that the ruler has these powers while the ruler himself very well knows that he does not have them, or does not know so only if he is an idiot or fool. Rather, the notion of his power is of course arranged in a way such that it corresponds with experience – his own and that of the people. That any kind of hypocrisy plays a role in this is only true to the extent that it suggests itself in most of what humans do anyway. (RFGB, p. 56)

Therefore, for Wittgenstein, it is not as if the believer is somehow an irrational superstitious creature. Rather, the believer is someone who contemplates events in a different fashion from that of the scientific point of view. It is not determined that one is doomed to one or another. The same subject may very well be able to understand both. Wittgenstein only wants us to understand how the religious language-games, and the practices that sustain them, are not “irrational” as if they were a form of primitive science. They are not “going against science”, but structured by different rules of thought and action. The religious point of view is not simply a change in the perspective of the subject that still maintains the search for causes, but a change in the perspective of the subject that makes him look at events in a contemplative manner. A completely different plane of reality opens up, parallel to the natural phenomena.

It is worth mentioning here the work of Frank Cioffi. In his 1998 book *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer*, he develops the idea that Wittgenstein's critique of Frazer reached a much broader scope than just the one usually captured by Wittgensteinian scholarship. Wittgenstein's attacks on Frazer (and Freud) center on the rejection of an empirical investigation, and thus solution, into internal, formal affairs. The latter is to be taken in a completely new perspective, attending not to the cause-effect relations between empirically observable events, but to the perspicuity of the phenomena. Cioffi writes:

One of the most common grounds for disparaging empirical explanation, or for expressing disappointment at its results is its frequent failure to confer perspicuity on the phenomena explained. The perspicuity requirement may seem gratuitous when we are dealing with afflictions where the priority ought to be instrumental power and not understanding. (Cioffi 1998, p. 286)

In order to understand the meaning of events, one has to see them in such a perspicuous light¹⁶ (which translates to Wittgenstein's religious point of view or "the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*") that their narrative comes forward and we are no longer looking for a causal datum history. The acceptance of our bewilderment is, for Cioffi, an acceptance of our ignorance regarding a great many things about our lives. This is not ignorance in need of a scientific explanation, however. The clarification of the conceptual confusion at stake emerges through the articulation of existential questions (which will never be "closed") with scientific discoveries (that are in search of precisely closing the gap of our ignorance about them). In Cioffi's own words:

What ought to be said is that our lives, when contemplated in a certain spirit, have an expressive character as well as a causal history; they "seem to be saying something", and it is as if we had to discover what it is they are saying. (Cioffi 1998, p. 303)

"Explanations" are not a suitable method to understand the meaning of existential and religious questions. They are useless when one wants to understand the symbolic narratives of our lives. Does this mean that, if we take Wittgenstein's later philosophy seriously, we

¹⁶ There is definitely an interesting parallel between Cioffi's and Thomas D. Carroll's use of the term "perspicuous": both attribute to Wittgenstein a "perspicuous" reading of existential and religious matters, meaning that they should be seen as dealing with the meaning of our symbolic practices and not giving explanations of the causes that give rise to such practices.

have to abandon the concept of “rationality” in order to comprehend the structure of religious belief? Was Wittgenstein affirming the separation of reason from faith? This question is directly related to the well-known debate regarding whether Wittgenstein was a fideist or not. Was Wittgenstein divorcing reason from faith, or, quite the contrary, was he opening up a new understanding of rationality? To better understand the extent and complexity of this question, it is important to first focus on the term itself. Thomas D. Carroll develops a powerful argument for being careful when attributing the label of fideist to Wittgenstein. Let us look into his main points.

3.3. The Question of Fideism

In his 2014 book *Wittgenstein within the Philosophy of Religion*, Carroll presents us with an analysis of the manifold questions regarding Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion within the literature in the field. One of his main concerns is the concept of fideism, and the association many philosophers make of it with Wittgenstein. For Carroll, a philosophical housekeeping is needed in order to clarify the confusions related to the meaning of that term. He proposes a contextual and hermeneutical reading of fideism: through a conceptual, context-oriented, historically sensitive, clarification it is possible to understand the true usefulness of the term in a philosophical investigation of Wittgenstein.

One of the main arguments developed by Carroll is about the unclear definition that fideism has had over the years in the studies of philosophy of religion (Carroll 2014, p. 101). This messy starting point for the labelling of Wittgenstein is one of the major problems: how is it possible to label Wittgenstein as a fideist if the term itself is not clear and has different meanings for different schools? His suggestion is that we should take a context-oriented analysis to see how the term has evolved in its usage. For him, this contextual clarification is the key to solving the confusions over the meaning of the term (Carroll 2014, pp. 101-102).

The first of three main problems regarding the term fideism is that it is used mainly pejoratively, and this kind of usage is not very fruitful for academic discussions (Carroll 2014, p. 102). Although one can find throughout history many different attempts to define the term, most of the time the concept is defined without paying attention to contextual nuances. What most of the usages have in common is a divergence with the catholic ideal of faith and reason hanging together perfectly (Carroll 2014, pp. 106-107).

A second problem is related to the ahistorical character of the studies on fideism. Philosophers and theologians assume the term to be a general category that can be applied in different contexts and can be seen in different historical moments (Carroll 2014, p. 107). This goes precisely against the hermeneutical and context-oriented reading that Carroll proposes. A third problem relates to the previous one: the historical complexity of the term does not allow for it to be moved from one context to another without some sort of conceptual entropy (Carroll 2014, p. 109).

3.3.1. Traditions of fideism

Following Wittgenstein himself, Carroll proposes a plural view on the definition of fideism. He suggests we should take into account the variety of ways the term has been used and the different meanings that it had. For him, attention to the contextual nuances and the historical particularities is the key to understand not only the complexity of the term itself, but also its usefulness for a philosophical investigation. Carroll identifies six types of uses (Carroll 2014, p. 121): 1) Symbolo-fideism; 2) Criticism of Catholic traditionalism; 3) Criticism of Biblicism; 4) Criticism of anti-metaphysical philosophy and theology; 5) Conformist sceptical fideism; and 6) Evangelical sceptical fideism. The first four represent categories that are actually used in religious debates, while the last two are only used by historians. Also 2) and 4), since they are pejorative terms, should be put aside for not being useful in academic discourse. What Carroll concludes from his investigation into the traditions of fideism is that, once again, the lack of clarity regarding the term is liable to bring philosophical confusion (Carroll 2014, p.122).

3.3.1.1. Sceptical fideism – Popkin and Penelhum

Carroll makes reference to the work of Richard H. Popkin and Terence Penelhum, two historians of philosophy, for their contributions to the understanding of a phenomena that Popkin named sceptical fideism: the appropriation of ancient sceptical arguments in the service of Christian apologetics (Carroll 2014, p. 109). Their thesis goes back to when Catholics and Protestants, in the mid-16th century, were debating the proper criteria for religious truth. They show that Catholics maintained that the criteria for “the rule of faith” should be the legal tradition of the Magisterium, while Protestants believed that it should be the individual that discovers it in the Holy texts. Both sides accused each other of Pyrrhonism,

and both of them have features of the categories of sceptical fideism that Penelhum brings to surface: conformist and evangelical. But all these categories have changed throughout time and Carroll is focused precisely on that migration of meaning (Carroll 2014, p. 111).

3.3.1.2. Symbolo-fideism – Ménégoz and Sabatier

Continuing his project of developing a hermeneutical analysis of fideism, Carroll presents the work of two theologians who are of much importance for the genealogy of the term: Eugène Ménégoz and Auguste Sabatier. In the late 19th century, the French theologian Ménégoz proposed an articulation between the orthodox Lutheranism and the agnostic positivist philosophy of science. He is labelled as the first to have used the term “fideism” (Carroll 2014, p. 113). Together with Sabatier, they sought to build a path for Christianity after the Enlightenment by articulating it with the rise of science and historical criticism of the bible. Their theology is sometimes called symbolo-fideism to express Ménégoz’ idea of salvation independent of belief and Sabatier’s reflections on religious symbolism.

Their project relied on a proposal for historicizing the representations of faith in order for the Christian message to be adapted to a new environment. They advocated for a separation between morals and religion, on one hand, and science on the other. The path for dealing with this religious crisis should rely on the protestant principle of *sola fide* (Carroll 2014, pp. 115-117). Through this separation, both Ménégoz and Sabatier thought they would be able to accommodate faith and science, without damaging one or the other.

3.3.2. Fideism as an interpretative category: the case of William James and Soren Kierkegaard

Carroll identifies the beginning of the term “fideism” to be used as a tool to understand Wittgenstein’s philosophy of religion with the work of Kai Nielsen in his 1967 paper “Wittgensteinian Fideism”. For Carroll, to use this term without rigour and care is a mistake, and a contextual investigation into the subject can, in fact, show this. The usefulness of “fideism” as a hermeneutical category is dubious when disconnected from the particular context in which is used. A context-sensitive investigation, Carroll argues, shows that Wittgensteinian fideism has gone a long way away from Wittgenstein himself (Carroll 2014, pp. 122-123).

Wittgensteinian fideism is usually associated with the influence that William James and Kierkegaard (two thinkers that are usually labelled as fideist) had on Wittgenstein. But for Carroll, if there is an element of fideism in Wittgenstein, this is due to James and not Kierkegaard (Carroll 2014, p. 124). James held that people could decide between “life options”, being constrained only by the “logical intellect” and historical, social and cultural forces. There is a space for passions within our epistemic lives, and these are what drive us when two equal hypotheses present themselves to us. The connection to other beliefs and values plays a decisive role. James’s pragmatism, Carroll argues, does not conceive the relationship between knower and reality as something static: on the contrary, truth happens to be an idea, becoming true through events (Carroll 2014, p. 128). Although James never mentions the term fideism, Carroll sees the possibility of drawing a line of connection between James and Sabatier’s ideas, since he talks fondly of him in his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. But labelling James as a fideist in the negative usage of the term is a mistake, Carroll argues, since “religious beliefs are viable for the Jamesian only after one has thoroughly investigated what reason has to say about the beliefs in question” (Carroll 2014, p. 134).

The case of Kierkegaard demands us to be careful, Carroll states. For to take seriously a hermeneutical study of Kierkegaard’s texts it is imperative one takes into consideration the rhetorical dimension of his work (Carroll 2014, p. 135). Carroll believes that the term fideism may be useful as a comparative category in some studies of Kierkegaard. However, inattention to hermeneutical differences between the usage of Kierkegaard’s scepticism and subjectivism may lead to misreading his work as a defence of irrationality. His proposal is not to destroy objective reason, but to transcend it (Carroll 2014, p. 138).

After looking into the cases of Kierkegaard and James, Carroll concludes that the term “fideism” is not clear enough to be used as a label for their philosophy (Carroll 2014, p. 139). Nevertheless, he sees similarities in their thought with the work of the symbolo-fideists.

As stated previously, Carroll identifies the beginning of the use of fideism to characterize Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion with the publishing of Kai Nielsen’s “Wittgensteinian Fideism”. Carroll starts by noting that the influence of James in Wittgenstein is not entirely clear. There are similarities between their ideas, but that does not

mean that there is a traceable line of fideism from James to Wittgenstein (Carroll 2014, p. 141). There are, however, two big influences that can be immediately identified: the philosophical methodology and their shared view of authentic religiosity.

Carroll brings up Russell Goodman's study on the influence of James on Wittgenstein. Goodman argues that there is a symmetry between Wittgenstein's conception of pragmatism and what he later wrote in *On Certainty*. On his view Wittgenstein shares two themes with the pragmatists: the idea that not all empirical propositions play the same role and the view of an interconnection between action and thought (Carroll 2014, p. 141). But Carroll does not believe that this symmetry is enough to claim that there is a traceable influence of James' pragmatism in Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, Carroll agrees with Goodman when he claims that one of the main reasons that Wittgenstein liked James' philosophy was his approach: James philosophized as a human being. This is in deep connection with Wittgenstein's method of defusing philosophical problems by pointing to the misconceptions about the plurality and diversity of language (Carroll 2014, p. 141).

Similar remarks can be made about the influence of Kierkegaard on Wittgenstein. Although Wittgenstein was interested in questions of authenticity and sincerity of religious belief and practice, it is not clear to what extent these matters were brought up by his reading of Kierkegaard at an early age. There are remarks that are clearly influenced by his reading of the Danish philosopher, but they are scarce in direct references (Carroll 2014, p. 142). Also, the passages from Wittgenstein's notes that address the Christian historical proof-game were published long after his philosophy of religion was labelled as fideist.

The only trace that could be found for a fideist reading of Wittgenstein lies in the role of emotion in beliefs, since here Wittgenstein joins Kierkegaard, James and the symbolo-fideists (Carroll 2014, p. 144). However, Carroll argues that it would not be completely unreasonable to drop the label if one does not have careful attention to the historical meanings at stake. It can be a useful comparative category with other philosophers, though only when carefully contextualized and hermeneutically analysed (Carroll 2014, p. 145).

One of the main features of Carroll's work (and of his whole book) is his particular attention to context. His reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy, the perspicuity reading, is sustained by careful hermeneutical work. This is his method and his proposed "solution" at

the same time. From his analysis, we can draw three main conclusions. First, there is a clear distinction between using the term “fideism” to designate a philosophical or theological school and using the term as a pejorative adjective. This is a categorical difference of the investigation itself. Second, the term has had a flexible meaning since it was first introduced. It is a fluid concept that has been used by authors holding different points of view, even opposite ones. This fluidity can enrich the concept semantically, but it doesn’t help achieving a clear and serious usage of it in a philosophical investigation. Thirdly, Wittgenstein was a complex author, even somewhat opaque on some issues. But he was very clear in his message to draw our attention to the plurality of usages of language. This has to be taken into account if one wants to label his philosophy of religion as fideist. The term can have a useful comparative role in studying Wittgenstein within the history of philosophy, but this demands a rigorous hermeneutical treatment of it. The lack of clarity and the fluidity must be faced through a careful historically sensitive analysis that remains faithful to his attention to diversity. Only then one can find philosophical fruitfulness in combining “fideism” with Wittgenstein.

3.4. Wittgenstein within Christian Theology

Wittgenstein’s ideas about the religious point of view, far from being strange to Christian theology, are in perfect coherence with its tradition. Both share the same interpretations of the relationship between faith and reason, religion and science, and the divine and nature. For example, G.K. Chesterton and David B. Hart share with Wittgenstein the idea that the religious experience starts with a change in the subject, in the way the subject perceives the world. It is an altogether different experience of reality: it is indeed a touch with another dimension of reality not graspable through science. The ability to grasp the “Elfland”, in Chesterton’s words, marks an ability to rejoice with the uniqueness of things, an experience of awe with the world that is only possible when the subject embarks on a particular way of living (and seeing) it. It is the recognition of a dimension that is beyond the reach of materialist methods and metaphysics, a context of reality that is only graspable through the ritualistic practices of religion. One has to live religiously, so to speak. It is not a matter of content of beliefs, but a matter of the form of beliefs in themselves: seeing the world as a miracle, in Wittgenstein’s words.

This separation between the natural and the divine (which is an open dualism that does not enclose ontologically all types of things that can exist) starts on the very crucifixion of Christ. It is Christ, the man, who is crucified. However, it is Christ, the God in human form, who resuscitates, and thus challenges the power of death. Death is the master of the material world, but with the Event of the resuscitation, Christ shows how every human has the ability to transcend the natural world, and get in touch with a different dimension of reality: the divine plane. To do so, one needs to live according to the Christian values. This is the power of the Christian revolution: it is not merely a change in what people believed in; but a change in the very way people believed and perceived God, man and life in general. It is this separation that allows for the discovery of a natural world in itself (the world of the flesh, the body that has Death as its master), and thus opening up the gates of future scientific endeavours. It is also this movement that enables the exaltation of the divine reality where the human soul lies, marking the metaphysical difference between the two contexts (or fields of sense).

3.4.1. G.K. Chesterton's Elfland

In this section, I wish to draw a parallel between some of the main points of Chesterton's lay theology and Wittgenstein's notion of the religious point of view. My goal is to show that both philosophers argue that one needs to change their point of view to *get in touch* with the religious context that lies *outside* of the subject.

Chesterton's magical realism in literature is not at all detached from his lay theological work. His idea of an "Elfland", a different plane of reality, which is not constrained by physical laws of nature, but simply by creativity, morality and symbolism, is very similar to the idea of a "religious point of view" as thought by Wittgenstein. I will not attempt here to develop a literary criticism of Chesterton's works, but only to take some elements present in both *The Man that was Thursday* and *Orthodoxy* that are relevant to the present investigation. I am not attempting to form a systematic view of Chesterton's lay theology or philosophy of religion, but only to show how there are similarities in his work with Wittgenstein's writings on the same issues.

Chesterton wants us to see how the adoption of a certain point of view allows us to get in contact with a plane of reality that transcends the natural world. It is through symbolic

practices, actions grounded in a transcendent morality, and a religious attitude toward life that one can grasp this different dimension of reality. He argues for a pluralistic scope, one that allows seeing beyond the limits of space-time extension. Chesterton is not arguing for religion as a competitor of science, but of the religious attitude towards life in contrast with an atheist one. He does not want to produce a parallel theory of nature based in theology, but to show how one can, in fact, adopt more than one point of view. This different point of view is the door to another dimension, or context, which has its own rules. If one wants to engage with the objective features of this context, one has to embark on a series of practices grounded in the Church's doctrine. More than an ontological argument, Chesterton's aim is to show the moral superiority of Christian life.

In this section, I delineate the main points of Chesterton's apologetic work. More specifically, I expose his views regarding the relationship of faith and reason, and then look into his take on the debate on materialism (and determinism) vs. magical (religious) realism. Other elements of Chesterton's work would also be interesting to approach here. However, to maintain the focus and a reasonable scope for this investigation, I focus mainly on his realist approach to the religious dimension of reality.

3.4.1.1. Faith and reason

Chesterton and Wittgenstein share an important point: reasoning, and scientific investigations hinge on the idea that we can have access to how things are in themselves. Reason hinges on grounds that are not themselves rationally sustained. Both reason and religion get their grounds from rules and hinges that are not themselves subject to a rational analysis. These certainties function as the basis for rational argumentation. The parallels with Wittgenstein are enormous. For Chesterton, the belief in objective truth is one of the fundamental hinges of our reasoning.

Chesterton's Elfland is not a region of reality that contradicts the laws of thought, but an ontological field that follows the rules of logic ("logic" in a Wittgensteinian sense as the rules of "grammar" that structure our language-games). It is a separation between the physical (natural) and the religious, while both sharing the same laws of thought. A Wittgensteinian would say that it is precisely the fact they share the same laws of thought that allows for a distinction between them.

But we cannot say why an egg can turn into a chicken any more than we can say why a bear could turn into a fairy prince. As IDEAS, the egg and the chicken are further off from each other than the bear and the prince; for no egg in itself suggests a chicken, whereas some princes do suggest bears. (Chesterton 2008 [1908], p. 91)

One can only fully grasp the family resemblances between concepts if one abandons a purely materialistic view. An open mind and spirit are needed in order to capture the meaning of nuances and differences. The resemblances expressed in language are reflections of how things really are, even beyond the material level of analysis. This is one of the tenets of Chesterton's magical realism: the spiritual is out there, only not in the same context as material objects. This brings Chesterton close to Wittgenstein's idea of a view *sub specie aeternitatis*: both conceive the religious point of view as a contemplation of the world as it is, without searching for causes. The form of the very act of looking at the world is different. Believers ground their actions on this hinge: to see the world of facts as miracles. Once again, this is not to deny the validity of scientific investigations, but only to open up to another dimension of reality that has all the same rights to exist.

3.4.1.2. Materialism and determinism

For Chesterton, the materialist philosopher cannot deal with the objective existence of non-spatial-temporal objects. Similarly to Gabriel, for Chesterton, the naturalist picture is necessarily ontologically reductive and constrains too much the materialist philosopher. The materialist philosopher can never accept anything that lies outside the scope of spatial-temporal extension, while the Christian philosopher has all the freedom to accept events that open up a new form of explanation or understanding: miracles, for example. It is not a matter of contradiction but of expansion of perspectives.

There is an inherent plurality to every person: "The Christian admits that the universe is manifold and even miscellaneous, just as a sane man knows that he is complex. The sane man knows that he has a touch of the beast, a touch of the devil, a touch of the saint, a touch of the citizen." (Chesterton 2008, p. 40) Materialism and determinism lead to a narrow, limited, worldview and an immoral standpoint that promotes "cowardice" and "cruelty", according to Chesterton.

3.4.1.3. Religious realism

For Chesterton, the true mystical philosopher accepts the ontological plurality that constitutes reality, even when this brings in contradictions to the picture. These contradictions are themselves part of the plurality that is constitutive of how things are. Like in the duck-rabbit drawing example, both exist in their domain. This is essentially Chesterton's position: the religious and the material both exist like the duck and the rabbit, each in their domain. Facts compose the limits of these domains, which are not dependent on us being aware of them. Chesterton wants to recover our contemplative capacity and appreciate these facts as miracles. He wants us to let go of the scientific search for the mechanistic causes and rejoice in the feeling of awe one experiences when contemplating the world as a miracle. This is also the tenet of religion for Chesterton: Religion allows for a full acceptance of the world, with all the emotions that come with it: "All descriptions of the creating or sustaining principle in things must be metaphorical because they must be verbal." (Chesterton 2008, p. 140)

The need for metaphorical expressions in the religious language-games is a realist demand: it stems from the very nature of the religious point of view. There is a constitutive discursivity in religious experience that impels into a metaphorical structure. The need for metaphors does not come from a decision of the subject but as a demand of the object: a realist account of the metaphorical religious discourse.

Obviously, it will not do to take our ideal from the principle in nature; for the simple reason that (except for some human or divine theory), there is no principle in nature. (Chesterton 2008, p. 187)

Science cannot ground morality. The rules that structure the moral language-games are different from the laws of nature. The Christian revolution opens up precisely this distinction: nature and the divine are two separate contexts, one with its own ontological and epistemological structure. Christianity opens up the possibility to contemplate things in this separate, divine, sense. A contemplation of something that is external to the eye of the beholder, but not as if it was an empirical object. It is an externality within the domain of the divine.

He may say that there has been in many miraculous stories a notion of spiritual preparation and acceptance: in short, that the miracle could only come to him who believed in it. It may

be so, and if it is so how are we to test it? If we are inquiring whether certain results follow faith, it is useless to repeat wearily that (if they happen) they do follow faith. If faith is one of the conditions, those without faith have a most healthy right to laugh. But they have no right to judge. (Chesterton 2008, pp. 278-279)

Chesterton touches the kernel of Wittgenstein's view of philosophy of religion: for one to be able to grasp a truth in the religious context (namely, the existence of a miracle), one has to already accept the hinges of the religious language-game and participate in the practices that enable a subject to grasp such a truth. It is through an active practice from the subject that the subject can grasp the objectivity of religious experience. One cannot study miracles in a scientific fashion: it is not an empirical science in waiting, but a question regarding the way of living one's life at its very core. "We must have a long historic experience in supernatural phenomena – in order to discover which are really natural." (Chesterton 2008, p. 283). And he writes a bit further on:

This, therefore, is, in conclusion, my reason for accepting the religion and not merely the scattered and secular truths out of the religion. I do it because the thing has not merely told this truth or that truth, but has revealed itself as a truth-telling thing. (Chesterton 2008, p. 289)

3.4.1.4. On Catholic detectives

In his book "Conversations with Wittgenstein", Maurice Drury tells us an episode where Wittgenstein reacted to a suggestion to read Chesterton:

Today at lunch the conversation turned to discussing "detective stories". Wittgenstein said how much he enjoyed the stories of Agatha Christie. Not only were the plots ingenious but the characters were so well drawn that they were real people. He thought it was a particularly English talent to be able to write books like this. One of the company advised him to read Chesterton's 'Father Brown' stories. He made a grimace. "Oh no, I couldn't stand the idea of a Roman Catholic priest playing the part of a detective. I don't want that." (Drury 1996 [1984], p. 133)

His reaction is rather curious. Taking into account the other passages from the same period present in the book, we see that Wittgenstein takes the Roman Catholic Church with reverence. For example, when Drury tells us about an episode where Wittgenstein heard a piano being played near the university chapel and he immediately stormed out, ranting about

how in a church only organ should be heard playing.¹⁷ He does not consider the Catholic moral to be taken lightly. This could be one of the reasons for him to dislike the idea of a Catholic priest playing the part of a detective – as if it were some sort of profane activity for someone with such moral and religious demands. However, we can also read this in another fashion, where Wittgenstein does not consider the Roman Catholic priest as a figure capable of the deeds of a detective, as if it were not able to do it. As if some elements of the Catholic way of life (I do not wish to speculate on which) disabled one to be a good detective in a story. Would this be exclusive to works of fiction? Although this speculative digress could turn out to be curious, I think the former option is more in line with other remarks made by Wittgenstein in regard to the Catholic Church. Not only did he consider the Catholic rituals to be followed with a meticulous rigour, but also he regarded the morals of Catholic priests as something that *should* be pristine (or at least demanding such a high moral ground from the cleric), in line with his conception of how the rituals should be followed. Perhaps because of this reverence, and respect, Wittgenstein would agree with the points made here, regarding the proximity of his views with Chesterton’s realist conception of religious experience, and the parallels between the Elfland and the “world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*” (TLP, 6.45).

3.4.2. Roger Scruton’s cognitive dualism – Tradition, art and religion

In this section, I draw parallels between Roger Scruton’s remarks on tradition, art, and religion and Wittgenstein’s thoughts about some of those matters. I will present Scruton’s cognitive dualism and show how it can be relevant to the reading proposed here. The ideas developed here can be found in Scruton’s 2014 book *The Soul of the World*.

3.4.2.1. Tradition

Scruton shares with Edmund Burke (the 19th century English conservative thinker, and politician, who is regarded as the founding father of the contemporary conservative tradition) the idea that society builds on relationships of affection and loyalty, providing tradition with an epistemic status. These are more than mere arbitrary conventions. These are forms of

¹⁷ “We then went and sat for a while in the college chapel. There was no organ in the chapel but instead a piano in the loft. While we were sitting in silence, someone else came in and started to play the piano. Wittgenstein jumped up at once and hurried out; I followed.

WITTGENSTEIN: Blasphemy! A piano and the cross. Only an organ should be allowed in a church.” (Drury 1996, p. 121)

knowledge built over the years over many trials and errors. They are neither theoretical knowledge nor know-how, but rather a form of tacit social knowledge that involves knowing the rules of social interaction, goal determination and policy, which are determined through the harmony of our needs and interests (Scruton 2014). These are rules of communal life, taught through example, osmosis and shared practices, and play a fundamental role in our life in society. Without them, everything would fall apart.

A communal identity is a fundamental element for the success of life in society, according to Scruton. There must be a “we” that grounds our action within a community. We need a sense of belonging in order to be able to think the community as such. This means that there has to be a common ground of values and cultural conventions that serve as the backdrop for the various divergences that may appear between different sorts of people (Scruton 2014). This is very close to Wittgenstein’s idea that for a disagreement to take place, a lot has already been shared first to be able to understand where the disagreement lies. Scruton shares the same idea: we need a common axiomatic ground to provide a shared identity and commitments. Our freedom to disagree relies on this shared background.

Value emerges as the result of a shared cooperative life. Traditions and institutions serve as the grounding for these shared values: through practices and rituals, we preserve the values that those institutions stand for. Among these are moral values, love, experience of beauty, all things that are engrained in our social nature and come forth only through dialogue. According to Scruton, the first of these institutions is religion, introducing conceptions of sacred and transcendental in society. Identity and the Self emerge through a free relationship with others. Only with others do I recognize as myself, within contexts in which I am recognized as Me. This is the tenet of Hegel’s idea that a life of Freedom and Trust is obtained only through others, according to Scruton (Scruton 2014, pp. 20-30).

Scruton and Wittgenstein both share the idea that the religious view of the world connects to the aesthetic experience of contemplation. It is a special way of looking at, and thus living, in the world. Judgments of taste, and aesthetic notions, are indispensable habits of our human form of life, transmitted through generations and bond by a shared culture. Religion is not a repertoire of opinions nor a scientific body of research. It is an institution to which we can join, participate in rituals, and convert to, that reflects a way of living. It

grounds our interaction with nature, our perceptions and emotions. This experience emerges through the social filiation, the communitarian practices that ratify the creed and the place of the churches within the world, forming a kind of *Weltanschauung*.

3.4.2.2. Art

Subjectivity is not the opposite pole of objectivity regarding arts and aesthetics. The subjective nature of aesthetic judgments do not make them immune to argumentation and reasoning. Not everything goes. According to Scruton, ‘Art’ is not a natural kind concept, but a functional one. This means that the criteria to determine one music better than another cannot be the same as in physics. At a first glance, it may seem that we are condemned to a destructive form of relativism. It may seem that we are no longer able to enter into any discussion whatsoever about the quality of different works of art, or that we cannot argue for a substantial difference between contemplating a painting and watching reality television shows. However, this is not the case. We can in fact make distinctions and judgments. The fact that ‘Art’ is a functional concept does not mean that we cannot judge different works of art and place them hierarchically according to shared standards within the community. There can be a judgment regarding ‘Art’ in the sense that one can judge its efficacy according to its own function and goal. This view still allows us to make distinctions between good and bad works of art without committing to a form of reduction to natural phenomena.

Scruton and Wittgenstein have a very similar understanding of the aesthetic experience: both regard the experience of beauty as a form of looking at the world that sees it not as a mechanical totality of causes and effects but as a ‘miracle’, something to appreciate and contemplate in its immediate presentation. When one contemplates the world in this way, there is an abandonment of the search for causes – it is the replacement of the ‘why’ of causes (or the “how”) for the ‘why’ of reasons. This necessarily means that there is a fundamental methodological difference between scientific endeavours and aesthetic judgements: there is a difference at the ground level from which one looks at phenomena. Aesthetic judgements look for the understanding of the meaning, not for its natural causes. That is why, for Scruton, the experience of beauty is a door to the transcendent, to the religious frame of mind.

3.4.2.3. Ontological monism and cognitive dualism: order of nature vs. order of the covenant

For Scruton, there are two ways of knowing the world. One is the scientific way, sustained by scientific methods and focusing on a natural description of facts. The other is the practice of understanding and grasping the *Lebenswelt*, which focuses on looking for reasons and meanings instead of causal connections. This second way of knowing the world is in itself emergent from the natural order. This emergence is nonsymmetrical and, for Scruton, nature is ontologically prior to the *Lebenswelt*. His cognitive dualism sustains on an ontological monism: the reality of values is emergent from the natural reality. Science cannot answer to the question of the meaning of existence, since this ‘why?’ of reasons can only be addressed within the space of values.

Scruton then proposes that we should abandon altogether any attempt to make a scientific description of the sacred: we should let go of the idea that the sacred is some sort of supernatural intervention in the natural world. The divine is of a different order and one cannot address it from a scientific point of view. Science cannot provide an answer to the teleological questions about the world. To achieve an answer regarding these matters, one has to practice the understanding and look into our *Lebenswelt* with another frame of mind.

The science of the human being will not be able to find the subject that is at the basis of the I-You relation. This ‘I’ is transcendental, in the sense that it is at the edge of the natural world – it does not exist somewhere, but in another way, like music or God. The subject plays the role of hinge in the practice of understanding – which is a reflection, in Scruton’s view, of the dynamics between freedom and accountability. Scruton writes:

I pointed out that the science of the human being, which sees the seat of all activity and thought in the brain, will not find, in the organism that it explores, the thing that we address in the space of reasons. The ‘I’ is transcendental, which does not mean that it exists elsewhere, but that it exists in another way, as music exists in another way from sound, and God in another way from the world. (Scruton 2014, p. 185)

Is Scruton here conceding to some form of ontological pluralism? He is not just arguing for different epistemic criteria for the *Lebenswelt* but for a different kind of existence of these phenomena altogether? The relation between these two ways of seeing the world is not explainable, on Scruton’s view. This is similar to Wittgenstein’s idea that we cannot rationally (scientifically) explain, and justify, the religious point of view, or the emergence

of the *Lebenswelt* from the order of nature. For Wittgenstein, both come down to a difference in practice, in the way of living the world. For Scruton, the very relationship of emergence between nature and the *Lebenswelt* is to remain as a mystery, one that is reserved only for God to know. For Scruton, the acceptance of this emergence as a mystery is what constitutes the kernel of the life of faith that fully accepts the order of the covenant (Scruton 2014). The parallels with Wittgenstein are enormous, but the emphasis given by Wittgenstein on the practices that ground both points of view, the scientific and the religious, allows us to have a glimpse of how these two ontological domains can interact. Even if we do not follow Scruton's emergent reading of the *Lebenswelt*, his idea that there is an epistemological abyss between the two goes hand in hand with the realist reading of Wittgenstein proposed here. It shows that, either from a pluralist or from a monist ontology, there is more than room for an objective conception of the domain of axiological practices.

3.4.2.4. The I-You relation – overreaching intentionality as a hinge

The 'I' that is the result of the unity of the self-conscious subject is not, for Scruton, the result of a chain of reasoning, but the starting point of all premises. It functions as a hinge of the overreaching intentionality that characterizes the subjects' relations between each other and with God (Scruton 2014). Other related hinges are freedom and accountability. We could perhaps say, using Pritchard's terminology, that the "I-You" relation stands as an über hinge of the hinges "freedom" and "accountability". The public character of reasons and rules makes everyone accountable for their actions within the practice of reasoning with each other. Rights and duties are what bind people in a free relationship of rational agents.

It is through these shared commitments that the experience of the sacred can emerge. Similarly to Wittgenstein, for Scruton it is the interpersonality that marks the ground of the religious experience. The search for meanings and reasons – teleological foundations of the world – presupposes a public, shared, set of rules that bind people. This does not mean that this domain is a fabrication, much less an illusion. The objectivity of the *Lebenswelt* is non-questionable for Scruton, functioning as a hinge of his cognitive dualism. The phenomenon of interpersonal search for meanings is as real as any other feature of the natural order. This intentionality projects itself beyond the boundaries of nature, showing our need for religion.

3.4.2.5. The objectivity of the *Lebenswelt*

The world that opens up through values and religion is not the world of scientific natural laws. Therefore, to reduce values to some form of physical phenomena is not to explain them, but simply to leave their own questions unanswered. Scruton is very clear about how, for him, the emergent relation of the *Lebenswelt* with the natural world cannot reduce to any form of empirical explanation whatsoever. The way of looking at the world that allows us to hear music in sounds, for example, demands a skill to conceptualize and represent the experience in such a way. It is emergent from the natural world, but it is an experience that cannot be found anywhere in space and time (Scruton 2014). In a similar fashion, it is not possible to find God's presence in the world through the lens of a scientific investigation. When we look into the meaning of the world, searching for an answer to the question 'why?', there is absolutely nothing to gain by looking into the empirical order for answers.

Scruton and Wittgenstein share the idea that there has to be something that it is not put into question when we are dealing with the *Lebenswelt*. There is a presupposed shared common world of values that sustains the relation between subjects and enables them to practice reason. For Scruton, the experience of beauty is a paradigmatic example of the encounter with appearances that play such a role. Appearances are realities, as real as the natural objects we encounter every day. The experience of beauty reveals the fundamental truth about being – namely, that being is a gift. One grasps this truth only if one abandons the scientific search for causal connections and contemplate being from a transcendental perspective.

To understand the meaning of art, literature, music, the humanities, one has to apply a different method than that of the sciences. These domains pertain to the overreaching intentionality of the subjects, the emergent world of values. To understand these practices within their context, one needs to adopt a method of their own that is not merely a description of facts, but a search for their internal meaning. A search for reasons that looks into these phenomena, into their own specific properties, without trying to reduce them to their physical counterpart. These values are not illusions, but realities in their own accord, with their own rules. The metaphors we use are not lesser forms of description, but integral to the phenomena themselves. They are embedded in the objects of the *Lebenswelt*, so that the metaphor cannot

be ‘translated away’ and constitutes a part of the very experience we have with the domains of morality, aesthetics and religion. Values are ‘out there’, part of the interpersonal structure that constitutes the *Lebenswelt*, shared between the members of a community:

Music is all appearance, and yet it is not an illusion (...). It is out there and not in here, to use the familiar metaphors – though note that they are metaphors, which might be both illuminating and misleading when it comes to spelling them out. (Scruton 2014, p. 144)

We are dealing with an entrenched metaphor – but not a metaphor of words, exactly, for we are not talking about how people describe music; we are talking about how they experience it. It is as though there is a metaphor of space and movement embedded within our experience and cognition of music. This metaphor cannot be “translated away”, and what it says cannot be said in the language of physics. (Scruton 2014, p. 144)

There is an internal relation between what music is and how we listen to it, according to Scruton. One cannot detach the practice of listening and leave the music untouched: the two are constitutive of the same human practice, the same relational fact of the *Lebenswelt*. It is a feature of our culture and our form of life that conveys ideas, emotions, perspectives, experiences that surpass the limits of description. Scruton is pointing to a truly Wittgensteinian idea here: that some things can only be shown, and not said. Music is one of the means to convey such messages. It is also interesting how Scruton argues that the act of listening is not just a neutral act directed to music, but rather “listening to music” constitutes a practice not divisible in itself. This idea is very close to what this research is attempting to show: that the rules of a language-game are the result of a practical, non-reducible relation between the subject and the object, happening “out there”:

[L]istening is not a practice that could be subtracted from our music, while leaving the music unchanged. It is as necessary to the nature of music as the I-You relation is necessary to our nature as persons. Music, like people, is a relational fact. (Scruton 2014, p. 154)

What is going on when we say that a music is “sad”, or that is moving “fast”? Are we using metaphors, or are we saying that music is literally sad or is literally moving fast? For Scruton we are in the presence of *entrenched metaphors* – a metaphorical perception in itself. We are “hearing the music under a concept that does not literally apply to it. And we do this by directing towards the music the overreaching intentionality that we direct toward each other,

thereby situating music within the *Lebenswelt* at the place where we situate our fellow subjects” (Scruton 2014, p. 161). Taking a cue from Wittgenstein, Scruton says that we should look at the literal use of these concepts to see what the important resemblances at play are. We need to look into the literal use to understand the very metaphorical way we are conceptualizing the music we are hearing.

The objectivity of the *Lebenswelt* reveals itself in the way that music opens up a phenomenological space of its own. This space has its own “virtual rules”, in Scruton’s words, characterized by a subjectivity without subject, ruled in its own accord. We find the meaning of music in the musical space created by itself: “Those reductionist philosophers who think that there is no such a thing as aboutness must therefore deny that music exists. Their world contains sounds, but no melodies, just as it contains brains, but no people” (Scruton 2014, p. 167).

This space opened up by music cannot be reducible to their physical counterpart, since this would entail a loss of the very meaning that makes music more than sound. However, this space is not internal: it is “out there”, and demands training and mastery of concepts. One has to undergo a kind of emotional education to be able to turn outward the inner life and be able to conceptualize it. It is through the contact and participation in the *Lebenswelt* that one gets to know oneself.

3.4.2.6. The religious frame of mind

Scruton’s view of the religious frame of mind is very similar to Wittgenstein’s idea of the religious point of view. Both philosophers conceive the religious experience to be dependent on a way of looking at the world that searches for the meaning of events, the phenomena as signs of God’s grace:

The sacred comes to us when, in the midst of all our calculations, we set aside the order of the covenant and see the world, ourselves, and all that we have as given – as signs, so the Christian would put it, of God’s grace. (Scruton 2014, p. 182)

It is fundamentally different from the scientific point of view: where science looks for causes, the religious frame of mind looks for meanings. A relation with the subject God grounds all religious experience. This relation is lived through the shared practices of a community.

The life in the community builds on shared commitments on rules and practices. The repetition of these practices binds people together around a shared goal they wish to fulfill. Religious rituals follow this structure, providing a narrative for those who follow them: a myth of origins that is maintained through the ritualistic practice.

The heart of religion is ritual, and it is a mark of religion that its rituals are meticulous. The wrong word, the wrong gesture, the wrong way of addressing the god – all such departures are not just errors but profanations. (Scruton 2014, p. 192)

The grounds for religious practices are necessarily beyond the physical horizon (from a Wittgensteinian point of view that is precisely why they are rules). This does not mean that there is no rationality intrinsic to these practices. It just pertains to Wittgenstein's distinction between empirical and grammatical propositions, and what grounds meaning and reasoning is beyond the scope of natural sciences.

Scruton's view of the religious frame of mind centers on one main point: for the life of the faithful, the world is a place of meanings, signs, narratives, in sum, with a *telos*. This is profoundly different from the world seen by the eyes of science, with natural causes, laws, mechanisms and patterns. The religious frame of mind is not worried about empirical laws, but what signs the world gives and how do they fit into a moral narrative. Meticulous rituals, where the community rigorously follows shared rules, sustain religious practices, according to Scruton. The religious practices and rituals address God as a subject – it is the same I-You relation that stands as hinge of all communication between persons. Religion concerns the *Lebenswelt* and not the natural world. Its role is to provide a meaning for existence, using myths and allegories.

3.4.3. David B. Hart on the Christian Revolution

Following the trail of thought from the last section, I now look at David B. Hart's 2009 book *Atheist Delusions – The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* and see what it tells us about the Christian Revolution (both in ontology and morality). To understand religion and religious experience, Hart claims, one has to participate in religious practices. One has to be part of the religious rituals in order to judge religion from the 'inside'. To understand the meaning of the rules of religious language-games, to put it in Wittgensteinian terms, one has to live and actively play (participate in) those games.

Compassion, pity, and charity, as we understand and cherish them, are not objects found in nature, like trees or butterflies or academic philosophers, but are historically contingent conventions of belief and practice, formed by cultural convictions that need never have arisen at all. (Hart 2009, p. 16)

There is an ontological difference between moral categories of religion and natural objects. The former are historically contingent and cultural-based. This is something that New Atheists do not understand. Hart believes that the New Atheists do not employ reason to criticize religion, but simply give voice to an irrational form of fideism based on prejudice. It is not a matter of arriving at a well-reasoned conclusion, but rather of starting from a worldview, that rejects any other view besides a materialist one. For Hart, atheists that articulate a passionate hatred of religion also believe in something – this is why they develop such a complex hate for the belief in God.

3.4.3.1. Christianity and science

Modernity is a powerful nihilist ideology, according to Hart. One that allows for any belief as long as none questions the fundamental belief in nothingness as such. It is not a ‘postreligious’ movement, as it is sometimes portrayed, but rather a scrapbook of Christian morality mixed up with scientific materialism.

The ancient and mediaeval church had always acknowledged that the Bible ought to be read allegorically in many instances, according to the spiritual doctrines of the church, and that the principal truths of scripture are not confined to its literal level, which often reflects only the minds of its human authors. (Hart 2009, p. 63)

Hart claims that the Church has long ago defended a moral reading of the scripture, and that it should not be read as a scientific work. It is not a dispute between different theories about the world, but of different ways of looking at the world entirely. Different views imply, and implicate, different ways of living the world. The dispute of the Church with science was not one of different views regarding the same phenomena, but of looking at different phenomena entirely. This only changed with the Protestant critique in the seventeenth century, where the Church was led to a more strict and narrower view of the holy texts.

It was, in fact, the Christian universities and the worldview cultivated there that enabled Galileo, Kepler, and Newton to break free from the theoretical imprisonment of

Aristotelian science. It was the Philoponus' Christianity that enabled them to cast out metaphysical dogmas. Christianity was in fact on the side of scientific study of the natural world, opposed to the paganist view of the material world as a manifestation of the gods. An example is "the Canon episcopi [8th/9th century] (...) [that] prescribes the expulsion from the congregation of those who insist on the reality of the witches" (Hart 2009, p.76). Christians were clear about the negation of the reality of the witches: these forms of magic were still remains of paganism, since it conceived of the spiritual as a form of supernatural. The separation between the spirit and the flesh operated by Christianity opened up the doors for a scientific study of the natural world, without the supernatural mysticism. These forms of supernatural magic are just another instance of a metaphysical prejudice in favor of materialism.

The rise of modern science and the early modern obsession with sorcery were not merely contemporaneous currents within Western society but were two closely allied manifestations of the development of a new post-Christian sense of human mastery over the world. (...) After all, magic is essentially a species of materialism: if it invokes any agencies beyond the visible sphere, they are not supernatural – in the theological sense of transcendence – but at most preternatural: they are merely, that is to say, subtler, more potent aspects of the physical cosmos." (Hart 2009, p. 82)

"Magic" was seen as a heathen superstition by the Church. The Church negated the reality of witches and of magic, since this was already a form of materialism: the divine embedded in nature, and the human mastery of the supernatural within the natural. On Hart's view, "magic" and "science" both share the same metaphysics – morally and ontologically – belonging to the same way of thinking about the world, the same *Weltanschauung*.

As we have seen, Hart rejects the idea that Christianity was an impediment to scientific development. The evidence points precisely to the contrary. However, even to simply presuppose the absolute value of scientific progress is in itself too much of a concession from Christians. There is no metaphysical reason to privilege material and scientific discoveries over spiritual and religious theologies.

3.4.3.2. The rationality of faith

Let us consider the following quote from Hart:

Nothing strikes me as more tiresomely vapid than the notion that there is some sort of inherent opposition – or impermeable partition – between faith and reason, or that the modern period is marked by its unique devotion to the latter. One can believe that faith is mere credulous assent to unfounded premises, while reason consists in a pure obedience to empirical fact, only if one is largely ignorant of both. (Hart 2009, p. 101)

Hart's criticism of fideism is similar to Wittgenstein in the sense that both consider the separation of faith and reason to be an absurd. Both play a role in scientific and religious language-games. Hart, like Wittgenstein, points to the fact that even the most rational of scientific reasoning presumes premises, intuitions, convictions, certainties that cannot be proven. All reasoning presupposes firm and unshakable propositions. This is not the marking difference between faith and reason, but rather their shared feature. The idea that rationality is limitless is a false one, since, for every reasoning to even come to be, boundaries must be established in order for some minimal form of meaning to be attained. There cannot be reasoning without principles. Both the atheist and the Christian believer *believe* in something that lies beyond the scope of justification, as this is the mark of all webs of belief.

All reasoning presumes premises or intuitions or ultimate convictions that cannot be proved by any foundations or facts more basic than themselves, and hence there are irreducible convictions present wherever one attempts to apply logic to experience. One always operates within boundaries established by one's first principles, and asks only the questions that those principles permit. (Hart 2009, p. 101)

It is evident that Hart is very close to Wittgenstein on this matter. Both give relevance to the ungrounded assumptions (hinges) that form the basis of our rationality and both locate these groundless grounds at a pre-intellectual level, on the level of the practices that ultimately structure our way of living. In addition, both deny the supposed advancement of modern people over our ancestors simply due to the abandonment of a religious way of life. This is an error caused by the hubris so characteristic of our times. We too have our own non-justified prejudices, as they play the exact same role as they did in the past. There cannot be any form of doubt, any kind of reasoning or any knowledge at all were not the fixed assumptions that form the grounds of our beliefs outside the scope of justification.

3.4.3.3. Materialism as an ideology

Hart stresses the importance of understanding the difference between the religious and the scientific worldviews. As he stresses:

We may, obviously, as modern men and women, find certain of the fundamental convictions that our ancestors harboured curious and irrational; but this is not because we are somehow more advanced in our thinking than they were, even if we are aware of a great number of scientific facts. We have simply adopted different conventions of thought and absorbed different prejudices, and so we interpret our experiences according to another set of basic beliefs – beliefs that may, for all we know, blind us to entire dimensions of reality. (Hart 2009, p. 102)

It is not the case that our ancestors were using religion as some form of pre-scientific thinking: the whole network of beliefs played a different role and the focus was on the meaning of the events, the moral narrative, instead of the unattached description of brute facts that characterizes science. This difference in approaching the world gave them the opportunity to reach dimensions of reality closed to those who think exclusively in scientific terms. One could say that Hart's view is an ontological version of the Wittgensteinian religious point of view: the change in the presuppositions of the subject lead him to grasp different aspects of reality.

Similarly to Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer, Hart rejects the idea that ancient cultures are more primitive simply due to the present economic and technological development. The religious frame of mind is not an indication of underdevelopment, since the standard for development is not, for Hart, scientific progress. The dispute of science vs. religion is not a dispute of progress vs. primitiveness. Materialism is not a conclusion from a series of empirical premises. It is a worldview, a metaphysical system that is as ungrounded as religious worldviews. Materialism is essentially an ideology.

3.4.3.4. Existence and the split between nature and the divine

Hart sees questions about the meaning of existence as being grammatical, and so no empirical investigation could ever address them. We cannot give a natural account of conscience because conscience is not a natural concept, but a cultural, historically contingent artefact indebted to Christian morals. The Christian revolution divided the world into two: the natural

and the divine allowing, thus, to study nature solely as such and not as a manifestation of the cosmos (as in the pagan world):

Religious fundamentalism in the West is primarily a modern phenomenon (as anyone who knows the history of biblical exegesis is aware), an absurd and reactive mimicry of modern scientific positivism. And nowhere, at present, is the fundamentalist tendency more prevalent and indurated than in certain quarters of the scientific community, or among those who look exclusively to the sciences for guidance in this world. It is astonishing, really (...), how many very intelligent scientists cling to an illogical, inflexible, and fideistic certainty that empirical science should be regarded not only as a source of factual knowledge and theoretical hypotheses but as an arbiter of values or of moral and metaphysical truths. (Hart 2009, pp. 231-232)

The roots of scientific and empirical reasoning lie in the Judeo-Christian tradition of rationality present in Western civilization. There is an intimate connection between the Christian thought and the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. Far from a case of fideism (a poor term on Hart's view), religion and science operate at different levels of reality that remain untouched by each other's discoveries and theoretical developments. There is historical evidence of a plural environment in Christian universities and primary sources of members of the Catholic Church that were supportive of scientific endeavours. The case of Galileo is paradigmatic for a certain misconception, on Hart's view, of a Dark Age of Christianity. Far from being an example of that, it is, rather, an example of how the Church, at that time, was already applying standards and measures similar to our own today (proof, peer review, shared data). The Catholic Church was not an obstacle to scientific and rationalist investigations. Quite the contrary, it laid the ground for the explosion of scientific discoveries made by many different European scientists in the following centuries of its domain over European universities. Hart's point is that religion and science are not in opposition. They share a common intellectual life in some points but they are ultimately dealing with different aspects of reality, so they cannot be misused to prove or refute one another. Therefore, fideism is a poor category to analyse what is going on in the relationship between religion and science or between faith and reason.

It is through the crucifixion of Christ that the natural world, the flesh, appears as such, separated from the divine. When Christ the Man dies on the cross, and Christ the God

resuscitates, the message of separation is clear: there are two worlds, the natural, empirical, where death is the master, and the divine world, where souls can be redeemed and challenge death. Christ challenges values for all humanity: when Christ rises from the dead, he opens up the divine sphere to every human. It is precisely this theological move that allows for the perspective of the world as having two different dimensions that are grasped in different forms. In the pagan world, the natural was seen as a manifestation of a cosmic divine order, controlled by the gods, where the empirical is a mere manifestation of a higher order that pulls the strings. With the Christian revolution, the separation is clear and opens up the space for a whole different understanding of each of the dimensions that constitute the human person. The Christian revolution is not a mere replacement of many gods by One, but a fundamentally radical change in the way we perceive humanity and the world around us. This separation was a radical change that, contrary to what contemporary atheists believe, is the philosophical and theological operation that opened the gates for scientific endeavours to come centuries later.

3.4.3.5. St. Paul's Universalist revolution

There is a trenchant parallel between St. Paul's universalism – the universal address of the One, the monotheistic God – and Wittgenstein's idea of a common form of life as the necessary ground for communication and meaning formation. It is precisely this universal address from God that creates the shared, common, form of life of Christianity. This address is truly universal, focusing on the concept of person, stripping all contingent identities of any privileged position. This is the true emancipatory aspect of Christianity, in Badiou's interpretation of St. Paul: this universal address does not differentiate any person based on her historically determined identity. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, this address is what creates the common ground, the shared hinge, that allows for a meaningful set of language-games within the Christian community.

3.4.3.6. Ritual and Practice

The religious point of view is, in the end, a form of living the world. Hart and Wittgenstein are close to one another in the importance they give to practice. Both believe that it is through a shared form of acting and doing things in a certain way that keeps the morals and religious ideals alive: "If the beliefs or stories or logical principles that give an idea life are no longer

present, then that idea loses its organic environment and will.” (Hart 2009, p. 237) The role of the ritual is precisely to maintain alive the moral narrative that structures the religious life. The ritual keeps the ideals alive. The ritual is then the organized and rule-oriented practice that is redeemed as worthy of holiness. The rules and hinges that consolidate a practice as a ritual are embedded in the theological principles of the religious community. A practice is considered a ritual in as much as it reflects the theological principles of the dogma. The belief and the ritualistic practice form an intertwined relation that grounds the theological dogma.

3.5. The religious robot scenario

3.5.1. The aesthetic handicap

Julian Friedland deals with the issue of aesthetic sensibility in robots in his article “Wittgenstein and the Aesthetics’ Robot Handicap”. In this paper, the Irish philosopher begins by talking about the chess game between Gary Kasparov, the best chess player in history, and Big Blue, a supercomputer that has a processing capacity of 2 million plays per second. This supercomputer was able to beat Kasparov in a match. The human player even referred to a strange feeling of playing against an alien intelligence, that the machine really seemed to be thinking. For Friedland, none of this comes as a surprise. That is, chess has two dimensions: one mathematical, computational, and another sportive, affective and aesthetical. Given the computational capacity of Big Blue, it is not strange that the supercomputer was able to perform better than Kasparov. However, if we take into account the other dimension of chess, this computer has no use, since it lacks the emotional and social skills to understand and participate in the playing of the game as a sport. Hence, it cannot bluff, it cannot be nervous, it cannot be shaken by any of the psychological elements that all humans share when they are playing a chess match. This is the difference between *playing* and *performing* chess.

The next point Friedland wants us to look at is the need for computers to have rules and objectives very well defined (like a chess game or any other sport, like football or tennis) that can operate as inputs and outputs in its neural net. What the computer cannot compute is, precisely, the areas of our human life where this delimitation is blurred or vague. Like someone who doesn’t quite get a joke, Friedland says, “as when missing a pun”. This is the

Wittgensteinian concept of *aspectual blindness*: not capturing a modified (or metaphoric) use of a concept, not seeing the use it has in a particular context.

This is where *family resemblances* comes in: it is part of our human faculty of perception to capture almost immediately the physiognomy of a sign, without the need for pattern evaluation. One can still argue, though, that what we do when we immediately perceive it is still some sort of cognitive adaptations that always go through an aspect blindness period, even if it is imperceptible. But this is not the case, Friedland states. We need not compare every face from a family to recognize they belong to a specific family, for example. We don't compare each face to the other in order to state they are all Kennedys (it's the example Friedland gives). Without any great reflection or analysis, we easily conclude and perceive traces that every member share with each other even though there is not one single trait that is shared by everyone. This would complicate the computer's task even more: there would be no characteristic of any of the members of the set that they all would share besides being members of the same set:

“Oh! I clearly see that this boy is a Kennedy”. And this of course would not necessarily imply that the boy in question shares any single feature of group of features with every member of the Kennedy family” (Friedland 2005, p.181).

This is how family resemblance works. Taking the example of Donald Foster (a renowned linguist who developed software for recognizing any author of any text, given enough data), Friedland continues his critique of the possibility of a supercomputer to capture the modified, aesthetic, use of a concept. Even if the work from Foster manages to attribute correctly the text to its author, the only thing it can do is to recognize patterns, to see how many times a word is used in a certain syntactical role, but all this doesn't tell what is at stake when we talk about aesthetics: qualitative value. The computer may attribute a lost text to Shakespeare correctly, even if it was never read or analysed by any of Shakespeare scholars. But it won't be able to replace the work of the scholar or the literary critic in evaluating aesthetical value. It won't be able to distinguish between a bad and a good work of art. Besides that, it will have to go through a phase of aspect blindness until it perceives the modified use of a concept and even this modified use will not be able to understand it completely beside the patterns associated with it. This will be its main difficulty and the one that makes its aesthetic

evaluation of the text impossible: it will not have *criteria* to know when to follow the rule of the concept in an aesthetic sense.

3.5.2. Kripke vs. dispositionalism

Friedland's argument is that what makes us understand this aesthetic use of the concept is the projection our human minds make, picturing the sign with a life that emerges from our affective dispositions, from our intentionality. This inner mental, but shared, process is what distinguishes us from the robot. It is a distinction between form and content, one that is made intuitively through our projected intentionality. But should this really be the argument? Isn't it exactly this kind of dispositionalism that Kripke warns us about in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*? On this account, if someone who is accepted by the community as an individual with aesthetic sensibility makes a mistake in the application of an aesthetic concept, "the dispositionalist seems forced to hold that the subject makes no computational mistake, but means a non-standard function" (Kripke, 2004 [1982], p. 30).

The fundamental problem, for Kripke, is that this dispositionalist account is only *descriptive* while the concept of meaning is *normative*. These dispositions could not fit the category of the semantical fact for two reasons: first, they are finite, and a rule has an infinite number of applications; second, they are only descriptive, and therefore not able to establish the background needed for correcting mistakes. Kripke writes:

The dispositional theory, as stated, assumes that which function I meant is determined by my dispositions to compute its values in particular cases. In fact, this is not so. Since dispositions cover only a finite segment of the total function and since they may deviate from its true values, two individuals may agree on their computations in particular cases even though they are actually computing different functions. Hence the dispositional view is not correct. (Kripke, 2004 [1982], p. 32)

If we assume Friedland's argument as correct, it is not only the robot that will not be able to develop religious sensibility, but also neither will the human. There will be no criteria, nor a background, that allows him to make the distinction between *following* a rule or merely *thinking* that one is following a rule for the modified use of the concept. On this view that Friedland wants us to follow, it is not possible to accommodate the possibility of making a mistake with an aesthetic concept because in every case we could always argue that it was

the psychological projection or intentionality that was different, not the concept that was incorrectly used. Hence, like the robot, the human would not know when to understand the concept in the aesthetic sense, therefore being incapable of developing an aesthetic qualitative sensibility.

Friedland continues his line of thought by addressing John Searle's thought experiment of the Chinese room: two individuals in two separate rooms, equipped with a chart with symbols and Chinese signs, and every time they receive a card with a symbol, they have to go see what it corresponds in the chart and write the corresponding Chinese sign on a new blank card. When the symbol has been written, they must send it back through the slot from where they received the card. The question then arises: are the two individuals having a conversation? Friedland's argument is that even if they were exchanging correct cards in Chinese, they would not be talking due to the different psychological dispositions between someone that knows Chinese and someone who is merely manipulating signs ordered by someone else. But we have already discarded this internalist account for meaning. What we don't need to do is to disagree completely with Friedland's position. It is correct to say that the individuals are not having a conversation, not because of their mental dispositions, but because they are not accepted as members of the community. They do not possess the knowledge of the assertibility conditions that enables them to take part in the language game. In other words, they lack the *criteria* and the *agreement* between the members that give them the ability to be recognized as Chinese speakers.

The next example that Friedland gives is the imitation game developed by Alan Turing. This is an experiment that focuses on the ability of a robot to deceive a human during a conversation. The goal is for the machine to be able to replicate human behaviour in such a way that a human cannot know if it is either a human or a machine interacting with him. The rules of the game are as follows: two interlocutors try to deceive one interrogator about their sexual identity by any means possible. At random, interlocutors will be replaced by computers who will have to behave exactly the way the humans were behaving, even trying to imitate the opposite sex. The point of the experiment is for the computer to reach the same level of success that the humans reached in deceiving the interrogator. Recovering what was said at the beginning of this article, the computer's ability to develop a task needs the connectionist assumption of definite inputs and outputs. That is something that is lacking in

most of our communications, and even in the very nature of language. Even if one could try to fix some rules for the robot, this would not mean a knowledge of the assertibility conditions because, as Kripke states, the third element for the possibility of meaning is the shared *form of life*. Without this shared way to live, the rules and outputs of the language game would lose their status, even if one tried to define them in very broad terms. So Friedland was indeed right to appeal to human emotions and affections, but we should see these as external shared criteria, not as internal psychological dispositions.

3.5.3. Religious impossibility

Regarding religious sensibility, aren't we facing very similar issues? The robot would not be able to understand, for example, why one has to drink red wine in a church and cannot substitute it with cranberry juice: the meaning of religious practice is not something one can put in terms of rules and outputs. One has to *live* it, *to be part of* it, in order to be considered a member of the community and, therefore, to be seen as someone who has religious sensibility. It is indeed the lack of an affective life that disables the robot to be accepted as a participant in a religious language game. The robot lacks participation and integration into our customs, practices and institutions. Those are what gives us the necessary normative background for meaning. The normativity of meaning cannot take place in an individual in isolation or be a unique event for only one individual. Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which only one person followed a rule. [...] – To follow a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (usages, institutions). (PI, §199)

To follow a rule, and in our case to know how to apply and understand concepts in a religious context, is not something that can be taught as a super rigid function that exists in itself beyond the practice and the community. Any formula relies on this communal aspect to have a determined and correct way to be understood. It is precisely this communal life that the robot cannot be part of. He will always lack the “bedrock” assumptions that would enable him to grasp the rule in an instant, without any pattern of investigation. Our immediate grasping of rules, and therefore of meaning, is something that emerges from this shared form of life of ours. In Wittgenstein's own words:

“How the formula is meant determines which steps are to be taken.” What is the criterion for how the formula is meant? It is, for example, the kind of way we always use it, we taught to use it. (PI, §190)

Kripke is very aware that to attribute to the community such a role may lead to misunderstanding it as conceiving the act of following a rule as vague or undetermined. His reading aims to follow exactly the opposite direction: to understand a rule is a very precise and objective course of action. Kripke states:

The real point of Wittgenstein’s paradox is not that the rule of addition is somehow vague or leaves some cases of its application undetermined. On the contrary, the word ‘plus’ denotes a function whose determination is completely precise. (Kripke, 2004 [1982], p. 82)

Finally, unlike Friedland’s thought about aesthetic value, it is not the psychological intentionality to project meaning to the sign that the robot lacks, but the shared form of life and the human practice that emerges from our affective nature. What is at stake here, as Friedland correctly concludes, is an ontological difference between life and its imitation.

3.6. Conclusions

I will now summarize the conclusions of this chapter. I start by claiming that, for Wittgenstein, a religious belief is fundamentally a way of seeing the world and living it. It is an ontological context in itself, with its own practical foundations and rules, with its own criteria for truth and falsity, and its own structure for what counts as meaningful. Therefore, even though religious belief can mislead us into reading it as just a perspectival nuance, it does objectively exist (Chesterton 2009; Hart 2009; Scruton 2014). Being a subject-related matter does not make it less objective. Even though it is a subjective practical engagement, it is an engagement with something that exists in itself. It is a dimension of reality, an ontological field of its own (Hart 2009; Scruton 2014).

Rational foundations, abstracted from the object of belief, are not in the market for grounding beliefs. It is rather the practical life of believing, and the particularities of the context in question, that ground the belief. It is by living according to the belief that one gets one’s grounds. There is no belief in abstract or neutral terms, only a “belief in” that gets its meaning by the very practices that structure it. A belief is always contingent. On this view,

there is no tension in abandoning a foundational account. Beliefs are not metaphysically sustained by something “outside” of its context, but by the very deeds that emerge from within the practice of believing.

The gap between the subject and the (grounds for) belief is not a gap between a metaphysical Cartesian Subject and the radical contingency of the context in which the belief emerges. It is not an impossibility emerging from the lack of a metaphysical bridge between the subject and the foundations of the belief. Rather, it is a gap emerging from the radical contingency of the belief itself, thus creating an apparent abyss between the subject and the justification of belief: a gap that emerges from the practical contingency of believing, from its groundlessness in itself. The lack of metaphysical foundations, the subject-belief gap, is not a “problem” to be solved: the very groundlessness of belief is in itself part of the practice of a subject believing, originated in the contingent nature of both the subject and the context in which a belief appears. Therefore, showing the groundlessness of belief in itself, and our ability to grasp its groundlessness directly, is evidence of our realist apprehension of phenomena.

Here I wish to propose a parallel with Žižek’s Lacanian reading of Hegel, namely his view of the ontological incompleteness as part of the Real itself (Žižek 2012). The belief is objectively groundless. It is not a “lack” of our capabilities: it is the belief itself, and thus the practice that sustains its meaning and apprehensibility, that is groundless. The groundlessness of belief is graspable by us precisely because we have a realist, direct access to the context in which a belief appear (and to the rules that structure the very context of a belief). This also relates to the question of the difference between saying and showing: the difference does not emerge due to a lack of the subject to *say*, it is rather the thing itself that determines if it is to be *said* or *shown*. It is an objective feature, not a subjective lack. What appears as a lack of the subject is, rather, evidence of our ability to grasp the real structure of a context. This is the fundamental mistake made by radical atheists: assuming that there is a formal structure of belief that is neutral and that a religious belief is a belief *about* religion (with religious content), which could be replaced by a belief about science (with scientific content). This is an illusion of language already addressed by Wittgenstein in his remarks about family resemblance. There are in fact family resemblances between the multiple uses of the concept “belief”. However, religious belief is *formally* different from other beliefs, precisely because

its form directly intertwines with the content (the objective features of the religious context). Its form, which translates into its rules and hinges, relates directly to the objective content structured by it. Their rules and hinges emerge directly from the facts that constitute the ontological context of religious belief.

Carroll's conception of trust in religious belief is very similar to Žižek's notions of the Lacanian Big Other in which we believe through an Other, at a distance. We have a fundamental trust (a Wittgensteinian certainty) in the signifier gaze of the other members of a community. There is a subject-supposed-to-believe in which we rely on for carrying the weight of the religious belief and we trust in its power to determine the truth of our religious assertions. The parallel with Kripkenstein is also evident: the rule-following of belief is determined by the community of believers.

The truth of a religious belief emerges only through practical engagement with the religious context. It cannot be rationally justified, only practically absorbed. One has to *live* the religious context. One has to engage with it practically. It pertains to the soul, not the mind. Only then, is one able to grasp the meaning of religious expressions. It is not a reasoning, but an assimilation of a practice (deeds) that ground religious beliefs. One cannot *say* (rationally justify) anything to ground the religious hinges, only *show* their value through the practical engagement with the religious context (*playing* religious language-games), and thus live a religious life.

General Conclusions

I will now conclude this investigation and summarize the results of the discussions from the previous chapters. I will attempt to formulate an answer to the research question of this thesis: how can one, then, make sense of Wittgenstein's idea that we do not have a rational justification for our most basic (religious) beliefs? I will divide the answer in three parts, with the first part divided in two sections. The first section addresses the very title of this investigation: the "vertigo" of belief; the second pertains to the grounding of religion. The second part of the answer is also divided in two sections, each focused on the main theoretical conclusions I want to draw. These are the ontological reading of Wittgenstein's language-games (a plurality of objective structures) and the ontological-epistemological realist claim about religious experience. The third part of the answer will pertain to the fundamental idea explored by Wittgenstein, which I tried to show throughout this investigation: to talk about religious belief is to talk about the living life.

1.The grounds of an illusion

1.1. Which vertigo?

What is, then, the vertigo of belief? I would say that there are two main usages of vertigo in the background. The first vertigo is the drive that supports the search for a rational justification. It is the terrifying depth that one feels when one confronts the groundlessness of one's beliefs. However, we see that this vertigo stems from an illusion. This illusion is that we need a rational justification for our grounding religious beliefs. This vertigo disappears if we understand that the process of acquiring meaning and knowledge in the religious context is not supposed to stem from a rational understanding of the rules. Rather, it is the natural (in the sense of what is expected) consequence of living a particular context and living within a certain form of life: a blind rule-following. It is through the participation in the field of sense of religion that one acquires the understanding of the rules that allow one to fully participate in the religious context (interact, communicate, pray, discover theological truths, be accepted in ritualistic practices, be recognized as a member of the community, to give some examples). For one to be able to grasp the meaning of religious practices, one has to learn them through living in a religious way, starting from the same assumptions, assuming the same certainties,

and this is not a theoretical work, but a practical change in one's life. This first vertigo only appears when one understands faith as something foreign and alien to rationality. However, Wittgenstein shows how one of the most distinct elements of faith (following the rules blindly without a justification for them) lies at the heart of our most rational epistemic practices. We are dealing here with a fundamental similarity between them, rather than the marking difference that separates religion from science. I will not go deeper into what is different between religion and science as disciplines. It suffices to say, for the present investigation, that they start from fundamentally different outlooks of the world. Their difference is ontological, both at the core of the "eye of the beholder" and at the content of the context itself. Therefore bringing in epistemological consequences as well. Their difference does not lie in the functional role played by certainties, since this is one of their shared features. The difference resides at the very content of these certainties. They exist, and operate, in different fields of sense, with different practical rules for their identity, grounded on their objective difference. Rationality is not detached from religious practices. It is rather a mark of the way these practices are organized. However, their grounds do not lie in a rational explanation outside of these practices, but starting from these very practices themselves. Only if we conceive of rationality as anterior to practice we have a need for justifying them in such a way. If we abandon this picture and see how the practices are what antecedes any rational justification, we understand how both science and religion can claim rational arguments for each of their fields of sense.

The second vertigo (presented by Pritchard) is the remainder of dispelling the illusionary first vertigo. This vertigo is the excess of abandoning a certain picture that impels us to an impossible, and indeed nonsensical, task: the looming feeling that remains when a paradox is undermined, dissolved in its core assumptions, instead of answered straightforwardly. The nonsensical task in question consists in finding a rational justification for our most basic religious beliefs. This task is only possible, and sensible, if we think that the grounding for our most basic beliefs is formed through reasoning. If we abandon this picture and look into how rationality get its ground from practices that are not themselves rationally sustained (which is the only solution that does not lead to a circular paradox of justification), we abandon the view that our beliefs should be rationally grounded. We dispel the first vertigo that drove us to this impossible task. However, another vertigo remains after

the dissolution of the illusionary paradox. We are not fully satisfied with the undermining and a feeling of instability stays with us. We wished to have a straight answer to the paradox, in this case a straight answer to how we rationally ground our religious beliefs. The dissolution of the enterprise might show us we were going the wrong way, but it won't satisfy our need for a final answer that cancels any scepticism. We have to be content with the undermining of the presuppositions that we were taking for granted and deal with the uneasiness of having to let go from a picture without a clear answer.

1.2. The grounds of religion

The answer to our research question lies, thus, in reading Wittgenstein as giving us the tools through which we are able to dispel the illusion of a supposed rational justification for our religious beliefs. In a similar fashion to the dissolution of universal scepticism, Wittgenstein wants us to see how this enterprise is doomed to fail due to the distorted picture from which it starts. If we understand the grounding of our religious beliefs as the result of our practical engagement with the religious life, which means living and thinking with religious certainties, we no longer need to look for any rational justification for them. It becomes clear that it is the opposite: rational arguments for, or against, religion can only be meaningful if grounded on certainties operating within the religious life, context, field of sense or language-game. This is the fundamental conclusion of the realist picture I wanted to draw here: *the objective structure of the religious context grounds the religious language-games through the living practice*. This understanding is realist both from an ontological and epistemological perspective, since it grants an objective, mind-independent, existence to the religious contexts and allows for our direct and objective knowledge of the modal robust properties that compose such contexts. The living interaction and practical engagement with religious domains are what enables us to grasp knowledge about them and further enrich our belief if that is the case. The claim that the religious context is objective and mind-independent is not a claim for the belief in the truth of religion, though. Like Gabriel, I wish to claim that illusions, subjective perspectives, opinions, all have a mind-independent structure. Both an atheist and a believer can agree with I am writing here. Even if one considers all religious experience to be a mass hallucination, my claim about the objective structure of religious belief maintains. The claim about the source of religion is not at stake here. The origin of the field of sense does not determine the level of objectivity, but rather that it is a candidate to

truth-apt thought or not. While a catholic might claim that the origin for the religious context is God, an atheist might group religion with other social constructs. This thesis is not claiming any part on that discussion. The goal here is only to reach for a realist understanding of religious experience; one that, I believe, follows Wittgenstein's insights and takes them to the full consequences.

2. Theoría

2.1. An ontology of language-games

The realist reading I aimed at developing here proposes a realist understanding of language-games that gives this concept a center stage at the ontological level. Language-games are not simply different ways of talking about the same world, but windows to different ontological domains. A difference in practice is a difference in the ontological structure of a context, leading to different rules to follow. The differences in the rules of language-games stem from this practical ontological difference: different ontological structures generate different rules for the uses of language. Perhaps in a more systematic philosophical approach, one could develop something like an ontology of language-games, where we take these to be the primary ontological category. For reasons of economy of space and time, I did not develop this idea to the fullest. Besides that logistical reason, I also have doubts whether Wittgenstein would agree with such an enterprise.

2.2. The reality of religious experience

The realist reading of religious belief argued for in this thesis relies on two ideas developed throughout the thesis. The first idea is that meaningful rule-following origins in the objective structure of ontological contexts. This means that the practices that ground the meaningfulness of our language-games come from our direct interaction with the objective structure of those contexts. The second idea is that to obtain knowledge within the religious context, one has to engage with it in a practical way. If we take Wittgenstein's claims about the practical grounds of our language-games, and if we want to argue for a realist conception of knowledge, we have to look at the practical grounding of knowledge itself. If one wants to know more about religion from within, and further enrich one's knowledge about one's belief, it is necessary to *live* a religious life. One has to start from the practices that compose

the religious paradigms and generate criteria for the meaningfulness of religious assertions. To grasp the meaning and truth of religious assertions and practices, one has to adopt a religious point of view from the start. This point of view does not look for cause-effect relations, nor for empirical hypothesis, but rather to the symbolic meaning of events, taken outside of space and time, seen as miracles – seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This difference in the way of looking at phenomena and events leads us to a different ontological and epistemological domain altogether. It is no longer the same domain as when we are doing scientific research, as the rules and hinges point to different categories in place. Frazer's mistake resumes to this inability to overcome his scientific mindset. A religious practice can only be understood from a religious point of view, if the goal is to understand its religious meaning. The religious context that opens up before us has its own objective structure, and its own criteria for meaning and truth. As said before, this is not an argument for the existence of God, but an argument for the objectivity of the religious context. Religious beliefs have an objective structure, directly intertwined with their content, and this composes its own domain. An atheist and a believer can both pursue an investigation into the truth of a particular religious belief, as long as both start from a religious point of view. The central point of Wittgenstein's reflections and, as we have seen, of some of the most notable names in contemporary Christian theology, is that the religious point of view is *fundamentally* different from the scientific one. It is this fundamental practical difference that opens up the possibility of understanding phenomena in a different way, and that sustains the claim that what is at stake is a whole different ontological domain altogether, and not simply another competing theory over the same domain.

3. Living and Believing

The main conclusion of this thesis, and what I read as the core of Wittgenstein's epistemology of religion, is the idea that holding a genuine religious belief is tantamount to living a religious life. To grasp the objectivity of a religious context, to capture the meaningfulness of its expressions and actions, one has to practically engage with it, live in a religious manner, and start from the same outlook on life. One cannot comprehend the meanings involved in the religious context if one looks at them from the outside. Wittgenstein wants us to embrace a view that gives center stage to the shared form of life as the crucial element that enables

one to understand the meaning of religious practices. I want to conclude with a remark taken from Drury's *Conversations with Wittgenstein* (Drury 1996, p. 114). One that, I believe, captures Wittgenstein's most fundamental idea about religious belief and touches on the core of this doctoral thesis. Drury writes that, when discussing about religion, Wittgenstein once told him this:

[...] remember that Christianity is not a matter of saying a lot of prayers; in fact we are told not to do that. If you and I are to live religious lives, it must not be that we talk a lot about religion, but that our manner of life is different. It is my belief that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God.

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