Perspectives on the World

Truth With and Without Self-Understanding

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Abstrakt:

In this thesis I explore the idea that our relationship to the world consists of forms of engaging with the world. The idea is a contrast to the belief that we are independent of the reality we describe, and that truth is like an accurate picture of the world.

This topic is inspired by a similar contrast in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. In his book, Wittgenstein discusses different ways in which an effort to search for the meaning of concepts in corresponding object leads to confusions. In a similar manner, I discuss what role meaning plays in our relationship to reality.

I begin by discussing how meaning is intrinsic to the practice of philosophy as an inquiry about the nature of our relationship to reality. I do this by describing the philosophy of Socrates the way that it appears in Plato's dialogue Apologia. I show that the Socratic notion of human wisdom entails understanding of the meaning of the claims that one makes, and that without an understanding of meaning, our claims about the world risk becoming what is called "divine wisdom".

I proceed to discuss meaningful descriptions of reality in relation to the philosophy of Winch. Winch develops Wittgenstein's idea of following a rule to include social practices. According to this view, meaningful human behaviour consists of following rules. These rules, in turn, create social practices. The central claim in this section is that the descriptions of social practices also work as descriptions of perspectives we take on the world. The perspectives are defined in the thesis as forms of engaging with the world. In other words, in describing social practices, we also describe the logical forms that our relationship to the world can take.

Finally, I discuss how a failure to appreciate our relationship to the world as forms of engagement can lead to a distorted idea of reality. I discuss some examples where these failures are shown. Among these are an example from Kierkegaard and a news article from the Finnish news paper *Iltalehti*. The thesis is aimed at showing, that an understanding of the ways in which we engage with the world, is a form of self-understanding.

In Concluding Reflections, I suggest that one broader implication of the thesis is that the desire for certainty in relation to truth can be understood as an existential desire for safety. This subject matter could not be investigated in this thesis and is left for further research.

Nyckelord: Wittgenstein, Winch, Social Practice, subject-object relationship, self-understanding

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1. Introduction

In the opening of *Philosophical Investigations* Ludwig Wittgenstein quotes Augustine's idea of language learning. According to Wittgenstein, Augustine introduces a picture of language as a relationship between words and the names these words refer to. Moreover, the picture describes an idea of our relationship to the world in the following way: the world is there independently of us, and what we do when we speak of the world is to refer to it. In other words, our relationship to the world is passive. We may observe it and we may describe it, and if we decide to engage with reality, then this is something over and above the relationship to the world. As a result, truth is often considered to be something like an accurate picture of the world.

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein shows that there is a more fundamental relation to the world that lies beneath the Augustinian picture. This relation is about the way we engage with the world we live in. Observing and describing the world as we see it is always part of some form of engaging with the world. From this, it also follows that the way we describe the world logically depends on the way we engage with the world.

This view introduces a major shift and a contrast to a natural way of looking at our relationship to the world. Firstly, looking at the world is something active rather than a passive receiving. That is, the meaning of truth depends on what we are doing, which is our way of engaging with the world. Secondly, self-understanding has a central role in our understanding of the world. Without understanding what we do when we engage with the world, as well as with other human beings, we are blind to the meaning of that relationship. This kind of blindness will inevitably result in misusing truth in various ways. Thirdly, the ways in which we engage with the world and each other are as diverse and as manifold as life itself. Our relationship cannot be reduced to one single relationship, such as referring to the world correctly.

This thesis explores the kind of relationship between ourselves and the truth, which Wittgenstein's philosophy suggests. More specifically, I explore why self-understanding is a crucial part in knowing the truth and what a lack of self-understanding involves.

The central concept I use to approach the subject is the concept of 'social practice'. The kind of self-understanding involved in understanding how we relate to our reality I focus on, includes understanding ourselves as engaged in a social world, which already carries meaning. We are, so to speak, born into a world that is already there with its social practices. We learn to engage with the world, and only then reflect on what we do. What we say about our reality, and how we describe it, expresses an understanding not only of the world, but the meaning of what we do when describing the world. This means that there is a self-understanding present in all descriptions of reality as a logical part of the descriptions.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters (chapters 2–4). In the second chapter I discuss two dialogues from Plato: *Apologia* (2008) and *Charmides* (2008). *Apologia* is a kind of origin story for philosophy, where Socrates formulates how he became a philosopher. It is a mythological description that answers indirectly the question of what philosophy is.

The philosophy of Socrates also shows how self-understanding, as the search for meaning, is part of a rational engagement with the world. Agreements of truth risk becoming "divine truths" without an understanding of the meaning of what we claim. The term "divine truths" expresses specifically related to claims where the meaning, i.e. the way in which the truth is part of our way to engage with the world, has no relevance as part of a passive relationship to the truth. In my discussion of the dialogue *Charmides* I moreover show that the divine truths are empty forms of agreement. This means that the distinction between human wisdom and divine wisdom I make in the second chapter reflects the distinction between active engagement with the world on one hand and the problems with passive reception of the world on the other.

The main part of the thesis is in the third chapter, where I discuss the philosophy of Peter Winch. I focus on Winch's book *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (2003, ISS), where he formulates the idea of social practices which I draw on in this thesis. The book was published in 1958 and according to Winch it was written against a tendency of those times to consider social sciences as fundamentally similar to natural science. His major claim is that the objects of social sciences, i.e.

human behavior, is qualitatively different from the objects of natural science. Human behavior consists of meaningful behavior, which can be described in terms of rules that are being followed. Social practices consist of following these rules. The major implication of this way of thinking is that social science and natural science both consist of rules that can be described as meaningful social practices. Social practices determine the criteria for a correct description of reality. This is why it becomes crucial to understand the practices within which descriptions of reality happen.

In 1992 Winch wrote a new preface to the second edition of *ISS.* In this preface he explained his dissatisfaction with the way he discussed social practices as consisting of following rules. He was also dissatisfied with the way he seemed to imply that social practices are self-contained. For similar reasons, I argue, that this tendency in *ISS* also implied a kind of relativism[1]. If the kind of practices we engage in determine the correctness of descriptions of reality, then how should we understand the way we engage in these practices? Is it simply a matter of individual choice how we want to describe the world? My suggestion is that the social practices also can be viewed as perspectives on the world, and that the description of the "rules" of social practices also describe the logic of a particular perspective on the world. This emphasizes the engagement that is involved in any description, including describing science as a social practice, and hopefully reduces the temptation to describe social practices from a disengaged perspective.

I argue that the question of which perspective is the correct perspective in each situation is broadly speaking an ethical question. It is ethical in the sense that there is no necessity to look at the world in one way rather than another, but these perspectives are part of our lives. What perspective we *should* take on the world in each situation is something to be determined in relation to that specific situation. To the extent that we claim we are free to choose the way we see the world in any given situation, it is an expression of our understanding of that situation.

Finally, in chapter four, I examine ways we may fail to describe the world if we fail to appreciate our own activity in those descriptions.

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[1] By this I do not mean to suggest that Winch is a relativist, only that those parts he himself saw problematic can give that impression. For a discussion whether Winch can be considered a relativist, see Ahlskog & Lagerspetz, 2014.

Even though the topic of this thesis is formed by the philosophy of Wittgenstein, I discuss his philosophy through Winch. One of the reasons I do so is because, as Winch himself describes *ISS*, he takes the idea of following a rule from Wittgenstein and expands this to apply to human behavior in general. I find this useful because it reduces the temptation to view language as a particular phenomenon to be explained. There is less temptation to think that all human behavior is of one form[2], than to think that all use of language is of one form. Moreover, regarding the topic of this thesis, there is also a benefit in describing our relation to the world as forms of engaging with the world with a specific emphasis on descriptions as something we are *doing* rather than passively mirroring the reality in words.

The thesis touches on several major topics in the field of Wittgenstein research. One such topic is how to understand the concept of following a rule, or the related concept of grammar. To engage in a discussion with these, or to even make a comprehensive overview, would be a major undertaking and strays away from the topic of the thesis. It should, however, be clear where I stand in relation to, for example, transcendental interpretations of following rules. As I write in chapter 3, any notion from my part that implies that there is a set of rules external to ourselves that dictate our behavior, or the correctness of our behavior, is a mistake. In section 3.3 I try to show that the idea of rules dictating our behavior is in its philosophical sense meaningless. Any dictating can only occur as a power relationship between people (or as a kind of self-subjugation).

Another theme that is briefly touched upon is in what sense rules exist in our behaviour. There are interpretations according to which the rules of social practices are implicitly present in our actions, and describing everything which goes on in even a simple action, such as tying one's shoelaces, shows the complexity of human action.[3] This kind of idea reintroduces metaphysics through rules as a fundamental part of action. It would have been possible to discuss such interpretations within the theme of this thesis, since they exhibit the tendency to describe reality simply "as it really is", rather than understanding that any description is a form of engagement and what will be considered reality is always dependent on that. As such, these interpretations fall

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2   Although, as I will discuss in chapter 4, J. G. Frazer did exactly that.
3   See Pleasants, xyz, for a discussion on such interpretations

into the category of "divine wisdoms", where reality is described "as such", instead of an understanding of what form of engagement with reality the description is part of. I chose not to discuss this topic to any greater extent. The forms that the problematic objective descriptions take are innumerable, and inevitably choices of what forms to address had to be taken.

There are also some important inspirations for the thesis and discussing these in depth would have been beneficial for the thesis. The major claim of the thesis is that our ways of engagement with reality is part of our world as an ethical world. This means that words such as "confusion", "misunderstanding", "mistake" or "broken", i.e., evaluative words, are part of the ways in which we engage with the world. This, in turn, means, that our way of being in the world is not static but always in motion. It is something like this I sense when Thomas Wallgren discusses in his book *Transformative Philosophy* (2006); how discussing the meaning of words is a way of caring for our lives together. This caring is not about simply preserving things as they are. It can also take the form of radically transforming the way we live. Another important inspiration in the same vein is the philosophy of Olli Lagerspetz. In his books, *A Philosophy of Dirt* (2018) and *Trust, Ethics and Human Reason* (2015), Lagerspetz describes our reality as one where reality is defined as different *relationships* to the world. Lagerspetz writes, "[d]irt becomes the unsavoury reminder of the gap between the world as we would like it, neat and tidy, and its real state of disorder" (Lagerspetz 2018, 86). The thesis rests on a similar idea, that our descriptions of the world expresses an understanding of ideals as part of that world. A third inspiration is Hugo Strandberg and his book *Escaping Our Responsibility* where he discusses, among other things, how different forms of objectivity become forms of ignoring our responsibility to others.

Towards the end of the thesis, I discuss an example from an article in *Iltalehti* (28.2. 2023) where I think much of what I discuss in the thesis is exemplified. For example, how confusion of what kind of a practice politics is, also becomes a confusion of what neutrality in journalism means in describing political discussions. In order to make the central claim more plausible, the claim that self-understanding of the ways in which we engage with the world is central in describing it right, more discussion of

"ordinary" examples of failures and successes in relation to this central claim, would have been needed. Also, some of the ways in which 'choice' figures in our understanding of the world would have been useful in understanding what exactly is meant by the idea that the perspective we choose to use when describing the world is part of our world as fundamentally ethical. As such, the main point remains regrettably on an abstract level.

2. Socrates and the Search for Human Wisdom

Plato's dialogue *Apology* (2008) is widely held as a kind of origin story for philosophy. It is the first extensive description of what philosophy is, or ought to be, and is viewed as the beginning for western philosophical thought. In *Apology*, Socrates[4] stands accused by Athenians for corrupting the youth and introducing false gods. His defense rests on the view that the Athenians have misunderstood his actions. Therefore, Socrates explains to his accusers what it is he does when walking around Athene and challenging those who are considered wise to a dialogue. Ultimately Socrates fails to convince Athenians and is condemned to death.

Apology is a dialogue that has a vast depth and entails a number of implicit themes. One such theme is the interplay between Socrates and the Athenians that could be superficially described as that between the wrongly accused and the angry mob. A crucial question is what has angered the Athenians and where does the confusion lie. My view is that the answer to this question points towards a difficulty in social life that is based on a kind of craving for agreement. This craving is often associated with a noble quest for truth. Socrates' method of philosophy shows that this quest for truth is misguided and misleads us to create the illusion of agreement.

Socrates approaches the question of what philosophy is through a paradox. This paradox is between on the one hand, his famous conviction that he knows nothing, and on the other hand, the wisdom that he receives from the oracle at Delfoi that he is the wisest in the world. This paradox is noteworthy because it indicates an important shift in attitude. A natural inclination might be to dismiss one of the views as simply wrong. For Socrates, however, the seeming paradox meant a puzzle that needed to be solved. In other words, he was compelled to take both claims seriously and as true statements. This compelled him to search for the resolution for the conflict, not in investigating the likeliness of the truth in each claim, but in the meaning of the two statements. Already in this simple decision we can see that the relationship to truth

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[4]   In this chapter I will talk about Socrates as he appear in Platos dialogues, mainly in *Apologia* and
       Charmides.

differs from a passive receiving of truths: the word of the oracle of the Delphi requires Socrates to address his own understanding of what is being told to him.

The philosophy of Socrates is sometimes hailed, for various reasons, as the beginning of a kind of rational search for truth (see e.g. Wallgren 2006). In this sense, the philosophy of Socrates can be viewed related to similar hopes as the enlightenment project and its emancipatory promise in that it develops the art to question the ideas and views taken for granted. One particular aspect of this emancipatory promise implicit in Socrates' philosophy is the promise that rational agreement means understanding truth as part of the life that it is involved in. Agreement of truths means agreement in ways of living. In other words, it is not merely questions such as 'what is true?' that increases our understanding of the world we live in. It is also questions such as 'what do we mean when we say that something is true?'.

In this chapter on human wisdom, I want to explore primarily these two themes: the illusion of agreement and the idea of truth as an active relationship to reality. These two themes are connected further to questions of meaning and self-understanding. It is through exploring the meaning of concepts like truth, good life and virtue that we can create an understanding of what truth really entails.

2.1 The origin of philosophical thought

In order to explain to the Athenians what his philosophy is about, and to prove his innocence, Socrates explains the original impulse for the quest to find human wisdom. It begins with a story of his friend Cairephon who went to the Oracle at Delphi and asked who the wisest man on earth was. The oracle told Cairephon that Socrates was the wisest. For Socrates this presented a difficult riddle. On the one hand, he had his own view that he knew nothing that was of any particular value yet he could not doubt the word of the oracle as they were the messengers of the Gods.

This sets Socrates out on a mission to prove the oracle at Delphi wrong. On his journey, he goes on to talk to the people who are reputed to be wise. To his great disappointment, he would only find people that thought they were wise but were not. With heavy hearts, he took it upon himself to show their lack of wisdom which made him unpopular.

There is a temptation to be sarcastic in describing the predicament Socrates is in. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates appears sometimes very annoying and petty. He mocks people through his famous wit and dedicates excessive time on what seems like petty questions about definitions. All in all, it is easy to see Socrates in the light of a first year philosophy student who believes that they are clever in doubting everything regardless of whether it is meaningful to doubt. On the other hand, Socrates is a literary character in Plato's dialogues and this means that our attitude towards this character is dependent on to what degree we are willing to suspend our disbelief. In other words, what we are willing to say about Socrates will depend on what we end up emphasizing and for what reasons. My choice here is to put the fact that Socrates stands accused with the penalty being death as the hinge around which my interpretation revolves around. Unless we imagine Athenians as a people who are themselves so petty that they would kill a person for annoying them, we must assume there is something more fundamental occurring here. Something in what Socrates does appears to threaten the whole foundation of the Athenian society. When Socrates questions people of Athens he challenges their self-understanding in a way that makes truth not just an intellectual game but shows the concreteness of truth and what is at stake when we speak truthfully. This is also an inherent part of the broader point of this thesis. Truth, when considered in relation to the lives we live, puts the ways in which we live at stake. That involves all the power structures as well as the taken-for-granted practices that our live rest on. In this sense, the fact that the context of *Apologia*, the dialogue where Plato describes what philosophy is and therefore what truth is, is set in literal situation of a matter of life and death, mirrors the seriousness of the kind of truth that Socrates stands for.

In his defense speech, Socrates explains that in order to find people wiser than him he talked to politicians, poets and craftsmen. Socrates realized quickly that both politicians and poets talk as if they knew something about most valuable things in life without a clear understanding of what they meant with what they were saying. Craftsmen, he admits, knows many things of value but lack a self-understanding of what they know and therefore also imagine that this knowledge of craftmanship brings them knowledge of things they know nothing about. Poets, according to Socrates, speak like seers and prophets and may divine "important things", but when asked about the meaning of what they talk about none of them could explain it. Soon Socrates would realize that the only difference between him and the people who were called wise was that he knew that he knew nothing, while others had all kinds of ideas about what was valuable.

What is noteworthy is that Socrates often discusses "what is valuable" in life when discussing knowledge. In other words, Socrates does not claim that he or anyone else simply knows no facts of any kinds. He takes it for granted that craftsmen make many useful items and that they are valuable, but the expertise of the craftsmen does not give them knowledge of the broader question of what makes all the items they produce valuable. This implies that Socrates believes there is a question of what a good life is that plays an important role in knowledge. The goods that craftsmen produce are only good to the extent that they are involved in a good life.

It is here that we can find the first indication of what makes Socrates such a problematic figure for the Athenians. Each society functions based on a kind of unquestioned order. This order is always in some relationship to a question of what makes a good life, but also to the power relationships of that society. What makes Socrates such a threatening character for Athenians is that his method exposes the implicit order that is reliant on a lack of self-understanding.

2.2 The Riddle as the Heart of the Philosophical Attitude and its Emancipatory Potential

At a first glance, it may appear as a contradiction to claim that Socrates is advocating a kind of emancipation from illusion through rationalism. After all, he claims to be following a divine calling when practicing his philosophy. He is also explicitly defending himself against the accusation to either have introduced false gods, or not believing in gods at all, a contradiction which Socrates points out in the dialogue. Nowadays, rationality is often understood as a contrast to religious beliefs in the sense that religious beliefs seem to require unquestioned acceptance of the truth, while rationality demands proof. In other words, rationality demands that we must ground our knowledge in something.

Socrates attitude differs markedly to the attitude presented above. The word of the oracle is something that comes from outside of him, yet it is he who must interpret those words. Reality is not something that can be handed over to him by divine revelation. Yet, this does not mean he must discard the divine revelation as a truth. Everything gets decided, so to speak, With regard to what meaning that revelation will acquire in his own life. A sceptical attitude towards the divine revelation would still be part of a passive relationship to the world. It would have been part of a relationship where he would have received a picture of the world, so to speak, and the only responsibility left for him would have been to simply establish whether that picture is accurate or not.

Socrates' attitude towards the word from the oracle introduces a radically different idea of rationality in relation to the divine revelation. At the heart of this idea is the attitude, that what the Oracle says poses a riddle for him. It is important to make the distinction that the Oracle alone does not pose the riddle, instead the words of the oracle becomes a riddle only in combination with the notion that Socrates knows nothing of value. The Oracle simply delivers what is divine knowledge and the riddle occurs in relation to Socrates himself. What does it mean for him when he says that he knows nothing, and what does it mean for him to believe what the Oracle says?

It is, in other words, this conflict between two at least seemingly opposing views which creates the riddle. Socrates does not simply assume that either the oracle must be right, or that he himself must be right. The question is not about which one is more trustworthy as a source for truth. This act of preserving the tension between these two views is a tacit acknowledgment of his own role in understanding them both.[5] It is an acknowledgment that no matter how these two claims of knowledge has come into existence (be it divine origin, subjective conviction, expert knowledge, or what ever else), he himself still needs to understand them one way or another. Simply assuming that the two views are in conflict would imply that the meaning of these two propositions is self-evident and that the only thing for him to do is to decide which one he thinks is more believable as a source for knowledge. This would reduce his difficulty to a question of truth in the narrow sense of what is correct.

The two beliefs are parts of who and what he is in his own eyes. They are beliefs that can only be replaced by better understanding. There is not even a real choice between either believing the Oracle or himself. As long as the tension is inside him the only choice would be between repressing one belief in favour of the other. But repressing something is not the same as ceasing to believe in it. In order to make a genuine transformation Socrates needs to solve this riddle.[6] In this sense, understanding the meaning of both these beliefs that he holds true is essentially about his own self-understanding.

2.3 The Illusion of Agreement – Or What is Divine Wisdom

Socrates realizes that both politicians and poets talk as if they knew something about what is valuable in life. Poets, according to Socrates, who speak like seers and

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[5]   This sort of ability to preserve a tension is signifying of the philosophy of Wittgenstein, both in his earlier philosophy and his later philosophy.

[6]   For more about the transformative aspect of the philosophy of Socrates and Wittgenstein, see Wallgren 2006.

prophets, may divine "important things" but when asked about their meaning none of them could explain it. In this sense the wisdom they possessed was open ended. The value of such statements is unclear because of this open-enededness.

Socrates does attribute some value to these prophetic and poetic words of wisdom by claiming that they can say "many fine things" (Plato 2008, 64). There is perhaps a hint of Socratic irony in this remark,[7] but if that is the case, the irony is not aimed at prophetic or poetic wisdom as such. After all, Socrates himself is following what he believes is a divine mission. The irony is targeted at people who are not prepared to treat the meaning of poetic and prophetic wisdom as riddles to be understood, as radically open. The irony is pointed towards people who believe themselves wise simply by virtue of uttering the words of a wise poet or prophet.

A kind of illusion of divine wisdom, is revealed in the dialogue Charmides (Plato 2008). In the dialogue, Socrates discusses with Charmides the claim that temperance is doing one's own business. It is revealed in the dialogue that this definition is from Critias even though Critias does not admit to this. Socrates shows that Charmides did not understand what "doing one's own business" meant, that he was either parroting what he had heard or projecting his own meanings into it (or both). But Socrates also reveals that the question of what they meant by their definition of temperance did not even enter into the minds of either Charmides or the person who introduced this poetic wisdom to Charmides. Socrates says the following after Charmides agrees that he does not understand the meaning of his own definition:

> Then, as I was just now saying, he who declared that temperance is a man doing his own business had another and a hidden meaning; for I do not think that he could have been such a fool as to mean this. Was he a fool who told you, Charmides?

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[7] What Socratic Irony exactly is, is an open question, but Socrates does seem to praise people who imagine too much of themselves, seemingly taking their words at face value, only to go on to show their ignorance. A more clear example of this is in Apologia, when he asks Callias the son of Hipponicus if he knows of a man that can teach human virtue, and when Hipponicus answers that Evenus is such a man, and that he teaches for five minae, Socrates goes on to marvel that: "Happy is Evenus, I said to myself, if he really has this wisdom, and teaches at such a moderate charge." (Plato 2008, 63)

Nay, he replied, I certainly thought him a very wise man. Then I am quite certain that he put forth his definition as a riddle, thinking that no one would know the meaning of the words "doing his own business."

I dare say, he replied. And what is the meaning of a man doing his own business? Can you tell me?

Indeed, I cannot; and I should not wonder if the man himself who used this phrase did not understand what he was saying. Whereupon he laughed slyly, and looked at Critias. (Plato 2008, 85)

Here we can see an interesting difference in the kind of puzzle, or riddle, that Socrates is out to solve through his philosophical endeavours and the kind of riddle that Critias appears to have introduced. Socrates takes the riddle seriously, as something of which the meaning is to be discovered through his journeys, while Critias is mainly hoping that no one would react to the obscurity in the riddle. In this sense, the riddle from Critias was not meant to be solved. One was simply supposed to be convinced of its truth. The difference between these two riddles is then to be found in the different attitudes taken towards them.

Neither for Charmides or Critias did it occur to contemplate on the definition. Both were content in sensing a deep wisdom in the definition, while feeling a sense of agreement and accomplishment. A superficial examination from Socrates showed that the agreement was based on an illusion. Regardless of whether the definition shows itself to be a good one, the way that Socrates draws attention to the meaning of the definition dispels a kind of fantasy that both of them reveled in. He wants to show that such divined wisdom is not human knowledge, and confusing it as such is a source of a shared self-deception. The words were rendered into a ritual.[8]

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[8] This form of exposing the emptiness in ones ideas is, of course, something that occurs constantly while doing philosophy. It is also what makes philosophy painful at times. It might be considered particularly embarrassing for Critias, who was considered wise, to have been more or less exposed as a fraud. While this particular situation lends itself to that interpretation, it is worth keeping in mind that our lives are often riddled with these kinds of failure of understanding.

Here we can also notice a clue for why Socrates was so disliked. The kind of feeling of collective wisdom and agreement was shown to rest on nothing. At worst, from the point of view of the disillusioned, where there appeared to be agreement, happiness and harmony, what was left is disagreement, confusion and discontent.

The important aspect of the approach of Socrates is that it puts meaning at the center of truth. Truth without an understanding of meaning creates the kind of illusion of divine truths that Charmides and Critias are content with. It does not matter what the source of a particular truth is, if it is divine revelation, subjective feeling/conviction or a scientific truth. In fact, it is often scientific truths that acquire this divine role. It is often said that quantum physics proves that a particle can be in two states at the same time until it is observed, or that theory of relativity proves that time is relative. In and of itself there is nothing wrong with these claims. What Socrates provokes us into is to ask what is *my* relationship to this particular claim, how do *I* understand it. This question is as relevant when asked in relation to what we are told about God as when a physicist claims that time is relative.

Our inclination to name a whole practice, such as physics (or the word of an oracle), as "the truth", is a metaphysical inclination. It is a way of putting one practice, one form of being in the world, above all else. The metaphysical impulse is about trying to describe the world in one form, from one perspective and projecting that perspective as simply part of reality. This is a blindness towards the role that the form of engagement with the world plays in our relationship to reality, towards the fact that there are many forms of engagement and not just one.

Our inclination to accept many truths does not necessarily get us much further unless we understand the meaning of the practices where those different truths figure. As I mentioned earlier, substituting one opinion for another is often impossible because our thoughts are part of our lives as we live them. For Socrates, the option could never have been between either believing the oracle or trusting his own intuition. Two equally powerful parts of his life clashed. "Choosing" to believe one over the other would have simply meant repressing the other. In a similar way, accepting both thoughts would have been equally impossible. Granted, the form of repression might

have taken more difficult and elaborate forms, but ignoring the conflict would still be a form of repression.

I have presented Socrates in a somewhat uncritical fashion. This does not mean that I fully agree with the way Socrates searches meaning. It often takes the shape of finding the true definition for a term, a notion that is dismantled by Wittgenstein by his idea of family resemblances.[9] The dialogues of Plato end, however, in a state of confusion called aporia. In other words, none of the dialogues end up finding the true definition. There is perhaps an interesting discussion to be had about the relationship between the state of aporia and the idea of family resemblances. Perhaps Plato wanted to communicate that no such agreement on true definitions could be found. The philosophy of Wittgenstein is in any case more radical. It is not just that no such definitions of meaning can be found, but the whole notion rests on a confusion that we ourselves have created. This is a general tendency in the so called later philosophy of Wittgenstein. It is about discovering the ways in which the source for the problems reside in ourselves and the notions we create.

The Augustinian picture of language that I referred to in the introduction is meant to show that there is something very natural and intuitive in the blindness towards the role that we have in looking at the world. First, we find the objects as they are being pointed out to us. Much later, we discover ourselves. This thesis is about discovering the role that we have in our relationship to the world. In order to do this I must turn to Winch and his concept of a social practice and following a rule.

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[9] I introduce this idea in the next chapter

3. The Relationship of Social Practices to Self–understanding and Meaning

In the previous section I talked about Socrates' philosophy and how meaning is inseparably related to truth. I wanted to show that unless a particular truth is understood, it risks becoming what I called either a poetic wisdom or a divine wisdom. What signifies such wisdom is that there is no agreement of what to do with it, and that each participant projects their own views into it. As an example I took the dialogue Charmides. In that dialogue, Socrates discusses with the young Charmides about the meaning of temperance. Charmides, who had studied under the great sophist Critias, explains that temperance is "doing one's own business". After a short interrogation Socrates reveals that Charmides was confused about what this definition was meant to mean. It is revealed that Charmides and Critias had both been satisfied with a faux agreement. The definition became a kind of poetic or divine wisdom.

What I considered to be important in this story was the following: that Charmides and Critias had discussed what temperance *is*, rather than what it *means*, and by doing this they had come under the illusion that they had arrived at an answer. This shared illusion, in the name of truth is what I take Socrates to challenge. I then went on to describe that this form of shared illusion is a kind of false sense of community. I claimed that the accusations of corrupting the youth that Socrates faced make sense against the background that Socrates was out to shatter the shared illusions, which was the basis of Athenian community. I also suggested that this transition from truth to meaning can be understood in terms of enlightenment and emancipation because it strives to replace a faux sense of community with real agreement. Or at the very least with an acknowledgment of the real differences.

Finally, I also wanted to hint that this potential for shared illusions is not only hidden in religious or poetic wisdom. Any claim for truth has the potential to devolve into a kind of illusion of agreement as long as truth is detached from the particular form of engagement with the world that it is part of. A shift from this involves a shift from a

focus on what is (merely) true to a broader understanding of what role that truth plays in human lives and how the truth is understood by people. In broad strokes, it is this shift from thinking in terms of what is the truth, to understand the meaning of truth as a form of engagement with the world, that I am concerned with in this thesis.

In this section I want to expand on how meaning is central to truth in relation to the philosophy of Winch and the concept of social practice. The goal of this section is to explain why it is necessary to understand the practices surrounding the truths when ever we are concerned with truth. Not only will it be necessary to understand what practice a particular truth belongs to in order to understand the conditions for truth, it is also necessary to understand what kind of difficulties our lives can pose in relation to truth. In order to do this, I will discuss the idea of a social practices as it is presented by Peter Winch in his book *The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (2003).

3.1 The internal relationship between meaning and practice

Peter Winch formulates the point of his seminal work *The Idea of Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* in the preface of the second edition:

> The central core of the argument is really stated in Chapter III, Sections 5 and 6. The title of Section 6 is 'Understanding Social Institutions'. It is important that I use the word 'understanding' at this crucial juncture rather than 'explaining'. In saying this I do not mean now to allude to the distinction made by Max Weber between 'causal explanation' and 'interpretive understanding' (discussed in Chapter IV, Section 3). The point I have in mind is a rather different one. Methodologists and philosophers of science commonly approach their subject by asking what is the character of the explanations offered in the science under consideration. Now of course explanations are closely connected with understanding.

Understanding is the goal of explanation and the end-product of successful explanation. But of course it does not follow that there is understanding only where there has been explanation; neither is this in fact true. I expect everyone would accept this.

But I should like to go further with a step on which the argument of the book in a way hinges. Unless there is a form of understanding that is not the result of explanation, no such thing as explanation would be possible. An explanation is called for only where there is, or is at least thought to be, a deficiency in understanding (Winch 2003, ix–x)

The preface of the second edition was written in 1990, 42 years after the initial publication of the book. As a result, Peter Winch had time to reflect on the topics and evolve as a philosopher, and the preface for the second edition is a reflection of the work much later in his life.

As Winch explains himself, the point of the book is a contrast to what he took to be a prevalent way of looking at social action. According to this prevalent view, the point of science was perceived to be to offer explanations of one sort or another, and as an extension of this view, social sciences were meant to offer explanations of human social behavior. What this view ignored was that any explanation of social behavior rests on a kind of understanding that is independent of any explanation. To put it in a slightly different way: before we can explain something, we need to identify it as something.[10] This identification is not something given to us. Instead of being passive, understanding is part of an activity that the person(s) identifying action engage in. The topic of the book is to describe how identification relates to these practices and what difficulties it entails.

Winch explains in the preface that the idea for the book stems directly from the book *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) by Wittgenstein and the concept of following a rule. His "strategy" was to expand what Wittgenstein says about following rules in relation to language and apply it to human behavior more generally (Winch 2003, xiii).

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[10]   Winch focuses on the identification of human behavior, but the same is true for anything we regard as an object.

A central point of Wittgenstein's book is that the meaning in language emerges in the way we speak. This means that any fundamental distinction between understanding linguistic actions and social practices dissolves. Understanding what the concept of promise means is not radically different than understanding what running is.[11] In other words, understanding the meaning of a word is understanding what we do with it, which in turn is understanding a social practice.

Winch explains the relationship between rules and meaning by describing how we come to understand a concept such as Mount Everest and asks *"[W]hat is it about my utterance of the words 'Mount Everest' which makes it possible to say I mean by those words a certain peak in the Himalayas"*(Winch 2003, 25). He then goes on to explain:

> A natural first answer to give is that I am able to mean what I do by the words 'Mount Everest' because they have been defined to me. There are all sorts of ways in which this may have been done: I may have been shown Mount Everest on a map, I may have been told that it is the highest peak in the world; or I may have been flown over the Himalayas in an aeroplane and had the actual Everest pointed out to me. (Winch 2003, 26)

Winch then goes on to focus on the specific case of ostension, i.e. that of defining something by pointing to it.

By discussing ostensive definitions, Winch echoes Wittgenstein who begins *Philosophical Investigations* by quoting Augustine's view on language learning (Wittgenstein 1958). According to Augustine, central to learning language as a child is learning the names of things when they are pointed out. This way of defining, or learning words, is important in relation to the point that Wittgenstein and Winch make because of two reasons. Firstly, our ability to point to an object gives the appearance that the identity of a thing is given to us by the thing itself. It gives the appearance that we are not involved in identifying it. Secondly, it also gives the appearance that identifying something as something, and then using that identification, are only externally related. Both of these assumptions turn out to be mistaken. I will quote

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[11] It is worth noting, as it has been for me, that there is a sense in which a promise is social that running is not. That is, we cannot make sense of a promise without an understanding what kind of relationship it entails with another person. Running is not inherently social in this sense.

Winch instead of Wittgenstein because, of the two, I believe he explains the point more eloquently:

> "As far as immediate external appearances go, the ostensive definition simply consisted in a gesture and a sound uttered as we were flying over the Himalayas. But suppose that, with that gesture, my teacher had been defining the word 'mountain' for me, rather than 'Everest', as might have been the case, say, had I been in the process of learning English? In that case too my grasp of the correct meaning of the word 'mountain' would be manifested in my continuing to use it in the same way as that laid down in the definition. Yet the correct use of the word 'mountain' is certainly not the same as the correct use of the word 'Everest'!" (Winch 2003, 26–27)

In other words, there is an inherent ambiguity in pointing, even in the seemingly obvious case of pointing to Mount Everest to name it. In order for that gesture to be understood as naming the mountain, rather than explaining the word "mountain", an understanding of what is being done has to already be in place. When Wittgenstein (and Winch) talk about the "context" in which a word is being used he is referring to this form of understanding of the situation which both speakers share. The context here is that Winch is taught the name of the specific mountain he is flying over rather than taught the word "mountain". Context in this sense is not about the fact that Winch is in a helicopter flying over Mount Everest. These kind of facts may or may not play a role when talking about context but they only play a role so far as they describe the sense in which a word is used (in this case the fact that the example is placed in a helicopter is incidental). These two ways of understanding context is often confused. I can only speculate what would be the source for the temptation to regard the helicopter ride as "the context" here, but I imagine it has to do with a common practice of retelling events from our lives. In the context of retelling events, "context" often refers to the circumstances where something interesting happened. In other words, even using the word "context" involves a context. It is not uncommon that, if we hear a word often enough in one context, such as the word "context", we start to project the logic of that context into other situations where the word is used. This is a significant source of confusions of meaning.

I previously claimed that pointing is inherently ambiguous. It is worth specifying that when I say this, I myself already occupy a certain perspective. Broadly speaking, this perspective is in relation to philosophy and a tendency in philosophy to look from an assumed absolute point of view. It is, however, strictly speaking wrong to say that there would always be uncertainty in pointing. Uncertainties, confusions and ambiguities are something that occur as part of the situations, and what the uncertainties are about depends on the specifics of the situation. For the most parts, when we point towards something, it is understood and presents no difficulty. Even in these situations, the ambiguity is absent because the context is already clear.

The point of this brief summary of Winch's idea of meaning and language is that the identity of a thing or action (is it a mountain or Mount Everest?) is related to the context in which it is identified. In other words, identity is not given to us by the world as such. Another often quoted example is about natural harbors (Meløe 1988). Natural harbors are a formation where land surrounds the sea from several sides to protect it from waves, but it is also deep enough to allow for anchorage from large ships. This formation makes sense only against the context of seafaring. This example is useful because it combines in a clear way a natural formation, which derives its meaning from a human practice. It becomes clear that our objective world is objective in relation to human practices. Understanding the world is as much about understanding ourselves. In other words, self-understanding becomes essential in understanding the world. To the extent that philosophy is about self-understanding, it is this aspect that makes philosophy indispensable in any knowledge. For Winch, this is also the answer to the indirect question posed in the title, what is the relationship of philosophy to social science?

3.2 Practices Overlapping

Winch says, in the preface to the second edition, that he regretted the way he discussed rules. He says that the way he discussed rules in social life gave the

impression that life is based on different, self-contained and separate "modes of social life", that each of these self-contained practices have their own separate "criteria of intelligibility" (Winch 2003, xv). As he explains in a later article called "Nature and Convention", these practices are often related in complicated ways and cannot be considered "isolated". He says:

> [T]he suggestion that modes of social life are autonomous with respect to each other was insufficiently counteracted by my qualifying remark (on p. 101) about 'the overlapping character of different modes of social life'. Different aspects of social life do not merely 'overlap': they are frequently internally related in such a way that one cannot even be intelligibly conceived as existing in isolation from others (Winch 2003, xv–xvi)

The difference that Winch is alluding to is worth exploring more deeply. One of the themes that I explore in this thesis is how truthfulness, as a broader concept than just correspondence with facts, crucially involves self-understanding. There is, however, a kind of ever-present danger lurking in falling back to a narrow objectivity by objectifying this self-understanding. One such mistake would be to understand the social practices as simply objectively describable social rules which determine for example criteria of correctness. This mistake is close at hand when Winch makes use of expressions like all human behavior is rule-governed (see for example Winch 2003, 51–52). This idea of being governed by a rule gives the impression that there is something external that dictates what is right and wrong in a given situation, when in reality, if there is something external to me, it is another person "governing" me in one way or another. In other words, the idea of being governed by a rule gives the impression that there is something going on that is independent of my will. To the extent that there is, this is part of the situation. I may, for example, choose to take part of a scientific conference, but I can only choose how to look at the work within the scientific framework. I may be out with my friend talking about the star constellations, and I may be free to look talk about them through astronomy or astrology. If I am tasked with building a bridge that other people use, then I am bound by that to make it strong enough to carry cars and people. In all of these situations, however, the way I

engage in those situations is an expression of both my will and understanding of the situation.

Another place where Winch seems to suggest a kind of relativist position is when he says that:

> The scientist, for instance, tries to make the world more intelligible; but so do the historian, the religious prophet and the artist; so does the philosopher. And although we may describe the activities of all these kinds of thinkers in terms of the concepts of understanding and intelligibility, it is clear that in very many important ways, the objectives of each of them differ from the objectives of any of the others. (Winch 2003, 18–19).

Winch follows that up by saying that the term intelligibility is widely open ended in the same way as the word "game". He refers to the famous idea of family resemblances from Wittgenstein, according to which the meaning of words do not neatly fit into one definition. Instead, the use of words vary in a way that resembles family resemblances. Some features are shared by some in the family, while other aspects are shared by others in the family. Some features overlap and some do not. The point is that there is no single defining feature that defines all that can be called games or intelligibility, just like there is no single feature that all share within a family.

Winch claims, however, that art, religion etc., are all different ways of making the world intelligible. This makes it sound as if the different areas only differ in either the object they try to make intelligible or in their method. That would imply that they all share one purpose: to make the world more intelligible. But it is not clear that this is the point of religion or arts unless we broaden the term intelligible until it simply means nothing. Much of what art does could rather be described as revealing ways to experience reality, rather than to make it intelligible. As such, they can make reality seem obscure, magical, miraculous or absurd. It can make us imagine things that are not real, sometimes because we wish them to be real or we fear them to be real. What arts does is, of course, open ended and will depend on what artists can come up with, but it is unclear whether it is meaningful to claim that they make the world more intelligible. The way I would describe the philosophy of these different areas of life is

as philosophies of those practices; an effort to understand what it we are doing when engaging in these practices. This would put less emphasis on the relationship between the practice being essentially about a set of beliefs of the world, and less about criteria of correctness.

The problem with the way Winch presents the different practices is not so much that the practices seem self-contained as it is that they seem to share one purpose: making the world intelligible. Granted, Winch does say that the ways that different practices make the world intelligible is open-ended. Perhaps open ended enough so that one can include things like experiencing the world as mystical through art. And in some sense this experience is also part of our world. It is unclear, however, what purpose it serves to say that the different practices make the world intelligible.

The different practices do, however, include propositions that at least seem to be about the world. One such proposition would be from the bible that the world was created in seven days. We might be tempted to say that science says the world was created in a big bang as if that theory competed with the story from the bible. A kind of relativist interpretation would be that both are talking about the same thing, the world, merely they apply different methods, and each statement is correct within its own practices. Things would not get much better if we were to say they define their objects differently. The point that I think Winch makes is, though in a clumsy way, that the propositions play different roles in different practices. It is not obvious that the religious origin story is meant to talk about the world in the same sense as science. We can just as easily imagine the purpose of the story to be to describe the logic of a perspective on the world. I described the origin story of philosophy in the first chapter, and that story was not meant to be factual. In fact, it does not make any difference if the story from Socrates in the way Plato was telling it was true or not. What it describes is a kind of logic. That of inquiring the meaning of ideas we have. It establishes a relationship to ourselves and our ideas. I do not mean that it could not be interesting to what extent the story is factual. The point of the story is not, however, in its factuality.

While I do not want to make claims about religions or go into the philosophy of religion in any greater depth, I want to point out that looking at the world we may

have different purposes. These purposes can, in their turn, only be understood in relation to the kind of life lived with that kind of perspective on the world. It is not obvious that before modern physics and technology, the question of the origin of the world had any kind of empirical meaning. The differentiation of making claims about an empirical reality and describing a perspective on the world in terms of the origin of the world, might have been superfluous because the ability to study the empirical questions did not exist. The creation of modern physics did not just create a new method, at least not on top of some old methods. It also created new purposes.

So how does this differ from pure relativism? Do we not simply choose what kinds of lives we want to live? I already hinted at the answer earlier which was meant to show that the question is something that gets settled within our lives. That is, there are plenty of situations we choose to be in and we choose to engage in a practice, and there are plenty of aspects of our lives we do not choose. For example, recognizing the need for a particular perspective when building a bridge is related to recognizing the importance of the safety of people crossing it.

More broadly speaking, to the extent that science is about instrumental reason, it is bound up with humans as beings that use tools. Understanding how choice plays a role in adopting different kinds of instrumental perspectives on things is part of understanding ourselves as instrumental beings. I may live my life without ever thinking much about science. I may not wonder about the world in scientific terms. Yet the peculiar aspect of instrumentality is that it is constantly present in my life. In that sense, denying the importance of science would be like denying the importance of instrumental aspects of my life. It would not be choosing the way I look at the world, it would be choosing to ignore an aspect of my life. Something similar, yet in the exact opposite way, occurs in *Frazer's Golden Bough* (1894), which I will discuss more in chapter 4.3. Frazer fails to recognize the role that rituals, gestures and rites have in our own life, which makes him blind to this aspect in life when studying what he calls primitive societies.

I want to sum up what some of the things that I find important in Winch amounts to. Winch shows that science, along with religion and art, constitute human practices with their own meaning. These practices are different ways of looking at the world that

involve different purposes. These purposes are something to be found within the kind of life that we live, to which these perspectives belong. The application of these perspectives is not itself either determined or a matter of choice. Instead, to what extent they should figure in our life is, broadly speaking, an ethical question. In other words, it is not a question of applying the correct set of rules for the appropriate situation according to one explicitly describable grand meta-rule.

In order to explain that the application of perspectives is an ethical question I want to address a confusion of rules as having a kind of magical ability to rule us. There is a perception that if, for example, a game has rules, then those rules dictate my behavior in one way or not. An analogous case would be that if I am in the army, then my commanding officer dictates my behavior. Normally there is nothing wrong with this way of speaking. Problems arise when we assume that these are cases where our own judgment/will is not involved. This interpretation arises when rules, or logic more generally, is assumed to have a transcendental reality that moves us independently of our own will, so to speak.

3.3 Judgments and Logic

To explain how rules and their application are entwined, Winch makes use of an allegory by Lewis Carroll called "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles" (published in *Mind,* 1895). In the allegory, Carroll describes a kind of logical race between Achilles and the tortoise in the style of Xeno's Paradox. According to the story, Achilles and the tortoise is discussing logic, and Achilles is unable to get the tortoise to draw a conclusion merely by referring to logically airtight rules. Achilles explains that, if A and B and Z are related so that if A and B is true, then Z follows logically. The tortoise claims that the sentence must be a rule itself that must be taken note of. So, Achilles writes it down as the claim C, so that if A and B and C is true, then Z follows, where C is the rule that "if A and B is true, then Z follows". Achilles then asks the tortoise to accept this new claim. But the tortoise insists that this claim must be a rule itself as well, something

worth taking note of. They decide to call it D and write it down. So if A and B and C and D is true, says Achilles, then surely one must also accept Z. One may guess what the response of the tortoise is to this new claim.

What this story illustrates is the basic idea that a rule cannot explain its own use. Otherwise you will end up in an infinite regress. Or to put it in another way, accepting a logical rule means something practical in the sense of actually drawing the conclusion. In this sense, the identity of rules that we follow, or the actions we take, is expressed in taking those actions. These actions are then, of course, also an expression of our will. It is not meaningful then to talk about a rule and its application as merely externally related, as if we could identify what a rule says separately from how it is applied.

More importantly, this idea leads us to exclude any idea about human actions being dictated by something external. Or to put it in another way, if we make a distinction between being lead by something external and doing one's own thing, then this is an ethical statement about some power relationships. A rule by itself cannot force me to do something or not. The power of this point is solely derived from the tendency to regard rules as something that dictates our behavior which is a kind of mind trick to distract from how our own intentions is related to what we do. Regardless of the situation, we may always distinguish how our own will is involved in it, but also how it relates to the will of others. There is no objective way to describe our social practices as merely regulated by something external.

The consequences of the above is tricky to describe because of two different perspectives that are easily confused. A description of rules of a social practice at the same time tells us what is right and wrong, and does not tell us what is right and wrong. If we are, for example, in a religious ceremony, then that description of the situation as a religious ceremony already makes a distinction what belongs to the situation and what does not. A person taking a sip of water because they are thirsty is not part of it. A person taking a sip of holy wine is. A description of the rules they follow might tell that the wine should be blessed before drinking. But if it is not blessed, it can mean that a mistake occurred, it can also mean that the ritual is changed, or that the part with the holy wine is simply dropped away and now the

congregation is just drinking the wine because they like it. In this sense, what the rule tells us is happening is not straight forward. The point of the descriptions as following a rule is that there is an internal relationship between the things that are done, and how the different actions are related to each other. A greater clarity of the internal relationships in a ceremonial practice does not mean that we will be able to do it "more purely" or more correctly. But it can mean that we realize that the whole congregation has just convened because of the wine and the social gathering, and that there really isn't much ceremonial about the situation. Or it might make the congregation realize the opposite. The possibilities are infinite. To the extent that rules of a social practice describe what is correct, there is still the question of what attitude we will take to the description. The rules do not say, in this sense, what we must do, but they may give us a greater clarity of what we want to do.[12]

Another way to say this is that our will is an *aspect* of our actions (or that *we* may choose to look at our will as an aspect rather than something substantive). What this means is that, our will is always there for us to observe as part of actions if we so decide. Whether or not we decide to observe it will entirely depend on what we find meaningful. For example, if we look at a situation where someone points a gun to my head, I may decide to act as the person wishes. But of course saying that "I may decide to act as the person wishes" is an extremely banal way of putting it. The banal description only works against the background that everyone understands that I am being forced to do something. When we say this it is not to say that my will did not play into it, but that we could not reasonably expect me to do anything else. This is because, when we talk about intentions, it is intertwined with other concerns, such as questions of responsibility. If we fail to see that the way we talk about the will is related to our perspective to the situation, it may give the impression that it is simply an objective (or perhaps metaphysical) question whether we are following something external or not.

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[12]   Wittgenstein says towards the end of §79 of PI (1958) that "say what you will, so long as you see how things are (and when you see that, there is a good deal that you will not say)" (My translation). The translation from Anscombe translates "verhält" into "facts", which is, in my view, contrary to the meaning of what Wittgenstein says. "How things are" is more broad than just facts, and also involves understanding the internal relationships between ideas and actions. The point I am here making could be expressed in a similar way: do what you want, as long as you see what it is you are doing (and when you see that, there is a lot of things that you would not do). This could be called something like the general form of logic.

Why then do I draw attention to this way of talking about will as an aspect of what we do? There is a tendency to talk about actions as if we could identify them without any relationship to an understanding of what kind of expression of will that action is. As if we simply could describe actions from an external point of view. Withing a certain way of talking about rules, especially if we use the expression "obeying a rule"[13], we might be tempted to "think away" our responsibility in actions (cf. Strandberg 2009). Within this way of discussing rules, when we describe our actions, our will is related to our actions as an additional layer above the objective reality[14]. In addition to philosophical contexts, this may become relevant when we essentially Jedi mind trick ourselves into following rules or norms against our will "because we must" or "because that is how it is done" (or as often may be the case, we trick others into following what we want by referring to an abstract notion of a rule). Essentially, describing reality and following rules can become ways of escaping responsibility for the understanding one presents.

There is another important example on rules which Winch talks about. The example is meant to show that the idea of rules we deal with here is not meant to refer to any specific kind of rule. The example goes roughly like this: Let's assume that A and B are playing a game called "guess the continuation of the rule I have in mind". A gives a set of numbers, 1, 3, 5, 7, and asks B to guess how the rule continues. B then guesses 9, 11, 13, 15, but A claims it was false. A then continues 2, 4, 6, 8 and B guesses 3, 5, 7, 9 yet still A claims it is wrong. They go on for a while but A never accepts any answer, regardless of any continuation that B gives. Winch's point with the example is that, while we could say that A does not follow an arithmetic rule, this does not mean that A does not follow a rule of another kind. This rule is to always continue the rule in some other way than what B suggests (Winch 2003, 30).

With this example Winch addresses the prejudice that when talking about meaningful behavior as rules, that following rules has a predefined meaning. It is easy to make the mistake of projecting a certain idea of rules as expressing strictness. Later in the book,

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[13]   English translation of *Philosophical Investigations* translates "regel folgen" as obeying a rule. This can be misleading, since this gives the impression that the rule is external. "Following a rule" does not entirely dispose of the problem.

[14]   More on this in chapter 4.3.

Winch makes this point again in relation to a monk living their life and an anarchist (Winch 2003, 52). We might want to describe the monk as living by strict rules while the anarchist is free from rules. While there is nothing wrong in describing them in this way, we must understand that this way of describing comes against the background of a specific notion of a rule. According to the notion in question, what is relevant in the concept of a rule is that it is imposed by something external to the person themselves. This does not imply that, in the case of the monk, there is no room to talk about what kind of an expression of will his lifestyle is (as if the monk is "just" following rules). Or to put it in another way, there is a *point* in talking this way. It also means that this notion of rules is akin to the question whether one is following a commandment or not (as in "are you doing this out of your own volition or are you commanded to?"). The difficulty in talking about rules in relation to meaning is that this notion of rules is easily confused because we take this notion to be synonymous with what rules mean. What magnifies this temptation is that when we talk about an arithmetic rules it is as if we would be merely following steps laid out to us in advance by an order that is divine in origin. This prevents us to see how our own will figures in what we do, which essentially prevents any self-understanding.

When talking about rules in the sense that Wittgenstein and Winch meant, it is perhaps better to talk about describing rules as an aspect in identification of objects, regardless if those objects are physical objects or human behavior. This aspect is about the fact that our identifications are internally bound to the use of these words. This use is something that expands in time and is related to different "occasions". For example, the fact that A never accepts any answer that B gives, describes a specific relationship between the different "occasions" where A declines B's answer. This way of talking about rules is meant as a contrast to the tendency to think that identification involves identifying the word with a matching object. Identity is about the internal relationship between the things we say. As the example stands, the question arises, why is A doing what they are doing? We can go on to construct the example so that A is trying to play with B and make fun of B's expectation that there is an arithmetic rule A is thinking of. Our temptation is to think that what we must find is the matching (in this case "inner") object within A's thoughts in order to identify that they are indeed

deceiving B. But the deception is not "located", so to speak, in any inner representation but in the actions and how they relate to each other.

It is, perhaps, partly in relation to the point above that Winch was not entirely satisfied with how he presented the idea of following a rule. In the example of A, the fact that A does not accept B's answers, Winch makes it seem as if the description is meant to overcome a difficulty. As if there would be an inherent obstacle when we try to identify actions, that needs to be overcome. The example is, of course, conducive to that interpretation, because it is quite literally constructed so that A introduces a puzzle to B. This does not, however, mean that identification of actions is akin to solving a puzzle, or that we normally would be in a place where we would have to guess "how the rule continues". By this I do not mean that the kind of games are rare, but that identifying something as something is not a situation where we start with nothing and then proceed to make educated guesses about what is going on, based on the data we collect along the way (cf. Backström 2019 for similar points). In fact, in the example, there is one "given" that precedes the whole example, and that is identifying the situation on the whole as one where A is riddling B. The fact that the situation is described that way explains the expectations of B about what A is about to do[15]. The fact that they find themselves in this situation is in itself an invitation to look at it a certain way and to have certain expectations of how the situation will proceed. It is important to note that it is not relevant whether it is A who has suggested that they play a game or if they just find themselves in that situation, for example as participants in a game show. It is not that some specific person introduces the expectations as a kind of promise, but that the situation itself creates the expectations. Taking part in

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[15]   It is an interesting, yet separate point that A's ability to mislead or deceive B, comes entirely from the situation itself setting the expectation. The situation is that A is trying to make B guess, and it is implied that it is some kind of arithmetic rule. That situations present these forms of expectations is discussed further in 4.1. There is a tendency to imagine the expectations residing somehow (merely) in subjects, as an inner object, rather than the situation itself. This is sometimes taken to mean that the expectations are not founded in anything but are "hanging loose", so to speak. These kind of thoughts may also lead one to think that the ability to deceive a person is a sign of intelligence or of cleverness as it means that the person is able to identify what expectations another person has (as if one was able to read minds). Understanding that the expectations grow out of the situation shows that there is nothing clever about deception. It simply amounts to the same as breaking a promise, and I believe that there is less inclination to think of a broken promise as a sign of intelligence.

the situation is to engage in it, which involves being tied by the expectations as if one had made a promise.

I have tried to describe in this chapter how the perspectives we take on reality are the ways in which we engage with reality. We may say from an abstract philosophical point of view that this engagement always presupposes a choice, but the meaning of the choice will depend on the situation itself. In other words, there is no generalized set of rules that define what perspective to take and when, nor what it means to deviate from a given way of engaging with the world. Whether it constitutes a problem, a mistake, a failure, a success or any other evaluative description, will be part of our understanding of the situation at hand.

4. Objectivity and the Self

In the previous section, I have explained how our descriptions of reality are part of our social life. I have also tried to avoid the pitfall of describing this social life as simply another object to be described. In other words, when we describe the world, we are engaged in a social practice, and this is why we are also responsible for how we describe the world. The responsibility is expressed in the self-understanding that is manifest in the descriptions. Describing reality, be it within social science or natural science, is not a disengaged view, but a way to engage with the world. I have also called these forms of engagement as different perspective. The responsibility in describing the world is then also a responsibility of what place in life we give to these perspectives.

In this chapter I want to address different ways in which objectivity, when it lacks self-understanding of the perspectives it makes use of, creates failures of seeing the world as it is. I call this blind objectivity. I begin by discussing two failures associated with a kind of philosophical effort to achieve objectivity. The first one is in relation to an example Kierkegaard discusses in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Kierkegaard 2009). Through this example, I want to show how our understanding of reality is expressive of an understanding of life in general. Stepping outside of that understanding in an effort to become a disengaged observer does not result in an increased level of objectivity. It results in absurdity.

The second form of lack of self-understanding is related to making a priori distinctions between what part of reality of social life is objective and what is "merely" subjective. I do this in relation to Winch's discussion of Weber. Weber is well known for introducing meaning as a central concept in describing social action, but ultimately the effort to distinguish between subjective ideas from the social life leads him to describe the reality of social life in absurd ways. The idea of defining a priori the ways in which reality can be described works only as a way to limit our ways of engaging with the world.

In relation to both of the failures mentioned above, I suggest that self-understanding is crucial in determining what kind of descriptions of the reality are meaningful and relevant. There is a tendency to focus on "the nature of human behavior" instead of the different ways in which descriptions become meaningful depending on the purpose of the one describing. Winch himself formulates many of his philosophical points in terms of differentiating the objects of research between social sciences and natural sciences. As a result, he ends up giving a fuller sense of the meaning human action than many others before him. This opens up new interests related to understanding human behavior.

Lastly, I want to explore a more regular example of how the self figures in describing the reality. I do this in relation to an article from the Finnish newspaper *Iltalehti* where the journalist, as part of blind objectivity, ends up describing politics as a kind of game.

These examples are also meant to show that the failure to describe things correctly is not merely a question of simply applying the correct rule or standard. The mistake of self-understanding is not a technical mistake. A lack of Self-understanding is a failure to see the meaning of what one is doing. How we understand our world is expressed in the ways we describe it, which is something active rather than passive.

4.1 A View From Nowhere

The fact that our social life is riddled with expectations can be seen by examining the kind of absurdity that would result from trying to understand simple social situations without it. This form of blind objectivity might give the impression that we as human beings are somehow inherently limited and are never able to speak entirely truthfully. Something like this is at stake when Kierkegaard uses the example of a person agreeing to meet another person the next day, but fails to do so because a roof tile falls on him and he dies (Kierkegaard 2009, 73). Looking at the situation from a presumed absolute point of view, we might be tempted to say that we really cannot make any promises because we cannot see into the future with certainty. It would seem that from this

divine perspective it is hubris of humanity to make any promises to begin with. It is against this form of misuse of words that Wittgenstein warns when he says that we must bring back words from their metaphysical use to their ordinary use (Wittgenstein 1958, §116).

Kierkegaard discusses this idea of absolute objectivity in relation to the following example:

> Lucian has Charon in the underworld tell the following story. A man in the upper world stood talking with one of his friends, whom he then invited to dinner, promising him a rare dish. The friend thanked him for the invitation. The man then said: But be sure now to come. Definitely, replied the invited friend. So they parted and a roof tile fell down and killed the prospective guest – isn't that something to die laughing over?, adds Charon. Suppose now that the invited guest had been an orator, who perhaps just a moment previously had stirred himself and others by discoursing on the uncertainty of everything! For that is how people speak: one moment they know everything, in the same moment they do not. And that is why it is considered foolish and quirky to bother one's head about it and think about the difficulties, for doesn't everyone know this? (Kierkegaard 2009, 73.)

These forms of confusion are caused by the idea of an objective, disengaged viewer with absolute knowledge. The confusion here is, however, not in the fact that we may sometimes say to ourselves things like "everything is uncertain". It is by no means a nonsensical wish to want to feel safe from contingencies. These forms of considerations take, however, their own form, their own shape of looking at the world, and they are separate from the normal practice of making promises. They can feel especially pertinent when we are faced with tragedies. The confusion is, in other words, in thinking that this implies that there is something strange in the ordinary way of making a promise to meet someone. The metaphysics that Wittgenstein talks about means taking one context as the paradigmatic, or the only important, context, and then applying the logic of that context into other places.

In reality, we constantly make agreements, arrangements and promises, and if life goes its normal course, we also fulfill them. But if someone was to die, we would hardly consider it as breaking ones promise. It is not even that we forgive them or that we consider it a legitimate excuse to fail to honor the promise. This perspective on the whole situation would simply vanish as irrelevant. There is a certain temptation to describe this as an implicit condition or rule that is agreed upon, but there simply is nothing that needs to be implicit (cf. Pleasants 1999). It resides in the common understanding of what life looks like and what is important, and this common agreement gets its expression in our reactions in different situations.

By this I do not mean that we might not say "strange" things that seem out of place. We may say utterances such as "if only John had kept his promise, he would still be alive" or that "I guess John had an excuse not to meet me, after all". These are not meaningless, but they are ways of mourning the passing of someone. The fact that it is about ways of mourning is a description of the logic of the situation. The utterances would be part of mourning John.

Even in less drastic situations our expectations change in different ways. I may agree to have lunch with my friends, but if their child becomes sick I expect them to take care of the child instead of honoring the agreement. This would simply count as a general understanding of life.

What these examples show is that the way in which we apply different perspectives in life is part of our understanding of life. Simply stating a fact like "John made a promise" is not just stating a fact. It also involves a perspective on the situation, a way of engaging with the situation. In other words, it is, on top of stating a fact, a statement that this perspective is relevant. It is in this way we are responsible for the ways we engage with the world.

The word "relevant" here is just a general notion. How we describe the relevance of a perspective will in itself depend on the situation. A way of engaging in a situation may be the only right one to take, an interesting way among many other interesting ways, the most important way etc. All these ways of evaluating the importance of the way we engage in a situation is part of a broader ethical attitude. The ethics of perspectives

cannot be reduced to a binary meta-choice between right or wrong perspective. Sometimes we may simply choose one right perspective among many wrong perspectives. In other times we are free to choose how we engage with the world. Different perspectives can also become relevant while others may fade away, as with the example where a child becomes sick. The promise becomes secondary to caring the for the child. Something similar could be said about the way descriptions work. They consist of a particular perspective, which are grounded in the different ways we live our lives. Understanding the perspectives in relation to life as it is lived means understanding that the way we look at the world is an expression of what perspective is important/relevant in any given situation. These expressions, in turn, are in relation to other people. They enter a web of expectations where certain ways of describing things may become important while others fade away.

4.2 Securing Objectivity by Limiting Reality

Through out the history of philosophy and the history of science, there has been an effort to secure objectivity by differentiating reality into qualities that belong to the sphere of objects and to qualities that belong to the sphere of subjective projections. One such distinction is made by John Locke, who made a distinction between primary qualities and secondary qualities (Locke, 1999). Primary qualities of objects include qualities such as size, shape, motion, quantity and solidity. Secondary qualities include qualities like color, taste, smell, sound or warmth. According to this line of thinking, primary qualities are part of the objective world, while secondary qualities were merely caused by the objective world. The taste itself is subjective in the sense that it does not represent anything in the object itself.

A similar effort exists in the history of social sciences. There have been efforts to differentiate between the social reality and the subjective perception of the social world. This presents a unique difficulty since our social world consists of ideas. The

question then becomes: what relationship do these ideas have to the reality we want to investigate?

When Winch wrote *The Idea of Social Science,* it was popular to think that social science should mimic natural sciences. This meant that social sciences should investigate regularities just like the natural sciences investigated regularities in the natural world. It was against this background that Winch's contribution came.

Understanding meaningful behavior served two purposes in relation to this discussion. First of all, it presented that science itself is a practice that consists of meaningful behaviour that needs to be described and understood. Second of all, the object of social sciences differed from natural science in that the object itself consisted of meaningful behavior. Winch made the distinction that while the natural scientist would have to adhere to the rules that constituted the science itself, social science was characterized by this double set of rules. One for the science itself and one for the object of study, that is, for human social behavior.

Winch recognized this as a simplification. In reality, the practices are not any clear cut cases of following just one easily defined set of rules, but a complicated web of meaningful behavior. Describing it this way opens up, however, the possibility to ask what it is that a social scientist does. If social science is a practice itself with a meaning, then what is the meaning of the practice? Not only that, but if natural science is understood as a kind of social practice, we can also ask what kind of social practice that is. My contribution is that these social practices are at the same time perspectives on the world. These perspectives, in turn, are ways of engaging with the world. Our understanding of the meaning of these practices is then tied up with our understanding of how the practices matter in our lives. When they are important or relevant, and when they are not.

Winch was concerned mainly with the question of the *nature* of the different research objects. Our way of understanding an object, be it natural or human, is essentially a relationship that we create with those objects. If objective description means something like the *correct* description, then we cannot ignore why we make those descriptions. The reason we make them will define what will be relevant in the

description itself. Any kind of effort to limit ways in which we describe phenomena will simply serve to limit the different attitudes we can have towards the world. It follows that the correctness of a description cannot be limited to simply accordance with the object. Instead, what we consider a correct description always implies an idea of what is important.

4.3 Ideas as Part of Our Reality

One of the sociologists who has been considered to contribute much to the idea of understanding social phenomena is Max Weber. Winch discusses Weber's ideas closely, but ultimately considers that they fall short of the kind of understanding that social phenomena requires. According to Winch, Weber believes that understanding the ideas that are manifest in human behavior may require a certain kind of immediacy. However, this immediate understanding of the ideas is something that needs to be verified by what Weber considers objective means, such as statistical tools that establish the real regularities. In other words, according to Weber we cannot take the causalities represented in these interpretations as obviously valid. Against this, Winch argues that, while statistics may indeed suggest something is wrong in an interpretation, what is needed is another interpretation. Statistics as such do not describe reality (Winch 2003, 113).

To illustrate Winch's point, I want to take an example of a fictional "primitive culture" [16] practicing a magical rite. They perform sacrifice and dances, and utter words that are meant to form spells, all in the effort to conjure, say, rain or more food. Weber's idea would suggest that we need to see if this description really predicts what the people in this fictional "primitive" society will do next. For example, we might assume from this description that they consider the magic to be a failure if it fails to produce the effects they desire. Repeated and consistent failure, it would stand to reason, would imply that the society abandons the practice altogether. Clearly, there are societies that keep

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[16] The name "primitive culture" is tightly interwoven with an idea that cultures are on different stages of development. Winch's philosophy dismantles this idea.

practicing magic despite the feeble results of it, which shows that the description of what they are doing is bad at predicting what the society will do. If we assume that we are merely interested in predictions, a statistical model would seem to be more useful.

I present this example because Winch travels close to, so to speak, these kind of examples. He refers to *Frazer's Golden Bough* which is one of the early anthropological accounts of the practice of magic in so called primitive societies. Presumably, Winch was aware that Wittgenstein had criticized Frazer's understanding of those magical rites in what has been published as *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (1993a). Winch ultimately takes a slightly different path than I intend to. Winch points out that understanding is something else than the ability to predict, and that we could well be able to predict speech from a language that we do not understand. Social life presents such regularities. "Hi" is often accompanied by a "how are you", and one can make a predictive model that states this regardless of whether one understands it or not. While all of this is important in and of itself, it excludes the kind of relationship that the description establishes towards the people described.

It is true that the description of the magical rite as a kind of proto-scientific practice also implies wrong predictions which, quite correctly, should make us skeptical of the description. It also makes the assumption that the magical rite is about needs to be understood as a form of instrumental rationality. The idea magic rite is really about a form of instrumental rationality such as, say, scientific theory trying to predict something, is, however, a projection. The point of a social practice is something to be found within the practice itself. In other words the idea, or meaning (or point – all of these terms are interchangeable here) of a practice is something inherent in a practice.

When Frazer describes the so called primitive culture he is not only blind to the form his perspective takes, he is also blind to the fact that it is a perspective. Frazer's way of looking at the world is part of an instrumental form of looking, where a description of causes and effects creates a predictive model of the cultural evolution of societies. By thinking that this is simply how the world is, he ends up using this form of looking at the world as the general form of the world itself. It leads him to interpret the social practices of the so called primitive cultures as merely more primitive ways of this same perspective. There is, in other words, a kind of double blindness at work here. The

inability to appreciate the particularity of one's own perspective leads to the inability to appreciate the reality as it is, and projects a logical form on the social practices they do not have.

Winch discusses an example by Max Weber where Weber tries to formulate the objective ground for social relationships that our subjective ideas supposedly rest on. In doing so, Weber describes a situation where workers in a factory get paid and exchange goods. But according to Weber concepts, such as "getting paid", "money" and "exchanging" goods, are subjective ideas attached on top of an objective reality of social relationships. This means that Weber, instead, describes the situation as people being handed "pieces of metal" and handing those over to other people and then receiving other objects. Instead of talking about the police coming to protect the workers, he describes the situation as consisting of "people with helmets" coming to hand the pieces of metal back. (Winch 2003, 117)

It is important to note that this kind of objectivity, if we found someone describing events like Weber in our normal life, would sound absurd rather than 'objective'. It makes, however, some intuitive sense, if we think of descriptions primarily aimed at predictions, and understanding social behavior only useful as far as it makes predicting possible. The broader point here is, however, that whether we find a particular description good or not, will depend on our uses for it. If we are inclined to say that we normally would not find Weber's description very useful, then it means that we have a particular idea of what a normal situation would consist of. Questions, such as whether someone was stealing or not and what was taken from whom, are related to our lives in complicated ways, and leaving those out of a description would not give a more objective description of a situation. It would simply make it impossible to address the situation from certain perspectives. On the other hand, if we are only interested in identifying the people who took the money, for example in order to catch thieves, then it would be relevant to describe whether they had helmets on or not.

To sum up, the difference between Winch and Weber is not just in that Weber ends up "on the wrong side", as Winch describes, in how he represents meaningful action. It is only if we understand that the objective description will depend on what we deem important that we can even begin to describe a description as either true or not.

Reducing in advance the concepts by which we describe the reality can only work to diminish the ways in which we may find certain descriptions important.

4.5. A Description of Politics as a Game In *Iltalehti*

As part of the public discussion in the media before general election in 2023 in Finland, *Iltalehti* published a <u>political analysis</u> by Erno Laisi (*Iltalehti*, 28.2. 2023). In the analysis, Laisi discusses claims made by the National Coalition Party (NCP). The title of the political commentary translates roughly to "National Coalition Party distorts in a clumsy way the tax policies of the Social Democratic Party – and this is also Sanna Marin's own fault".[17] According to Laisi, the head of the NCP, Petteri Orpo, reads the political platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) "like the devil reads the bible". However, he also claims, that Marin made the intentional misunderstanding possible by being vague in her statements.

The analysis is related to a political discussion where Sanna Marin, head of SDP, referred to the Danish tax system. She claimed that if Finland would have the same tax rate as Denmark, then Finland would not have long term problems with deficits. Laisi points out, that Marin expressed herself in an ambiguous way by saying that "if Finland had the tax system of Denmark, then Finland would not have a sustainability deficit".

The ambiguity in Marin's statement leads to, according to Laisi, that NCP politicians interpreted that SDP wants to implement the Danish tax model in Finland. Laisi points out that this has "no factual basis". Laisi quotes Orpo saying that "the tax system that Marin and SDP idolize would practically mean doubling the VAT and raising taxes on the incomes for low and middle income families". Laisi says that this cannot, however, be construed as lying because Orpo does not directly claim that SDP wants to implement the Danish model.

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[17]all translations of the article are mine

In the final few paragraphs, Laisi concludes that "the clumsy distortion strategy" by NCP has been enabled by Marin herself. Marin herself has spoken about the Danish tax model in a "positive manner". "Marin has given the keys to her political opponents with her rhetoric", he continues, and that "if a politician gives the opportunity to be misunderstood, then that will certainly be used by their political opponents. The Prime Minister of Finland should not give this kind of possibility to their number one political opponent".[18]

As far as there is an expectation of neutrality that is attached to media, this article would seem to satisfy that. On the one hand, Laisi points out that what NCP politicians claim is false, but he also points out that this was made possible by Marin's comments. This way of looking at neutrality is made from a perspective that resembles the neutrality of a referee in a hockey game, or a commentator that takes no sides. It is like saying that "the offense played dirty, but ultimately the defense was left open and the offensive team scored". The referee, or the commentator, takes no sides and only calls the game as they see it. This could be viewed as a kind of disengaged view that simply observes what occurs without any interest in the outcome.

There is, however, no absolute way of being engaged or disengaged. The referee and the commentator still look at the game as a game. They take part in the situation as observers or referees, and they describe the game from that perspective. Seeing something as a game is a particular way of seeing things. For example, there is no truth beyond the game at stake, only two teams competing about which one is better. Politics, on the other hand, is not isolated in this way. Even though we might want to say that the political parties compete for the votes, the idea is that the votes represent the will of the people. If people are misled into voting for someone for the wrong reasons, it will detract from the validity of the elections. In other words, it is not simply a part of a clever game to misinform people, but is rather a crucial problem in a democracy. In this way, Laisi ends up establishing the perspective on politics as a game.

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[18]   The last sentence could be also translated to "a prime minster of Finland should not[...]". In Finnish there is an ambiguity between whether Laisi is referring generally to the institution of Finnish prime minister, or if he is referring to specifically Sanna Marin as the Prime Minister of Finland.

The notion that someone "intentionally misunderstands" is only meaningful in a context of a game with strict rules. The ability to intentionally misunderstand already presupposes that a person understands what is said, but if the rules of the game define clearly how one is "supposed to" understand the other in order to win the game, then "intentional misunderstanding" is just a description of a move within that game. Considering that politics is not a game, a more correct description would be that the NCP politicians Laisi refers to are intentionally misrepresenting the SDP political platform. Laisi is careful not to call this lying, but it is unclear what difference he is alluding to. What is the specific difference between intentional misunderstanding and lying. One possible difference is that lying is, after all, something morally reprehensible, but if it is done within a game it means it is to be expected.

Seeing something as a game means to see the situation without a broader truth beyond the game. This way of looking at something may even come to an abrupt end in an actual game, for example if someone is seriously injured or if the game becomes "too serious". In other words, looking at something as a game is not derived from the fact that something is a game.

I have mentioned that we can sometimes "borrow" a logic from another setting, another context, and project that logic into another context. Something similar seems to be happening here in relation to "neutrality". We borrow an idea of neutrality, which has its meaning in that context, such as ice hockey, and we assume that this idea of neutrality present in ice hockey is representative of the essence of neutrality in general. A sentence like "Neutrality is like being a hockey referee" conjures up an image, or an idea, of neutrality.

A misleading way if looking at neutrality is to think of it in terms of neutrality having an essence. That this means that we, so to speak, distill the idea of neutrality from a situation where neutrality has an important role, like that of a sports referee. What we then do is that we peel off the aspects we consider incidental and believe we are left with a picture of neutrality that essentially represents all neutrality. We then go on to believe that we may apply this picture of neutrality where ever neutrality is required. In reality this results in projecting, or borrowing, ideas from practices in ways that distort reality.

It is sometimes claimed that "there is no such thing as morally neutral descriptions". This leaves open what we mean by "morally neutral". I argue, however, is that there still are correct descriptions. In this case the correct description drastically alters our perspective on the role of Sanna Marin and her role in the intentional misrepresentations by some NCP politicians. This is, perhaps, not morally neutral, but it is a more objective description. To what extent objectivity implies neutrality, and what neutrality means, is a more complicated question.

The expectation of neutrality in a political analysis in a newspaper is central to what a newspaper does. The situation that the journalist is in, is describable in similar terms that Winch uses to describe social science. There is one set of rules (or ideas) for the journalist and one set of rules (or ideas) present in what he is describing. What I have drawn attention to is that the meaning of neutrality, which Laisi operates with is dependent on meaning of politics. Democracy entails a kind of ideal to which the kind of neutrality that Laisi expresses in his article is poorly fit. This leads to distortion in how the situation is represented by Laisi, as if it was just a kind of game with a set of predefined "legal" moves. As I mentioned, Laisi is borrowing an idea of neutrality from one context and then applying it to another context where it does not fit.

The idea of neutrality in journalism is a specific kind of expectation that we have for journalism. Here I have not discussed what this expectation really entails. All I have done is to point at the fact that this expectation exists. To a large extent it is about what kind of a practice journalism is. This question, however, is not simply something to be defined in isolation of other practices. Journalism is bound to all the practices it decides to relate to, and an understanding of what journalism is depends on the difficulties in those other areas. For example, one crucial difficulty in democracy is to have the election results to represent the will of the people, which means that this is at the same time a difficulty of journalism related to it. This, I hope, also clarifies what it means that social practices are not isolated from each other.

5. Concluding Reflections – The Insufferable Contingency of Life

In this thesis, I claim that the inability to appreciate the form our engagement takes with reality, results in an inability to see the world as it really is. The expression of the world 'as it really is' is usually associated with the kind of objectivity I am arguing against. The term perspective, on the other hand, is often associated with a form of relativism. The view I describe in the thesis, a view that is inspired by Wittgenstein, is in other words, neither the kind of blind objectivity I explicitly argue against, nor is it relativism. Both of these forms of thought are confused, as they try to describe our relationship to the world without taking into account how objectivity is defined by the forms our engagement with the world takes.[19]

A natural reaction to this thesis would be to wonder whether something is lost by defining objectivity the way I do. Are we really to give up the idea of being able to simply state how the world is, and be done with it? Does this not also mean, that we cannot have any certainty about reality? If one has followed my reasoning thus far, it should be clear that these reactions are confused as well. The sense of a loss, confused as it may be, is real, however. The question is then, what is it, in the end that has been lost? Answering this is crucial in addressing this sense of loss, which I believe is natural when realizing that objectivity does not have the divine character that is often craved for. This question is, unfortunately, beyond the reach of this particular thesis. In these concluding reflections, I suggest a perspective on the thesis, and on what I believe to be at stake in the sense of loss of a "real" and "truly objective" world.

The kind of blind objectivity I contrast myself to has had at least two different explicit formulations in the thesis, on top of all the implicit forms presented as a background. I have called it a divine concept of truth, or a view from nowhere. The implication of the thesis is that this view is based on a confusion, and that the relationship to the world is based on ignorance. It is an ignorance about the role that oneself has in looking at the

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[19]   I am aware that I am here making a crude generalization. Much of what goes under the name of relativism, can be either explicitly or implicitly aware of the kind of questions that I have discussed in the thesis.

world. This ignorance ends up establishing, through its ignorance, one particular way of looking at the world as a default way of looking at the world. As a consequence, it also establishes one form of engaging with the world, one social practice, as a default attitude. Understanding what consequences this has is complicated. To some extent, a false self-understanding cannot eradicate the multitude of ways of engaging with the world. This does not mean that our self-understanding does not matter, or that life will go on as it must regardless of how we conceive ourselves. A twisted self-understanding results in confused consequences. There is no general way of describing these consequences, or how dire the consequences from a confused self-understanding can be. This will depend entirely on the confusion at hand. Some confusions may hardly be worth dealing with, others might define our existence. In Frazer's case, it is easy to imagine that emphasizing science and the instrumental rationality in it, results in downplaying other aspects of life as unimportant. This, in turn, may have consequences for how we organize our lives. In Frazer's case, his views were part of a broader racist culture that belittled other cultures as primitive in comparison.

The kind of objectivity that is blind to different forms of engaging with the world, also becomes a way to exercise power over others, a kind of will to power. This power is about establishing the priority and supremacy of one single perspective, and through that, one specific social practice. If this is done with a clear understanding of the relationship between different perspectives, then advocating for the importance of one perspective is not in and of itself problematic. The defining feature of the blind objectivity is that truth is defined without an understanding of the meaning of that perspective. Things are not necessarily improved much even if a multitude of perspectives are included. If we believe there is only one perspective corresponding to what is perceived as "one object", this still works in all the same ways as the blind objectivity, and as a will to power. For example, if physics deals with physical particles, chemistry with chemical processes and economics with economical exchanges. This view still lacks an understanding of the logical relationship between different possible perspectives. It lacks an understanding of meaning.

A question that announces itself here is why, then, is there a will to power? The objectivity that becomes a will to power is constituted by blindness towards the multitude of perspectives and their relation to each other. The question still remains, however, why there should be such a blindness to begin with? Why should we want to instill one perspective to rule them all? As a result of this thesis, life may appear as insufferably riddled with contingencies. Different perspectives become important in ways that is impossible to grasp in any general form. In chapter 3.3, I show that the way we apply rules, and by extension, the way we apply perspectives, is ultimately up to our own judgment. This means that we also may make mistakes, and that there is no organizing principle that can guarantee what perspective is the right one in every situation. This can cause existential anxiety, since the mistakes we make may not be of merely mundane, everyday and innocuous kind, as we can see in Frazer's case.

In Voltaire's *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster* (Voltaire 1755), Voltaire questions if it is right to look at the world and the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, merely as part of a divine order and as the will of God, or should we view the world as something that we can shape. The poem was written as a response to a perspective of the world from a kind of disengaged perspective that is summed up in the poem in the dictum "what is, is right." This dictum can be seen in contrast to an attitude that strives to understand the natural phenomena that occur, in order to affect the outcome of them. This other attitude could be described as a scientific attitude. The poem is, in other words, an expression of a certainty in a relationship to the world that is shaken.

The kind of certainty that is shaken in Voltaire's poem is fundamentally of an existential form. Wittgenstein formulates a version of this certainty in "Lecture on Ethics" (Wittgenstein 1993b). He describes a kind of absolute safety that is an existential experience of feeling safe no matter what happens. Normally, when we feel safe, we feel that we are safe from some more or less specific danger. We may, for example, feel safe from violence in our own house, or the house of a friend. The existential safety that Wittgenstein talks about is the feeling that regardless if misfortune would befall me, I feel safe. This does not mean that I would be untouched

by any misfortune, but it is a kind of confidence that we can endure a misfortune without the world falling from underneath, so to speak.

In chapter 2, I describe that the philosophy of Socrates shook the foundations of Athenian society. I claime that it is otherwise hard to make sense of the reasons to why he would be condemned to death. As the example with Charmides shows, there is a sense of false safety in agreement that is disconnected from the meaning of what is said. By bringing truth from the divine dimension back to the human life, Socrates introduced an insufferable contingency for truth that lead to a state of aporia.

Looking at certainty from this perspective, the will to find certainty in truth acquires a radically different form. It is a project aimed at addressing what seems like the inherent fallibility of human life. It is addressing the existential need for feeling safe in the world, albeit in a confused way. If the analysis of this thesis is, roughly speaking, correct, then the question is not how we will have certain, objective knowledge that can establish one perspective above all else. The question is, how can we create a world where we feel safe.

Summary in Swedish – Svensk sammanfattning
Perspektiv på världen –
Sanning med och utan självförståelse

Ett vanligt sätt att närma sig våra problem med sanningen är att fråga vad som är sant. Det här har gett upphov till flera olika sanningsteorier som strävar efter att förankra sanningen på en säker grund. Fokus på sanningshalten i våra utsagor har dock lett till en brist på förståelse av vilken roll sanningen har i olika sammanhang. I den här avhandlingen fokuserar jag på hur denna brist kan leda till problem och hur problemen kan åtgärdas genom förståelse av betydelsens roll i sanningen. Den genomgående tanken är att sanning utan självförståelse är blind. Syftet är inte att definiera vad självförståelse är i relation till sanningen. I stället tillämpar jag ett sätt att göra filosofi på som jag anser har anknytning till Ludwig Wittgensteins filosofi. Tanken är att först göra allmänna begreppsliga beskrivningar som därefter ges en konkret betydelse med exempel.

I det första kapitlet behandlar jag filosofins begynnelse utifrån Platons beskrivning av Sokrates. Jag granskar dialogen i Sokrates försvarstal där han beskriver början på den filosofin som han utövade i antikens Aten. I dialogen berättar Sokrates hur han ställdes inför en gåta som han gav sig in på att lösa. Gåtan uppstod som en följd av att oraklet i Delfi kungjorde att Sokrates är den visaste i världen. Sokrates ansåg tvärtom att han inte visste något av värde. Enligt mig är det centrala i denna berättelse hur Sokrates skapar ett nytt förhållningssätt till dessa två utsagor. I stället för att fråga sig vem som har bättre bevis eller mera övertygande grunder, han eller oraklet, uppfattar han själva motstridigheten som en gåta. Gåtan löser han genom att fråga sig vad de två påståendena betyder. Som ett resultat av sitt livslånga sökande efter vishet kommer han fram till den berömda slutsatsen att han är den visaste eftersom han är den enda som vet att han ingenting vet.

I det första kapitlet klargörs distinkionen mellan gudomlig och mänsklig vishet. Distinktionen anser jag vara central för det slags vishet som Sokrates uppvisar. En gudomlig vishet är en utsaga eller en bred övertygelse som är lösryckt ur sitt

sammanhang och vars sanning man är övertygad om. Som exempel tar jag dialogen Charmides. När Sokrates utmanar Charmides att förklara definitionen av vad avhållsamhet är som Critias gett åt Charmides, visar det sig att Charmides inte förstår definitionen. Därmed kommer det fram att Critias och Charmides har förhållit sig till definitionen som ett slags gudomligt budskap som inte ens behöver förklaras.

Avsikten med det första kapitlet är att beskriva hur en brist på betydelse handlar om en brist på självförståelse. I ett försök att nå en högre sanning blir sanningen samtidigt tom och skapar en illusion av vishet. Däremot riktar sig den mänskliga visheten till den betydelse som sanningar har i våra liv.

I det andra kapitlet diskuterar jag Peter Winchs bok *Samhällsvetenskapernas idé och dess relation till filosofin* (Winch 2003)*. I boken utvecklar Winch tanken att samhällsvetenskaperna skiljer sig från naturvetenskaperna i och med att det forskningsobjekt som samhällsvetenskaperna forskar i utgörs av regelbundna handlingar som består av mänskliga praktiker. Winch säger att eftersom samhällsvetenskaperna och naturvetenskaperna i sig är en mänsklig praktik som följer vissa regler har de sin egen logiska form med sina egna sanningskriterier. Jag vidareutvecklar den här tanken genom att beskriva hur de olika sätt vi beskriver sanningen på ger olika perspektiv på sanningen. Dessa perspektiv är inte löst hängande regelsystem enligt vilka vi bedömer sanningshalten i våra beskrivningar av verkligheten. I stället är de den ram innanför vilken sanningen får sin betydelse. Förståelsen för perspektiv är en form av självförståelse som i sin tur är en förutsättning för sanningen.

I det tredje kapitlet analyserar jag några exempel på hur våra beskrivningar av verkligheten är beroende av vår förståelse av livet. Först visar jag hur vår förståelse av livet manifesteras i hur vi reagerar. Man kan till exempel enbart förstå betydelsen av ett löfte i relation till den roll våra olika förväntningar spelar i förhållande till det vi uppfattar som ett brutet löfte. Olika situationer kan producera perspektiv som är mer eller mindre relevanta. Jag diskuterar också hur vår förståelse av den sociala praktik vi befinner oss i spelar en roll för hur vi beskriver verkligheten, och hur beskrivningarna kan gå fel om vi förstår vår roll i relation till vår sociala verklighet fel.

Ett annat exempel som jag diskuterar är en [artikel](#) av *Iltalehti* (28.2.2023). I artikeln granskar journalisten Erno Laisis påståenden i en politisk debatt mellan Samlingspartiet och Socialdemokraterna (SDP). Han hävdar att Samlingspartiet gjort falska påståenden om SDP som grundade sig på det han kallar avsiktliga feltolkningar som möjliggjorts av att Sanna Marin uttryckt sig vagt. Jag argumenterar att den här idén är meningsfull endast om man uppfattar politiken som ett slags spel. Laisi använder sig av en idé om neutralitet som har sina rötter i det slags neutralitet som till exempel en domare tillämpar i tävlingar. Jag hävdar att det här handlar om en bristfällig förståelse av hurdan praktik politiken är. Politiken består av en sanning som är mera omfattande än kampen om röster mellan partierna, eftersom demokratins förverkligande är beroende av hur väl ett valresultat representerar folkets vilja. Därför kan en beskrivning av ett "avsiktligt" missförstånd inte uppfattas enbart som ett skickligt drag i ett spel. Journalisten Laisi ger således en beskrivning av en verklighet som är varken objektiv, sann eller neutral.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att motarbeta en tendens att bemöta våra problem med vad verkligheten är, det vill säga i första hand som kunskapsteoretiska problem. Oftast är frågor om sanning beroende av vilken betydelse sanningen har i våra liv. Därför vill jag med olika exempel visa, eller 'träna upp', läsaren till att reagera på svårigheter med sanningen med frågan "vilken betydelse har det" i stället för "hur vet vi det". Något slutgiltigt svar kan inte ges på frågan eftersom våra problem gällande sanningen är lika komplicerade som livet självt.

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