

ARTICLE SECTION

Randy Ramal
randyramal@gmail.com

On Wittgenstein, Radical Pluralism, and Radical Relativity¹

Abstract

In this paper, I introduce the idea of ‘radical relativity’ to elucidate a very important, albeit ignored, justificatory context for endorsing and promoting radical pluralism. Radical relativity describes the contingent, non-causal, and yet non-arbitrary relation between ordinary concepts and the radically diverse reactions people form vis-à-vis their worlds. This idea can be extracted, I argue, from three notions discussed by Wittgenstein – ‘concept formation’, ‘agreement in reactions’, and ‘world pictures’ – whose combined consideration provides a solid logical foundation for affirming radical pluralism. I accept D.Z. Phillips’s characterization of radical pluralism, drawn from Wittgenstein, that certain radical differences between people’s ordinary practices prevent these practices from being reduced to a necessary set of common interests that refer to the same meanings or truths. I argue that Hilary Putnam’s notion of conceptual pluralism, also indebted significantly to Wittgenstein, offers a similar radical suggestion. Yet neither Putnam nor Phillips utilizes anything akin to radical relativity to justify their affirmations of their respective versions of pluralism or that of Wittgenstein. I therefore offer an appreciatively critical discussion of Phillips and Putnam to show the essential role that radical relativity plays in justifying any logical support for radical pluralism.

¹ I am grateful for the insightful comments I received from the anonymous reviewers of this paper.

1. *Introductory Analysis*

During the last decade of his life, D.Z. Phillips adopted the term 'radical pluralism' to describe his long-held position regarding the irreducibility of people's diverse practices and discourses into a set of common interests that necessarily refer to the same meanings or truths. Whether in religion, morality, aesthetics, politics, or other areas of existential import, Phillips argued, the voices within these diverse practices often converge in shared ways of thinking and living but, in many cases, diverge into opposite and irreducible directions (2007: 197–212). The irreducible divergence of these voices is that which makes pluralism radical for Phillips and, from his perspective, one should not expect to find a universal concept called 'the beautiful', 'the good', 'the divine', or 'the right policy' that all people would come to adopt as the agreeable norm in the relevant practices where these concepts might arise.

Phillips developed his understanding of radical pluralism as a result of promoting, and making applications of, Wittgenstein's idea of philosophy as a grammatical activity. In Section 4, I discuss the important role this idea plays in analyzing and clarifying the meanings of everyday concepts relative to how these concepts are consistently applied in people's everyday practices. Phillips utilized grammatical analysis to explicate the meanings of countless concepts in various religious, ethical, and aesthetic practices, and he sought to distinguish the outcome of this analysis and clarification – a descriptive notion of radical pluralism – from normative forms of pluralism within these various practices. But Phillips takes one step further and argues that it would be a mistake to seek any explanatory justification for radical pluralism in the potential links that concepts hold to the primal reactions people develop vis-à-vis the natural world and other phenomena in their lives (1993: 103–22). Unless one wants to risk producing a genetic theory of language that Wittgenstein clearly opposes, Phillips claims, any explanatory justification of how and why people lead the diverse lives they do should be based solely on grammatical analyses of the concepts exemplifying their world views (1997: 162; 1993: 103–22).

One of my arguments in this paper is that it is possible to justify the affirmation of radical pluralism with the help of Wittgenstein's

discussion of the relations between concepts and people's diverse reactions to the world while also avoiding the genetic fallacy of language feared by Phillips. I introduce the idea of 'radical relativity' to show how this can be done, and I argue that this idea is suggested in Wittgenstein's accounts of 'concept formation', 'agreement in reactions', and 'world pictures'. Wittgenstein rejects forms of justification that are based on a supposed causal link between concepts and people's reactions to the world, I argue, but he is not against all forms of justification that take the processes of concept formation into consideration. Since radical relativity, which I explicate fully in this paper, describes the contingent, non-causal, and yet non-arbitrary relations between ordinary, everyday concepts and the pluralistic reactions that emerge in people's lives, it elucidates the radical way in which the conceptual schemes embodying these concepts form and, therefore, justifies the reality of radical pluralism.

The idea of radical relativity should bring to mind Hilary Putnam's notion of conceptual relativity, particularly since Putnam utilizes the latter to defend a pragmatic and radical idea of pluralism similar to that of Phillips (e.g., 2004: 21–22, 49). I explain his idea of conceptual relativity and its crucial differences from my idea of radical relativity in what follows. As for his form of radical pluralism, Putnam describes it as both "conceptual" and "pragmatic" and, similarly to Phillips, he defines it as the view that the diverse "discourses" (conceptual schemes) expressive of people's various interests and world views are "subject to different standards and possessing different sorts of applications, with different logical and grammatical features – different 'language games' in Wittgenstein's sense" (2004: 21–22).

Putnam's idea of conceptual pluralism is not identical to that of Phillips, however. Although both develop their versions of pluralism in favorable responses to similar ideas in Wittgenstein about language and philosophy – both concluding that the various conceptual schemes expressive of people's world views may coexist without privileging one scheme over others and without explanatorily reducing these schemes into one – Putnam is a pragmatist in a way that Phillips is not, and he counts Kant as a major influence in his development of conceptual pluralism in a way that

Phillips does not (1995: 28–32).² Thus, although Putnam states that it would be an illusion to think “there could be one sort of language game which could be sufficient for the description of all reality”, intending by this to combat the intelligibility of speaking of a universal ontology that accounts for how the world really is independently of the conceptual schemes descriptive of it (2004: 3, 23, 49), as Phillips would, he makes it a matter of pragmatic convention as to which language-game, and by implication which conceptual scheme, is ultimately decided upon (1995:29; 2004:43–46). Putnam believes that people agree upon particular language-games as a result of seeing the pragmatic difference these games make in their lives. The agreement here is a matter of human convention whereas Phillips sees conventions themselves, or the choices and decisions made in regard to which language-games have application in people’s lives, as the outcome of natural agreements that people find themselves sharing in their similar reactions to the world.

I elaborate further on Putnam’s position on agreements of convention in Section 3 when discussing his critique of Bernard Williams’s idea of an absolute conception of the world. I show there that Phillips’s view on natural agreements is more faithful to Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘agreement in reactions’ than Putnam’s idea of agreements of convention but, as can be seen, the major difference between Putnam and Phillips on pluralism is not about the non-reductionistic, radical nature of people’s conceptual schemes but

² Putnam’s affiliation with Wittgenstein is complex (e.g., 2004: 16; 2008: 3; Conant: xxxiv–lvii), but he certainly depends more on Wittgenstein’s philosophy than Kant’s to make his case for conceptual pluralism and conceptual relativity, more specifically in his reliance on Wittgenstein’s notions of ‘meaning as use’, ‘agreement in reactions’, and ‘world pictures’ (1992: 170–173; 1995: 31–38, 53–54; 2000: 218–3; 2004: 21–22, 41–42). Still, he is very explicit on how he finds in Kant not only a “tendency towards genuine pluralism”, or even an “incipient” form of pluralism that recognizes how dissimilar descriptions of that world are neither “reducible to or intertranslatable with the other” (1995: 29–30), but also examples of pluralism that pertain to descriptions of the world in similar, or closely related, fields of interest. For example, Kant’s distinction between scientific and moral interests in the world are seen by Putnam as an endorsement of a pluralism that is based on dissimilar interests whereas Kant’s Second Antinomy is taken to contain a discussion of pluralism that is rooted in similar interests – i.e., the technical discussion of whether or not geometric points are primal “individuals” that compose regions of space as they form into sets of points (Kant’s “simples”) or simply “mere limits”, points within which space regions are primal individuals (1995: 28–31; 2004: 33–34; 46).

about how these schemes came to be what they are. This is where my argument about radical relativity has a role to play. In spite of the differences between Phillips and Putnam on how to justify the radical diversity of people's conceptual schemes, neither one takes Wittgenstein's discussion of the idea of concept formation to one of its natural conclusions, which is to justify the affirmation of how and why radical pluralism is what it is. This is true of Phillips and Putnam even when they incorporate discussions of Wittgenstein's intimately linked ideas of 'agreement in reactions' and 'world pictures' in their works. I argue that radical relativity is the outcome of drawing the logical conclusions of apposing Wittgenstein's discussions of concept formation, agreement in reactions, and world pictures.

There are additional differences between Phillips and Putnam that are important, but I do not dwell on them in this paper since my main concern is with the need to fill the gaps in their separate attempts to justify their defenses of radical pluralism. I could mention in brief that whereas Phillips's main reason for avoiding the use of concept formation to justify his defense of radical pluralism is the potential threat such justification raises for generating a genetic theory of language, Putnam does not seem to be aware of this threat at all. Also, Phillips at least comes close to linking the process of concept formation with his affirmation of radical pluralism in his reflections on Simone Weil's work (2000: 191–226) – albeit does not do so eventually, as I show in section 4 – but Putnam opts to focus on the different path of employing conceptual relativity to make his case for conceptual pluralism.

Here, a definition of Putnam's conceptual relativity is in order, particularly since it should not be confused with any endorsement of the traditional idea of relativism, and also in order to show what Putnam means by the observation, discussed below, that conceptual relativity is presupposed by conceptual pluralism but not vice versa. A definition of conceptual relativity at this stage should also be helpful in marking out its differences from my idea of radical relativity and why I think it does not provide radical pluralism with the full logical support it needs.

Putnam is very explicit about how the "mind-boggling" idea of conceptual relativity, as he puts it (1992: 118), justifies the

affirmation of conceptual pluralism. He argues that it demonstrates how some of the different, seemingly incompatible, conceptual schemes illustrated by the fact of conceptual pluralism are correlated to one another in cognitively compatible ways and, therefore, pragmatically explainable and justifiable. This is not something that conceptual pluralism can demonstrate on its own because the latter is simply the descriptive outcome of the variety of language-games and conceptual schemes in existence. Any explanatory and justificatory power resides in conceptual relativity for Putnam. This is proven, according to him, in how we are able to extend the use of specific words in our everyday languages beyond their typical applications – e.g., we say that strawberries or counties “exist” in our everyday natural languages but we extend the use of the word “exist” to say that the set of all strawberries or all counties in Massachusetts exist (2004: 34). We do the same with other words – ‘object’, ‘entity’, ‘individual’, ‘sum’, etc. – depending on the context considered.

For Putnam, the new applications of particular words or concepts create “optional”, or “sub”, languages about various phenomena in the world within our naturally spoken languages – sometimes about the same phenomena and other times about different phenomena – and the fact that we can “translate” them into meaningfully equivalent descriptions demonstrates the correlation between different conceptual schemes, or at least the feasibility of the idea that they are not incompatible (2004: 43–49). Putnam thinks of “translation” here in a technical, or at least non-traditional, way to which I return in Section 3.2, but the suggestion here is that if conceptual relativity demonstrates the compatibility, or cognitive equivalence, of different conceptual schemes then it also explains, and therefore justifies, the affirmation of conceptual pluralism.

In addition to the example from set theory about the optional use of the word ‘exist’, Putnam gives mereology as an illustration – his main illustration – of a field of inquiry that contains optional languages exemplifying the reality of conceptual relativity and its justificatory power. In section 3.1, I explicate his account of Lezniewski’s mereological idea of ‘sums’ to make his case for conceptual relativity (e.g., 1992: 120–21; 2004: 34–40), and show that even if he is successful in his critique of metaphysical ontologies, and

in demonstrating its value for the tenability of conceptual pluralism, conceptual relativity still does not address the question of how the concepts embodying the radically different conceptual schemes came to be what they are. My idea of radical relativity addresses the ‘how’ question and illustrates its logical status as a justificatory context not only for affirming the radical pluralism suggested in Wittgenstein’s works, but also the ideas of radical pluralism suggested by Phillips and Putnam.

For the exception of brief references to Bernard Williams, Hans Reichenbach, Nelson Goodman, and Donald Davidson, all critiqued by Putnam, I do not discuss other philosophers who reference Wittgenstein as one methodological source for discussing radical pluralism. One practical reason for this limitation is simply to keep the size of this paper manageable. More importantly, I find Putnam and Phillips to be the most faithful to Wittgenstein’s philosophy among others who promote radical pluralism, particularly since they defend Wittgenstein against any charges of relativism and, as I show in the next section, fruitfully distinguish their versions of conceptual pluralism from relativism.

2. Radical Pluralism Is Not Relativism

In promoting radical pluralism and endorsing the idea of philosophy as a grammatical activity, Phillips recognizes that his position might be misunderstood by metaphysical realists as one that jettisons truth and espouses relativism (2007: 206). After all, the grammatical nature of philosophy he advocates stipulates that it is not an explanatory activity that adjudicates between people’s diverse conceptual schemes on the basis of a supposedly objective, external idea of truth to which beliefs within these schemes can be gauged. Philosophy simply analyzes the meaning of concepts on the basis of how people use these concepts in their daily lives (2007: 205). But without so-called objective truth, the metaphysical realists insist, relativism is the only alternative. Phillips objects that the philosophy he advocates, and the radical pluralism it arrives at, are in opposition to relativism.

For one thing, relativism is not a consistent position, Phillips argues, because it endorses an objective criterion of measurement that it simultaneously denies. Discussing this in the context of religion, but with application to other practices in human life, Phillips sees relativism to be arguing that “since philosophy cannot be an adjudicating measure between religions, it must hold that all religions are equally valid. Such a view is self-contradictory, since having argued that philosophy does not possess the measure by which religions are to be assessed, it proceeds to measure them by saying that they are all equal” (2007: 206). In other words, relativism denies the possibility of an adjudicating measure between different religious conceptions of the world – or, if addressing ethics, politics, and aesthetics, then between different conceptual schemes within these practices – and then proceeds to employ an adjudicating measure when stating they are equally valid.

Phillips also states that his philosophy relies on a method of analysis rather than a theory and, as such, it avoids the need to rely on external criteria of measurement to determine the truth of what is said. The concept of truth has a reality – i.e., meaning – in the same way that any other concept has a reality for Phillips, namely in the actual applications it takes in people’s lives (2007: 207). To give an example that illustrates Phillips’s point: think of how, when people claim they prefer a certain aesthetic arrangement over another in their place of residence, the truth of that claim will be reflected in how that place of residence is arranged. The same goes for truths pertaining to existential claims, such as in ethics and religion. In other words, truth does not have to be objective or external to all practices in order for it to be real, but is affirmed from within the variety of language-games in practice.

Like Phillips, Putnam is aware of the danger of reading relativism into his idea of conceptual pluralism, particularly since he uses the term ‘conceptual relativity’ to justify his affirmation of pluralism. His early statements against relativism entail denying that “every conceptual system is ... just as good as every other”, and he argued that certain criteria of judgment demonstrate how some conceptual schemes are better than others (1981: 49–54; see also 1987a: 77). Putnam did not mean by this to privilege some conceptual schemes

over others in dissimilar contexts since what he had in mind were different conceptual schemes within the same language-game – in this case, within an empirical language-game about people who think they can defy gravity through their bodily powers. “If anyone really believed that”, Putnam states, “and if they were foolish enough to pick a conceptual scheme that told them they could fly and to act upon it by jumping out of a window, they would, if they were lucky enough to survive, see the weakness of the latter view at once” (1981: 54).

Putnam held the same perspective against relativism in 1987: “Of course, our concepts are culturally relative; but it does not follow that the truth or falsity of what we say using those concepts is simply ‘determined’ by the culture” (1987b: 71). In 1995, Putnam gave a timely example to illustrate this point, one that pertains to the question as to whether or not it is true to claim that there are American prisoners of war still alive in Vietnam twenty years after the Vietnam War ended (1995: 34–35). The truth in this example was independent of how people thought about it, Putnam stated, whether these people were the relatives of the mentioned prisoners of war (who hoped their relatives are still alive) or other reasonable people who read good newspapers and got the impression that any prisoner of war would have been dead by that time.

Putnam also rejects reading Wittgenstein as a relativist, stating at one point that although he initially agreed with Saul Kripke that paragraphs 608–612 in *On Certainty* support traditional relativism – passages that center on the radical differences between accepting magic or science in one’s life – he later came to change his mind on what these passages meant (1992: 170–173). In my view, this reinterpretation, correct as it is, comes at the expense of appropriating Wittgenstein’s accounts of ‘world pictures’ and ‘agreement in reactions’ correctly when discussing conceptual pluralism. But, as with Phillips’s rejection of relativism, Putnam’s position is helpful in opening the door to accepting my idea of radical relativity because the latter also rejects relativism and its attribution to Wittgenstein.

From the perspective of radical relativity, the relations entailed in the process of concept formation pertain to how the concepts

forming people's conceptual schemes are related to the pluralistic reactions people develop vis-à-vis the world in which they exist. These relations do not pertain to any direct competition between different conceptual schemes and, therefore, bypass any potential threat of relativism. In the next section, I begin introducing the importance of radical relativity by discussing Putnam's examples of pluralism and relativity, followed by an argument as to why I think Putnam's own idea of conceptual relativity requires the kind of relativization suggested by radical relativity.

3. Relativizing Putnam's Relativity and Pluralism

3.1 Putnam on Conceptual Pluralism and Conceptual Relativity

I quoted Putnam above as someone who claims that it would be an illusion to think “there could be one sort of language game which could be sufficient for the description of all reality” (2004: 23). This quote from 2004 echoes the following statement from 1992: “there is not one unique ‘right version’ of the world, but rather a number of different ‘right versions’ of it”, all containing truths about the world (1992: 109, 120). In between these years, Putnam provides many other similar statements. Here is one from 1995: “there is no such thing as the world's own language, there are only the languages that we language users invent for our various purposes” and, therefore, “no one language game deserves the exclusive right to be called ‘true’ or ‘rational’ or ‘our first class conceptual system’, or the system that ‘limns the ultimate nature of reality’, or anything like that” (1995: 29; 38).

Putnam explicitly links the view of the existence of multiple, “right” versions of the world with his idea of conceptual pluralism, contrasting both to traditional forms of metaphysical realism that require us either “to find mysterious and supersensible objects behind our language games” (as is the case, supposedly, with Plato's inflationary account of reality), or to deflate and reduce the diverse “ontologies” (conceptual schemes) people have come to adopt into

“some single fundamental and universal ontology” they are said to share by necessity (2004: 17–22; 48–49). Putnam takes Plato as an inflationary ontologist and considers Democritus and Berkeley to be reductionistic ontologists whose attitude concerning the world is one of “There is nothing but ...” – “atoms and the void” in Democritus’s case, and “spirits and their ideas” in Berkeley’s case (2004: 21).

Most opponents of conceptual pluralism deny the intelligibility of the idea that there could be more than one true conception of the same phenomena in the world – which is what is usually meant by speaking of a true or right version of the world – and assume that the idea of a true world is intelligible independently of all human practices, discourses, and conceptual schemes (2004: 48). But even in cases where one of the opponents rejects the metaphysical claim that a ‘true world’ makes sense apart from all human ontologies, as is the case with Bernard Williams for example, Putnam objects to his giving preference to one conceptual scheme over others, at least when it comes to dissimilar interests in the world (e.g., in science and ethics). In spite of Williams’s objections to how Putnam presents his position (Williams 2000: 184–89), Putnam thinks that Williams presupposes an absolute conception of the world according to which the scientific worldview gives humanity a truer guidance regarding ‘the world’ than other world views, such as in ethics and religion (Putnam 1992: 80–107; 2001: 605–614).

The well-known example Putnam uses to illustrate conceptual pluralism beyond his theoretical explanations pertains to how the contents of a room could be equally described in the vocabulary of everyday language (e.g., how a chair, a desk, and a lamp are arranged in a particular way in a room in relation to one another) and the technical language of fundamental physics (e.g., how certain quantum particles and fields constituting the contents of the room are active in a particular way at a particular time) (2004: 48–49). Although Putnam states that these two descriptions are not “cognitively” equivalent due to the fact that “the field-particle description contains a great deal of information that is not translatable into the language of desks and chairs”, he also claims that they are not exactly incompatible (2004: 48). Pragmatically speaking, as mentioned above, Putnam thinks “we can use both of

these schemes without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology” (2004: 49).

But Putnam recognizes that he needs a justificatory context for affirming conceptual pluralism beyond theoretical explanations and actual examples of non-incompatibility between conceptual schemes. He employs the idea of conceptual relativity to do the job, an idea that he partially develops in response to Reichenbach’s verificationist model of cognitive equivalence. Putnam’s reasoning process here is that conceptual relativity shows the correct cognitive equivalence between certain conceptual schemes and, thus, debunks the idea that multiple conceptual schemes cannot contain beliefs and ideas that are equally true of the world. By implication, this is how conceptual pluralism is justifiably affirmed for Putnam, and he not only uses concrete examples to substantiate the justificatory power of conceptual relativity but also makes an argument for it by utilizing Wittgenstein’s idea of meaning as use.

Here is the typical example Putnam uses to illustrate conceptual relativity, a variation of which he also employs to counter the arguments of Donald Davidson and Nelson Goodman that conceptual pluralism involves either a logical contradiction (Davidson) or a commitment to affirming a plurality of worlds (Goodman) (1992: 119). The example has to do with mereology, the field created by the logician Stanislaw Lezniewski to account for the relations between parts and wholes. Putnam calls it “the calculus of parts and wholes” and tries to illustrate it mainly with examples from set theory, acknowledging that Lezniewski went beyond the traditional “philosophical restriction” on what counts as a ‘whole’ (Aristotle’s *ousia*) when discussing how to count ‘objects’, and developed the idea of a “mereological sum” to say that any two or more traditional objects could count as a ‘sum’ or a new ‘whole’ and treated, thus, as an additional ‘object’ (2004: 34–36).

To elaborate, if we consider a world where three ‘objects’ or ‘wholes’ in the Aristotelian sense of the word exist without the possibility of decomposing them into further objects (or into further “individuals”, as Putnam puts it) within that universe of discourse – “say three point particles, of which two have ‘spin up’ and one has ‘spin down’” (2004: 38), or simply three quantum atoms in quantum

field theory (1992: 121–122) – Lezniewski’s mereological model would allow us to “translate” or to mereologize (if I may coin a word here) the three “individuals” under consideration into seven objects/wholes in the original world of these three individuals. This is possible because the sum, or aggregate, of any two or three traditional individuals will count as an additional object in the mereological model. Thus, if we symbolize the three individuals as x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 , the sum of $x_1 + x_2$ will count as a third object/whole, and so is the sum of the following combinations: $x_1 + x_3$, $x_2 + x_3$, and $x_1 + x_2 + x_3$ (1992: 122; 2004: 39).

In the example about quantum atoms, Putnam is explicit in stating that the cognitive equivalence between the two ways of describing the specific quantum world under consideration pertains to “the same situation” – i.e., in the commonsensical sense of this expression (1992: 120–121). This is important to emphasize because Putnam intends his conceptual pluralism and conceptual relativity to be true not only of different areas of interest and inquiry regarding the world that, naturally, might not contradict, or come in conflict with one another – e.g., conceptual schemes dealing with unrelated ethical, political, and scientific issues – but also of different conceptual schemes within similar, or closely related, fields of interest or inquiry. His pragmatic point here is that people choose the language-game they want to use as a matter of sheer convention, a topic to which I return below.

What should be emphasized here is that the main difference between conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism centers on whether or not conceptual schemes that are equally expressive of phenomena in the world, whether the same or different phenomena, are translatable into cognitively equivalent optional languages. Conceptual pluralism does not entail this translatability but conceptual relativity does, which is the reason conceptual relativity has a foundational justificatory value for Putnam in that it implies pluralism for him (2004: 49). Put differently, Putnam takes conceptual relativity to demonstrate how the various phenomena it describes and explains match up with the various phenomena expressed and described in conceptual pluralism. But, regardless of whether or not one finds Putnam convincing, more needs to be said

about how he justifies conceptual relativity itself through optional languages that result from inter-translatable language-games. I do so in the next section in the context of his already mentioned idea of translation.

3.2 The Justificatory Power of “Translation”

The first point to make about Putnam’s idea of translation is that he does not use it in its traditional sense of finding a synonym or a paraphrase of the same meaning for a word or an expression (in the same or in another language), as for example when the Sanskrit word ‘samsara’ is translated as ‘the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth’. “In this sense of ‘meaning’”, Putnam states, “the criterion as to whether two expressions have the same meaning is translation practice” (2004: 40–41). Rather than adopt this traditional method of translation, which Putnam attributes to Donald Davidson’s way of dealing with meaning, Putnam relies on Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘meaning as use’. It is worth citing Putnam on this point in order to also show his indebtedness to Wittgenstein regarding his ideas of pluralism and relativity:

But there is another, perhaps looser, notion of meaning made famous by Wittgenstein, in which to ask for the meaning of a word is to ask how it is used, and explanations of how a word is used may often involve technical knowledge of a kind ordinary speakers do not possess, and may be of a kind that would never appear in a lexicon or be offered as translations. In short, there is a difference between elucidating the meaning of an expression by describing how it is used, and giving its meaning in the Davidsonian, or narrow linguistic, sense. (2004: 41)

Davidson’s “ordinary notion of meaning simply crumbles” in the pluralistic world of diverse conceptual schemes, Putnam states, and it cannot do the job of translation Davidson expects it to do (1992: 119). But Wittgenstein’s wider idea of ‘meaning as use’, where ‘use’ means the actual ‘application’ of a concept in people’s language-games, allows for the kind of translation that substantiates the validity of conceptual relativity and, by implication, conceptual pluralism. But how does Putnam translate the translatability he thinks is embedded in Wittgenstein’s idea of meaning as use?

Putnam argues that if we look to the use made of concepts when thinking of whether or not two optional languages are inter-translatable, the ability to give meaningful application to these concepts in the mentioned languages is that which determines the success of the translation and, therefore, the further determination that the two conceptual schemes are cognitively compatible. In the example of mereological ‘sums’, the optional language proposing them to be ‘objects’ or ‘wholes’ would need to make meaningful new applications (or ‘uses’ in the Wittgensteinian sense) of them. In other words, an application/use for the objects x_1+x_2 , x_2+x_3 , x_1+x_3 , and $x_1+x_2+x_3$ would need to be real in order for the determination that the cognitive systems containing mereological objects and ordinary objects are cognitively compatible. It is difficult to give actual examples without knowing the field of mereology but when Putnam seriously claims that the sum of his nose (x_1) and the Eiffel Tower (x_2) could be regarded “as a perfectly good object in mereology” (2004:36), one could imagine different aesthetic representations of that new object (x_1+x_2) – e.g., a painting of this object used, perhaps, on the cover of a book by Putnam on ethics without ontology or on conceptual relativity. This new meaningful ‘use’ of the ‘sum’ of the Eiffel Tower and Putnam’s nose would potentially allow two optional (and ordinary) languages about his work on conceptual relativity to be inter-translatable.³

Since examples from conceptual relativity show how multiple conceptual schemes can be inter-translatable and applicable to the world, bizarre as some of them may be, Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘meaning as use’ is better than Donaldson’s traditional idea of translation. Furthermore, in Wittgenstein’s context, the question as to which of the different ways of using the ideas of ‘existence’, ‘object’, ‘whole’, etc., is the correct one becomes “one that the meanings of the words in the natural language, that is, the language that we all speak and cannot avoid speaking every day, simply leaves open” (2004: 43). As long as a meaningful application of these words is successful, we have a correct use. Echoing Wittgenstein on the use

³ A philosophical discussion of his work would not produce an ordinary, optional language, but mereological descriptions and explanations would. Discussing this would require further considerable space and is something to engage in at a different occasion.

of the word ‘existence’ in this regard, Putnam states that this word does not have “a single absolutely precise use but a whole family of uses” (2004: 37; 1987b: 69–77).

What about Reichenbach’s verificationist model of cognitive equivalence? Why does Putnam reject it? Briefly put, two statements have the same meaning for Reichenbach and are, therefore, cognitively equivalent “if and only if they receive the same weight” in all physically observable situations (Putnam 1983: 26–45, particularly 27–28). By “the same weight” Reichenbach means the same numerical value of probability that people can attribute to the verifiability of statements (on the basis of the best inductive inferences, in observable situations, at the time the weighing takes place). Thus, a statement about certain observable shadows that are cast upon the walls of a translucent cube (by objects outside of the cube) could hypothetically get the same numerical value of probability that a statement about what these shadows are gets – e.g., that there are birds outside the cube casting the mentioned shadows) (Putnam 1983: 28–32). If this should be possible, the two statements are then said to be equivalent in their cognitive value and can be “translated” to mean the same thing.

I think Putnam would have agreed with Reichenbach’s method of translation or, at least, he would have considered this method closer to his idea of translation than Davidson’s. But he thought that Reichenbach’s model entails the opposite of what it claims to demonstrate and, therefore, that its success is questionable. For example, Putnam argues that the two mentioned statements about birds and their shadows can be shown to be non-equivalent even when they have the same weight or numerical value of probability – e.g., when they are confirmed to different degrees rather than to the same degree through observable situations. It might turn out, one imagines Putnam to say, that not all the shadows were those of birds. This is not an issue of getting the meaning of what is said right, but Putnam’s critique of Reichenbach reveals how highly he values getting the question of translation and cognitive equivalence right.

Putnam also distinguishes his account of conceptual pluralism from that of Nelson Goodman to show, among other things, that his own idea of conceptual relativity is feasible. He states, for

example, that Goodman's acceptance of conceptual pluralism leads him to argue that either there is no world at all or else we simultaneously live in a multiplicity of worlds created by us (1992: 119, 109). Putnam describes Goodman's position as a form of irrealism and argues that his conceptual relativity does not lead in that direction. He denies not only that the world is created by us but also that the existence of different "versions" of phenomena in the world, particularly incompatible versions, must entail the existence of different worlds rather than the same world (1992: 109–114). Although Putnam agrees with Goodman that it does not make sense to speak of how things are independently of human experience or conceptual schemes (1992: 110), describing the latter view as a form of "philosophical parochialism" (2004: 51, 33), he claims that, pragmatically speaking, the question as to which one of several cognitively equivalent conceptual schemes is the "really correct" one is superfluous.

As I stated above, for Putnam it is a mere convention as to which optional language one decides to use. I agree with his critique of Davidson and Goodman, but this critique does not take account of how both conceptual pluralism and conceptual relativity came to be what they are. Whether or not conceptual relativity entails the existence of different worlds rather than one world when no contradiction is committed in affirming pluralism, and whether or not the right way of translating different optional languages into cognitively compatible ways is achievable, the need to look at the process that leads to the formation of concepts constituting people's radically pluralistic conceptual schemes is still bypassed in these situations. Thus, Putnam's pragmatic account of relativity is not sufficient to justify the affirmation of his or Wittgenstein's forms of radical pluralism. In the next section I provide an interpretation of Wittgenstein that gives further support for my critique of Putnam's account.

3.3 World Pictures, Conventions, and Conceptual Relativity

Putnam suggests that when multiple, cognitively-equivalent, conceptual schemes that express, describe, explain, or make sense of the world exist, the ones ultimately adopted are chosen as a matter

of sheer convention. His language is very explicit on this point – “literally a matter of convention” (2004: 43). Furthermore, this would be a convention, according to him, in the same way that deciding to drive on either the left or right side of the road is a convention, a matter of solving a certain kind of coordination problem as David Lewis suggested (2004: 44). Putnam does not include the laws of logic in his assessment of what counts as a conventional conceptual scheme, but why would he think all the other schemes are adopted as a matter of convention?

I mentioned above that Putnam relies heavily on Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘meaning as use’ to justify his notion of conceptual relativity, but he also employs Wittgenstein’s further ideas of ‘world pictures’ and ‘agreement in reactions’ to try to substantiate his view that the different conceptual schemes expressing people’s radically pluralistic lives are the upshot of agreed-upon conventions. Putnam’s overall framework is pragmatic and although he does not consider Wittgenstein a pragmatist in the strict sense of the word, he thinks his own pragmatic position on conventions gets further support from Wittgenstein’s views on world pictures and agreement in reactions.⁴ Putnam explicitly states, for example, that conceptual pluralism is a form of “pragmatic pluralism” (2004: 21) and insists that this pluralism is rooted in asking about the difference that choosing one optional language over another makes – e.g., choosing to count mereological sums as objects (2004: 38). From this perspective, as long as a certain practice, a certain language-game or conceptual scheme, has application, this fact must be seen as the outcome of a pragmatic choice or convention (2004: 37). Putnam thinks that Wittgenstein would agree with this pragmatic perspective since he – i.e., Wittgenstein – takes the consensus about any

⁴ Putnam states that Wittgenstein shares the following features with pragmatism: (1) giving logical primacy to practice when philosophizing, and (2) seeing philosophy as having a moral aim akin to the way John Dewey and William James thought of philosophy as normative (Putnam 1995: 27–56). I agree that Wittgenstein gives practice logical primacy when looking for the meaning of what is said in people’s discourses, but I do not think he would endorse the moral aim of philosophy, at least not as a direct aim. But, as I proceed to show in the essay, my concern here is with the question of whether or not adopting certain world pictures (conceptual schemes) as a matter of pragmatic convention, due, as it turns out, to giving practices logical primacy, makes sense. I argue that it does not.

conceptual scheme to have been the result of conventional premeditation (e.g., 2004: 44).

As I show next, Putnam's reading of Wittgenstein on 'agreement in reactions' is mistaken. For Wittgenstein, all conventional forms of consensus are the outcome of a non-premeditated, non-arbitrary form of consensus. Putnam is right to dismiss, together with Wittgenstein, the metaphysical worry about whether or not things such as mathematical and ethical 'objects' exist beyond the application they have in people's lives, and also the idea that we are connected to these objects in a causal manner. But Putnam's reasoning for the latter objection is that "[a]ll causal explanations are unaffected by the choice between these formalizations" (2004: 46–47), revealing a perspective on choices and conventions that Wittgenstein does not hold.

In *On Certainty*, for example, Wittgenstein portrays world-pictures as ordinary systems of reference that reflect, and inform, how one looks at the world and one's place in it in various and irreducible ways (1969: §§93–96, 144, 167, 222–225, and 608–610). His focus is typically on the differences between scientific and religious/magical systems of reference, as he does for example in paragraphs 608–612, but his analysis of these paragraphs is equally applicable to economic, ethical, aesthetic, political, and other ordinary systems of reference. The discussion in paragraphs 608–612 centers on the difference between the practice of consulting an oracle for guidance in life and the practice of consulting science, and the pluralistic point Wittgenstein makes there is that one cannot claim that the scientific worldview is truer to the world than the magical worldview relative to an objective frame of reference. "Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this 'wrong' aren't we using our language-game as a base from which to combat theirs?" (1969: §609). All matters of truth are determined relative to one's own language-games of truth and rationality, Wittgenstein suggests, and he does not argue that the language-games are arrived at through conventions. "I said I would 'combat' the other man — but wouldn't I give him reasons?", he asks in paragraph 612. Language-games are always the products of concepts that emerged non-arbitrarily for

Wittgenstein, albeit in a contingent and non-causal way as I further explain below.

Wittgenstein's various examples of cultural differences, including the ones about oracle and science consulting, indicate that he wants to emphasize the fact that people in different historical periods, or in different parts of the world, express and live in accordance with different world pictures. If a conversation ensues about which worldview is right and which one is wrong, and one's explanatory reasons cannot convince another human being with their veracity, then attempts at persuasion are the only alternative (1969: §§262, 612). Putnam agrees with this point in Wittgenstein because he takes the kind of persuasion Wittgenstein has in mind here as something pragmatic, not intellectual. Using an example involving the Azande, Putnam states that, for Wittgenstein, it is not necessary to reconcile the oracle-consulting and physics-consulting pictures of seeing the world:

I take Wittgenstein here to be simply telling us what is the case; that when we try to argue with, say, the Azande, there are times when we cannot find reasons that are reasons for them; the world views are so totally different that we sometimes find that in an argument with an intelligent Azande we cannot resort to ordinary argument based on premises that we share with the Azande but have to resort to persuasion. (1995: 55)

Putnam's pluralism is a recognition of the fact that there are genuine differences between people in regard to how they see the world and what they consider important in their lives. The world pictures that are reflective of these regulative differences suggest not only that the idea of an absolute world picture, or an absolutely correct conceptual scheme, is an illusion but also that agreements in reactions are not universal when it comes to non-empirical matters.

It is therefore puzzling that Putnam thinks Wittgenstein would find oracle-consulting a mistaken practice whereas physics-consulting the correct practice (1995: 53–55; 1992: 170–73). This cannot be a good reading of Wittgenstein even if Wittgenstein might personally find himself combatting the person who consults an oracle in regard to cognitive issues related to the physical world. Wittgenstein cannot be a pluralist if he thinks that everyone would

fight the oracle-consulting person in order to be rational. Putnam's reading of him as a pluralist who allows for preferring one practice over another within as dissimilar practices as science and magic seems to be rooted in his understanding of conceptual schemes as the outcome of sheer conventions, and that conventions explain the absence of universality in agreements in reactions.

Rush Rhees makes sense in this context when he argues that Wittgenstein's question about whether it is a mistake for someone from an oracle-consulting tribe to consult an oracle is simply the outcome of wanting "to bring out the misuse of 'mistake' there" (2003: 80). For Rhees, Wittgenstein aims "to counter the idea that it would be reasonable to look for a justification of our trust in physics" (2003: 80), which means that Wittgenstein would also counter the idea that oracle-consulting people need to justify their trust in oracles. The suggestion that Wittgenstein would think anyone would be mistaken in consulting an oracle, or that conventions have anything to do with accepting one worldview over another, does not make sense in this context.

Whether or not Putnam's take on Wittgenstein here is the result of a direct misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's remarks on 'agreement in reactions' is not clear, but the misunderstanding exists and I think it contributes to Putnam's mis-identifying, or at least ignoring, the essential context for justifying the affirmation of conceptual pluralism. Since Putnam focuses only on agreements in convention rather than agreements in reactions in the way Wittgenstein meant the latter, or, if Putnam reads agreements of reactions as agreements of convention, his interpretation of what Wittgenstein meant by world pictures is carried out independently of how Wittgenstein relates world pictures to the true sense of agreement in reactions and the process of concept formation. As I show in the next section, agreements of reactions are agreements in what Wittgenstein describes as forms of life, the everyday practices that dictate how to read these reactions and the conceptual schemes formed from them. If anything, this is what it means to give logical primacy to practice for Wittgenstein, and Putnam would have benefitted from paying attention to the link between world pictures and the processes of concept formation and agreements in the form

of life. Another way of putting this is to say that Putnam’s conceptual relativity and conceptual pluralism could use some relativization by means of radical relativity, which I defend in the next section.

4. Defending Radical Relativity

4.1 The Fear of a Genetic Theory of Language

In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein puts forward the following question: “If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?” (1958: 230). Wittgenstein clearly states that certain facts of nature, “the very general facts of nature” as he also calls them on the same page, function as “the basis of grammar” and, therefore, could explain how concepts form. Why should he then be interested “in grammar” – the analysis of the meaning of concepts – rather than in these explanatory facts, Wittgenstein asks? His response is the following:

Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and the very general facts of nature. (Such facts as mostly do not strike us because of their generality.) But our interest does not fall back upon these *possible causes* of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history—since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes. (1958: 230; italics mine)

This response suggests that explanations rooted in discovering the possible causes of the emergence of concepts are things in which the natural scientist, not the philosopher, would be interested. The philosopher works with concepts, be they in reference to factual or fictitious states of affairs, Wittgenstein suggests, analyzing and elucidating their meanings.

Wittgenstein’s response explains why Phillips reads into him clear antagonism towards attempts to seek an explanatory basis for people’s radically different discourses and conceptual schemes. But Wittgenstein’s antagonism needs to be put in the right context. I italicized the words ‘possible causes’ in the above citation to emphasize that Wittgenstein’s antagonism is limited to employing

causal explanations beyond explicating the meaning of concepts, rather than toward any explanation whatsoever. Causal explanations are one-sided for Wittgenstein, and to seek the possible causal rootedness of concepts in the natural world is to be engaged in what Lars Hertzberg (1992: 26) aptly describes as an “anthropological” explanation that is too narrowly focused on causes and effects. Wittgenstein writes: “The insidious thing about the causal point of view is that it leads us to say: ‘Of course, it had to happen like that’. Whereas we ought to think: it may have happened like that – and also in many other ways” (1980: 37e). Wittgenstein’s critique of Frazer demonstrates that he was vehemently opposed to this kind of anthropological thinking (Wittgenstein 1993), and the same attitude is clear from his discussions of the grammar of ‘color’.

In discussing colors, Wittgenstein states the following: “We do not want to establish a theory of colour (neither a physiological one nor a psychological one), but rather the logic of colour concepts. And this accomplishes what people have often unjustly expected of a theory” (1978: §22). Wittgenstein’s position on color is one of the reasons that Phillips claims: “What fixes our concept of colour [...] is the way we react to colours, reactions which show an agreement in our judgements. This is not an agreement we made with each other, or arrive at, but one that is shown in the judging itself” (2003: 137). This last point is important in that it correctly portrays the non-arbitrary and non-conventional nature of agreements in reactions. To say, as Phillips does, that these agreements are ones shown in real acts of judging is to say they are agreements in the form of life, as Wittgenstein would have put it (1959: §241), rather than agreements of convention.

In defending radical relativity, however, I do not advocate looking for a reality that lies, genetically, behind the concepts. I take Wittgenstein to suggest that people’s reactions to the natural world, and to other events in their lives, constitute one of the logical conditions for the possibility of concepts and, therefore, for justifying the reality of the radical pluralism expressive of people’s concepts, conceptual schemes, and world pictures. Radical relativity simply elucidates the grammar of the radical relation between concepts and their rootedness in people’s reactions to various

phenomena in the world. Wittgenstein would have called the kind of explanation that radical relativity provides “grammatical explanation”, an expression he uses in the context of a series of remarks on aesthetic reactions that deal with discomfort, as I show next.

When discussing aesthetics, Wittgenstein is explicit in stating that his ultimate aim in this context is to distinguish aesthetic explanations from causal explanations (1967: II, §38). Giving aesthetic discomfort as one of several examples that helps make the mentioned distinction, he explains that “To say: ‘I feel discomfort and know the cause’ is entirely misleading because ‘know the cause’ normally means something quite different” than tracing the feeling of discomfort to its source (1967: II, §16). Whatever sensible explanation one gives for aesthetic discomfort, it cannot be based on causal reasoning for Wittgenstein. As he also puts it, “‘I feel discomfort and know the cause’ makes it sound as if there were two things going on in my soul – discomfort and knowing the cause” (1967: II, §16). But Wittgenstein does not think two things are going on in the case of aesthetic discomfort, and he invokes the ordinary circumstances under which people express their discomfort to further illustrate what he means.

In ordinary circumstances, Wittgenstein states, “the word ‘cause’ is hardly ever used at all” and people use the words ‘why?’ and ‘because’ instead (1967: II, §17). When Wittgenstein finally comes to the expression “grammatical explanation”, he writes: “We have here a kind of discomfort which you may call ‘directed’, e.g. if I am afraid of you, my discomfort is directed”, and it is here, in replacing causality with directedness, or with vectorness, if you will, that Wittgenstein adds: “We have given, as it were, a grammatical explanation [in saying, the feeling is ‘directed’]” (1967: II, §18). The grammatical explanation here does not pertain to a cause that explains the reality of discomfort, but is something that resides in the directed responses people find themselves having in some of their aesthetic reactions. Invoking this directedness is as crucial for explicating the grammar of ‘discomfort’ in this context, as well as for affirming the radical plurality of ways in which people experience and speak of their discomfort in ordinary circumstances. Phillips and

Putnam ignore this justificatory context, and Phillips in particular fears a genetic theory of language that need not arise.

Another relevant point to mention here in support of Wittgenstein's openness to investigating the grammar of the rootedness of concepts in people's reactions to their worlds is his understanding that the variety of people's actual language-games is something that belongs to their natural history, just as walking, eating, drinking, and playing are (1958: §25). Thus, it makes sense to argue that knowing how the concepts in these language-games came to be what they are would be helpful not only for understanding them but also for justifying the variety of their uses in the various conceptual schemes expressive of people's world views. But more needs to be said about the question of agreement in reactions and its link with concept formation if the idea of radical relativity is to be taken seriously. I do so in the next section, explicating why when Wittgenstein links the idea of agreement in reactions with the idea of the origins of language-games, he needs not be risking offering a genetic theory of language. I also show the importance and justificatory relevance of the fact of the non-arbitrariness of concepts for affirming radical pluralism.

4.2 Wittgenstein on Concept Formation and Agreement in Reactions

The example of aesthetic discomfort I discussed in the previous section illustrates not only what Wittgenstein means by reactions that lead to the formation of concepts, which he describes as primitive reactions, but also the importance of looking at that context to see how the grammars of certain concepts develop. My next example, one to which Hertzberg pays fruitful attention in his attack on anthropological explanations of aesthetic reactions, helps illustrate this point further.

When someone sees a door badly designed for a house, Wittgenstein remarks, that person might feel that the door is "too high" or "too low" and might ask for adjustments until he or she sees it in the right place ("Higher, higher, higher," the response might come, until "... oh, all right!" (1967: II, §§9–10). As with the above example of the directed discomfort, here, too, one might feel

aesthetic discomfort, and Wittgenstein likens this instinctive feeling to the primal reaction of taking away one's hand from a hot plate (1967: II, §15). Both reactions, and the gesturing to indicate the presence of pain in others (1959: §§142, 244, 281), as well as smiling and rubbing one's stomach (1967: I, §7), are the kinds of primal reactions that Wittgenstein describes in his well-known statement about the origins of language-games: "The origin and the primitive form of the language-game is a reaction; only from this can the more complicated forms grow. Language – I want to say – is a refinement; 'in the beginning was the deed'" (1980: 31e; also 1969: §475).

There are various interpretations of how to understand Wittgenstein's intentions in the statement about the origins of language-games, as well as in other remarks about concept formation and primal reactions (e.g., Malcolm: 66–86; Rhees 1997: 1–14; Phillips 1997: 159–174; Hertzberg: 24–39). When Phillips worries that Wittgenstein might be taken to be offering a genetic theory of language in the reference to tracing concepts to the natural world, for example, he thinks Norman Malcolm makes this genetic link based on Wittgenstein's remark about the origins of language-games. I can only add that I do not think Wittgenstein considers primal reactions to be causal or universal in such a way that all, or most, people would react to events in the world in the same way when these events occur in similar circumstances. For example, Wittgenstein rejects the suggestion of the historian Ernest Renan that, in contrast to people in the modern era, all the ancient people of Israel had the gift of seeing the natural world with wonder – "As though lightning were more commonplace or less astounding today than 2000 years ago" (1980: 5e). Even if it is true that the ancient Israelites did wonder at all the things around them – "Birth, sickness, death, madness, catalepsy, sleep, dreams" – "it's false to say: Of course, these primitive peoples couldn't help wondering at everything", as if there is something in the world that forces them to wonder at everything (1980: 5e).

The point here is that if primal reactions are the origins of the various concepts and language-games in people's lives, and if they are not meant as genetic foundations for the conceptual schemes guiding people's practices, then it is the mustness of these primal

reactions that Wittgenstein rejects, not the grammatical role they play in explicating the meaning of already established concepts. There are enough indications in Wittgenstein's reflections and analyses that people's agreements in primal reactions – and in more complex reactions that derive from these primal reactions – constitute a grammatical context to consider when also justifying the attestations to radical pluralism. As I mentioned above, agreements in reactions are not ones of opinion that can be contested for their veracity due to conventional use, as Putnam wrongly thought, but agreements in people's deeds. Wittgenstein rhetorically stated this point as follows:

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?”—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinion but in form of life. (1958: §241)

The emphasis on describing agreements in reactions as agreements in deeds within people's diverse forms of life should help us remember that the logic of these agreements entails something non-arbitrary even if these agreements are not based on causal reactions. In turn, this assists in solidifying the suggestion that concepts are logically dependent, rather than causally dependent, on the existence of reactions to the facts of the natural world and to other phenomena in people's lives. One expects reactions that are rooted in a causal context – e.g., instinctively pulling the hand away from a hot plate or squinting in bright light – to generate similar and uniform concepts (in this case, the concepts of ‘pulling the hand away’ and ‘squinting’). By implication, this suggests that the radical diversity within the pluralistically aesthetic, ethical, religious, and other existentially-relevant concepts is better explained by an acknowledgment of a non-causal link between concepts and the natural world. The latter concepts cannot be reduced to identical meanings whereas concepts rooted in reactions to causal influences could be reduced to similar, if not identical, meanings. Neither type of concepts is arbitrary, but only the concepts that are not causally rooted in the world could be radically different, as I further show next, and, furthermore, they are the ones constitutive of the radical pluralism implied in Wittgenstein's philosophy.

4.3 Radical Pluralism and the Non-Arbitrariness of Concepts

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein compares concepts to styles of painting and asks whether either is arbitrary: “For is even our style of painting arbitrary? [...] Can we choose one at pleasure? (The Egyptian, for instance). Is it a mere question of pleasing and ugly?” (1958: 230). The analogy that Wittgenstein creates between concepts and styles of painting is important because it exemplifies the non-arbitrary nature of concepts, on the one hand, and their irreducibility to one conceptual scheme to which all other schemes must be collapsed. In the same way that it does not make sense to insist on one style of painting that is better or truer to how things are than other styles of painting, conceptual schemes and world pictures that are composed of non-arbitrary concepts cannot be reduced to one scheme or picture that can be said to be better or truer to the world than other schemes or pictures. This is further confirmed by Wittgenstein’s claim that there is no necessity about the existence of the particular concepts that people actually possess – i.e., in opposition to other concepts:

if anyone believes that certain concepts are the absolutely correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize – then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him. (1958: 216)

I read Wittgenstein here to be rejecting the idea of “the absolutely correct concepts” while still affirming that had the facts of nature been different than they are now, it would have been possible for us to have different concepts than we now do. This would be the reason, in fact, for rejecting the insistence on the metaphysical necessity of some concepts that had to come about for one causal reason or another. Certainly, as Rhees suggested, Wittgenstein would not be ready himself to say that the actual process of concept formation would have to be different had the general facts of nature been otherwise (2003: 12), but the concepts themselves would most likely have been different. After all, if gravity on earth was different than it is now, similar to that on the moon, for example, or on some other planet with less gravity than on earth, the concepts we

associate with walking, running, flying, and sitting would have been different than they are now, should they arise at all.

More importantly, we see here the grammatical relevance of tracing concepts to their sources in people's reactions to the natural world. Phillips comes close to endorsing this relevance in his discussions of Simone Weil's concept of God, but stops short from doing so because of the mentioned worry about producing a genetic theory of language. He agrees with her, for instance, that the concept of God "is formed via a hunger for an absolute goodness and love which cannot be satisfied by any object, by anything that exists", describing this hunger as something primal (2000: 215). But he objects to Weil's narrow insistence that there is only one way to speak of God (i.e., as absolute goodness, love, and grace) without committing idolatry. In pointing out that Weil's insistence blinded her from seeing the logical parity between all theistic references to God – i.e., that there are many legitimate ways of speaking of the divine (2000: 218–219; 223) – Phillips accepts, or at least presupposes, that how these legitimate references came to be what they are sheds logical light on the radical plurality of theistic grammars and, therefore, on the justification of affirming radical pluralism.

5. Concluding Remarks

What I tried to show in this paper is that the affirmation of radical pluralism – the irreducibility of the plurality of people's conceptual schemes to some underlying commonality of interests and beliefs – cannot be fully justified without considering the radically relative link that exists between concepts and people's reactions to the world. Putnam and Phillips make a traditional move in their positive use of Wittgenstein's philosophy – to look at the grammar of concepts in their ordinary uses in order to elucidate what these concepts mean, and to gauge what logical implications one can draw from them regarding pluralism. I argued that this traditional move is insufficient to render the affirmation of radical pluralism fully justifiable, and that

even Putnam's conceptual relativity leaves the affirmation of radical pluralism without full justification.

Wittgenstein wants to avoid theories about grammar that are rooted in causal ways of thinking about concepts and the world and, thus, to dissuade philosophers from thinking that there are such things as the absolutely correct concepts that provide the best, most authentic, and most objective world pictures. Phillips's cautious attitude about Wittgenstein's philosophy reflects these and other legitimate concerns, and it ought to be heeded by philosophers who hurry to adopt metaphysical and other theoretical foundations regarding issues of meaning and truth. But, as I have shown, the grammatical benefits of pursuing an understanding of the radical relation between concepts and people's reactions to the world cannot be ignored. I suggested that it is possible to extract from Wittgenstein's discussion of the ideas of world pictures, concept formation, and agreement in reactions a grammatical picture of relativity that provides the affirmation of radical pluralism with strong logical foundations. The examples of the analogy with styles of painting and Wittgenstein's use of the foundational language of 'grammatical explanation' were meant to give further support for my argument.

I have not attempted to justify any support for radical pluralism on the basis of the idea that primal reactions to the world are causally necessitated by the latter. If anything, my argument shows that when empirical disagreements in people's biological and physical reactions to the world are obviously absent, it should also be obvious that radical disagreements occur in their religious, ethical, aesthetic, political, and other normative language-games. The explanation for this is simple, I argued: we expect uniformity, even some universality, if all of our natural reactions to the world are based on a causal dependency on that world, which is not the case in religion, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and other normative practices.

The methodological importance entailed in philosophical analysis and contemplation is important for the affirmation of radical pluralism, but this methodology does not fully address the logical foundations of how people's diverse concepts came to be what they are. The radical relativity entailed in the contingent, non-causal, and

yet non-arbitrary relation between concepts and the natural world addresses these foundations, and it opens the door to seeing a different kind of dependence that allows radical pluralism to make the sense it does.

References

- Conant, J., 1990. "Introduction". In: H. Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. J. Conant. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, xv–lxxiv.
- Hertzberg, L., 1992. "Primitive Reactions – Logic or Anthropology?" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 17, 24–39.
- Malcolm, N., 1995. "Wittgenstein: The Relation of Language to Instinctive Behavior". In: G. H. von Wright, ed., *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays 1978–1989*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 66–86.
- Phillips, D.Z., 1993. "Primitive Reactions and the Reactions of Primitives". In: D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 103–122.
- Phillips, D.Z., 1997. "In the Beginning was the Proposition, In the Beginning was the Choice, In the Beginning was the Dance". *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 21.1, 159–174.
- Phillips, D.Z., 2000. *Recovering Religious Concepts: Closing Epistemic Divides*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Phillips, D.Z., 2003. "Afterword: Rhees on Reading on Certainty". In: R. Rhees, *Wittgenstein's On Certainty*, ed. D.Z. Phillips. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 133–82.
- Phillips, D.Z., 2004. *Religion and Friendly Fire: Examining Assumptions in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*. Burlington, VA: Ashgate.
- Phillips, D.Z., 2007. "Philosophy's Radical Pluralism in the House of Intellect". In: A. F. Sanders, ed., *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion: Questions and Responses*. Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 197–212.
- Putnam, H., 1981. *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, H., 1983. "Equivalence". In: H. Putnam, *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. 3. *Realism and Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 26–45.
- Putnam, H., 1987a. *The Many Faces of Realism*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Putnam, H., 1987b. "Truth and Convention: On Davidson's Refutation of Conceptual Relativity". *Dialectica* 4:1–2, 69–77.
- Putnam, H., 1992. *Renewing Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, H., 1995. *Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Putnam, H., 2000. "Rethinking Mathematical Necessity". In A. Crary and R. Read, eds. *The New Wittgenstein*. London and New York: Routledge, 218–31.

- Putnam, H., 2001. “Reply to Bernard Williams’ ‘Philosophy as a humanistic discipline’”. *Philosophy* 76:4, 605–14.
- Putnam, H., 2004. *Ethics without Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Putnam, H., 2008. “Wittgenstein and Realism”. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16:1, 3–16
- Rhees, R., 1997. “Language as Emerging from Instinctive Behaviour”. *Philosophical Investigation* 20:1, 1–14.
- Rhees, R., 2003. *Wittgenstein’s On Certainty*. D.Z. Phillips, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1958. *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1967. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*. C. Barrett, ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1969. *On Certainty*. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, eds. New York: Harper & Row.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1978. *Remarks on Colour*. G.E.M. Anscombe, ed. L. McAlister and M. Schattle, trans. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1980. *Culture and Value*. G.H. von Wright, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1993. “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*”. In: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*, J. Klagge and A. Norman, eds. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 119–155.

Biographical Note

Randy Ramal is an Independent Scholar who taught for several years in either full time or visiting professorship positions at the following universities: University of Zurich, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont School of Theology, University of La Verne, and Pitzer College. Most recently, he was a Visiting Researcher at the Center for Ethics, University of Zurich (2017), and at the Claremont School of Theology (2018). His latest publications involving Wittgenstein include “On How Not to ‘Sublime’ God’s Perfection” (in *The Question of God’s Perfection*, eds. Yoram Hazoni and Dru Johnson. Brill, 2018) and “On Not Seeing What Lies Open to View in Wittgenstein and Whitehead: A Response to Jerry H. Gill and Richard McDonough” (*Process Studies* 46.1, 2017, 25–51).