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## Pragmatism and Political Practice: Language, Skills and Institutions\*

Pragmatismo y práctica política: destrezas del lenguaje y las instituciones

Pragmatismo e prática política: habilidades da linguagem e as instituições

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### Abstract:

This article aims to show the importance of the pragmatic conception of language proposed by Wittgenstein in relation to his philosophy of action, as well as the possibilities it offers to political theory, by explaining the impact and influence that his theory had in some of his readers. This is particularly important for the notion of political representation, which emerges as a linguistic practice of rule-based behavior in terms of giving and asking for reasons. This idea will be reinforced by a reconstruction of Wittgenstein's arguments applied to a social instance a work that is done by many of his readers and commentators, specifically Searle (1969, 1995, 2010), Brandom (1994, 2001) and Mouffe (2000, 2011, 2014). Such instance would be limited in this text, by making use of Rawls' (2001) idea of public reason through the lens of this socially conceived Wittgenstein's pragmatism. As a relevant conclusion, the role of the early teaching environment of political norms is fundamental in the scope of the proposal in terms of further developments.

**Keywords:** political philosophy, philosophy of action, skills, community, praxis.

### Resumen:

El objetivo de este artículo mostrar la importancia de la concepción pragmática del lenguaje propuesta por Wittgenstein en relación con su filosofía de la acción y también las posibilidades que ofrece para la teoría política, explicando el impacto y la influencia que su teoría tuvo en algunos de sus lectores. Esto es importante en particular para la noción de representación política que surge como práctica lingüística de la conducta basada en las reglas, en términos de dar y pedir razones. Esta idea será reforzada con una reconstrucción de los argumentos de Wittgenstein aplicados al aspecto social de una obra que es hecha por muchos de los lectores y comentaristas, especialmente Searle (1969, 1995, 2010), Brandom (1994, 2001) y Mouffe (2000, 2011, 2014). Tal aspecto sería limitado en este texto haciendo uso de la idea de Rawls (año) de la razón pública a través de la lente de este pragmatismo de Wittgenstein con concepción social. Como conclusión relevante, el papel del entorno de la enseñanza temprana de las normas políticas es fundamental para el alcance de la propuesta en términos de buscar más desarrollos.

**Palabras clave:** filosofía política, filosofía de la acción, destrezas, comunidad, praxis.

### Resumo:

O objetivo deste artigo é mostrar a importância da concepção pragmática da linguagem proposta por Wittgenstein em relação à sua filosofia da ação e mesmo as possibilidades que ela oferece para a teoria política, explicando o impacto e a influência que sua teoria teve sobre alguns dos seus leitores. Isso é importante em particular para a noção de representação política que emerge como prática linguística de comportamento baseado nas regras, em termos de dar e pedir razões. Essa ideia será reforçada com uma reconstrução dos argumentos de Wittgenstein aplicados ao aspecto social de uma obra que é feita por muitos dos leitores e comentaristas, especialmente Searle (1969, 1995, 2010), Brandom (1994, 2001) e Mouffe (2000, 2011, 2014). Tal aspecto seria limitado neste texto fazendo uso da ideia de razão pública de Rawls (ano) através da lente deste pragmatismo de Wittgenstein com concepção social. Como conclusão relevante, o papel do ambiente de ensino precoce das normas políticas é fundamental para o alcance da proposta em termos de procurar mais desenvolvimentos.

**Palavras-chave:** filosofia política, filosofia da ação, habilidades, comunidade, práxis.

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## Introduction

To think of language as a praxis means to understand it as a complex process of rule-following behavior. This is nothing but an elaborate name for a game and so, Wittgenstein would continue, movements within the game and practices of rule-following lie deep as the background of our everyday life.

Following Goethe, Wittgenstein (1969) would not only affirm that “at the beginning was the deed” (p. 402) but, also, that “it lies in the ground of any language game” (p. 204), i.e., the possibility for humans to learn and accept different actors and actions that determine the domain of a valid action, decision or whatever our linguistic performance might produce. On a closer look, the idea is that only empirical (in the sense of an authoritative evaluated correction) experience can “confirm or deny the validity of our learning” (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 472); thus making praxis as the evaluation of rule-following behavior the foundations of language.

This context of *rule-following* frames individual preferences, which serve as reliable proof of the command and ability to use ordinary language. Reasonable action would involve the articulation of the linguistic performance with some sort of authority that arises from linguistic competence: Wittgenstein would describe such ability of rule-following as “analogous to obeying an order. One is trained to do so, and one reacts to an order in a particular way” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 206). If the latter is sound, Wittgenstein would continue to ask, what happens when someone reacts differently? What happens if an individual reacts in one way, and another reacts in a completely different manner? How can an individual evidence his mastering of a linguistic universe and how—in a sense, leaving Wittgenstein’s main objective aside—does this relate to our (public, social) institutions?

To answer this question, this article emphasizes the importance that Wittgenstein’s thought has for the philosophy of action, specifically, political philosophy, under the assumption that political action can be best described by the notions of linguistic community, association, ways of life, rule-following and discourse. Therein, Rawls’ (2001) idea of public reason serves as a basis into which the clarification of Wittgenstein would be mostly fruitful.

But, in order to do so, the strong assertion that Wittgenstein was not even remotely interested in politics or that he cannot be remembered as an author dedicated to political thought must be overcome. In this line, edited works such as *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy* by Cressida Heyes (2003), express the idea of the possible horror that Wittgenstein would have felt to know that his work has been incorporated in political or similar projects.

The aforementioned idea is commonly accepted and has its grounds in Wittgenstein’s own thought: he was radically skeptical towards political theory. But it is shown by some authors (Apel, 1994; Habermas, 1999; Rorty, 2007; Alexy, 2001; Skinner, 2001; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Mouffe, 2000; Williams, 2009), that his importance and impact on the philosophy of action or political philosophy cannot be disregarded. For instance, Mouffe (2000) highlighted Wittgenstein’s work when rethinking language from a political perspective. Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) used the idea of language, ways of life, discourses, linguistic universes and rules to widen Wittgenstein’s ideas to the development of how action is thought. (It might be, as it was often the case, that he thought of the applications of his ideas in the social and political instances as trivial, or even self-evident).

This fact can be asserted despite the efforts made by those authors stating that there is no solid link nor a proper explanation of Wittgenstein’s importance for the political action. Thus, the idea underpinning this article is the socially enriching pragmatism that defines Wittgenstein’s philosophy of action. Of all descriptions thereof, now we add the novelty of defending a *constructive* reading of Wittgenstein that could be strongly supported thanks to the influence it exerted on other political thinkers. This influence would make no sense unless analyzed against the communitarian operation of linguistic practices. Therefore, social and political practices arise as speech acts, instituting, in the long run, social norms that define our political

practices, that define our role as *apt* or *competent* political actors. But, to be consistent with this approach, no theory could be developed along this line. But what good a strong theory would do to our pluralistic societies? The main reason to defend a Wittgensteinian reading of the concept of justice is that it should not hope to set the concept in stone, but to make it practical: to bring it back to our everyday practices, *leaving everything as it is* (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 124).

The endpoint of the argument contributes to the novelty of the ideas presented: the close connection between Rawls' (2001) theory of justice and Wittgenstein's idea of linguistic practices. This conclusive argument paves the way for a new understanding of political action that is more adequate for the study of political agents; thence showing the importance of Wittgenstein's thought in the analysis of the game of political action.

## Wittgenstein's pragmatism as a social practice of rule-following evaluation

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify that the reading of Wittgenstein proposed below should be understood as constructive rather than therapeutic or skeptical. This text would start from the rigorous exposition of Wittgenstein's pragmatism done by Cheryl Misak (2016). However, my own perspective will lead to different conclusions than those addressed by Misak (2016). As to what does it mean to read Wittgenstein constructively, Misak (2016) states that: "Here Wittgenstein's aim is not to replace one theory with another, but to get rid of theory altogether. If we read him resolutely, he is a different breed of pragmatist, the kind that Rorty has made popular" (pp. 253-354). The resolute reader helps us to remember that a new and true project of philosophy "just leaves everything as it is" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 124).

Moreover, it's note that Wittgenstein himself would have rejected being called 'pragmatist'. Although he acknowledges some of James' ideas in the *Investigations*, he thinks of pragmatism as a mere methodology that merges all unto the category of the useful. In this respect, as Misak argues, similarities between Wittgenstein and Peirce accentuated. It is not the aim of this text to propose another argumentation on whether the former author can be properly called pragmatist. Instead, we will explain why we disagree with the conclusion she draws therein.

There are two things that are problematic. First, Wittgenstein does not think that we can distinguish truth from falseness just [missing word?] is the light of agreement. It is because of some training we have been educated at (the best way of putting it being a tautology: those instances we've been trained in). If it seems as purely agreed, it appears so only because the basis of agreement is founded on a set of skills as *differentially reliable responsive behavior*, that is, as appropriately *correctable* responses.

She continues to argue: "If our 'beliefs'—ethical, religious, or otherwise— are mere *commitments* to a chosen or inherited form of life and if we could just have ended up with another form of life, why should we feel so strongly about them?" (Misak, 2016, p. 271). Because they are not only mere commitments but *the background from which I can distinguish true from false* (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 94). That is the quid about instances that define training, the image of the world (*Weltbild*), and blind faith. But that does not mean that one couldn't be biased by a particular community's cosmovision. The opposite is actually shown in the example stated by Wittgenstein himself on the possibility of the convincement of the king by Moore (1983). It is pertinent to mention, as Sellars (2005) said, that to *change the rules is to change one's mind* (p. 134). This shows that a community is mainly based on strong –mostly undoubtedly without proof– beliefs that are taught, not learned on one's own will. Thus, evidence for something only makes sense in their articulation within the fabric of beliefs that a community has. Bearing this in mind, "the problem is not «Is it reasonable to give 'explanations' of matters of fact? » but «Which explanations of matters of fact is it reasonable to give? »" (Sellars, 2005, p. 134) and that is undoubtedly a *purely pragmatic* question. Consequently, according to Wittgenstein's thought, religious experience has the particularity that it does not articulate any of those

proof-mechanisms on its basic beliefs. This is where its radical nuance comes from, in the form of practical—and oftentimes political—doctrines.

The second point we find problematic has to do with the notion of ‘transcendent’. What does it mean? As it is presented, it seems as if there should be a special metacriteria enabling to evaluate behaviors. But – the argument continues– “for those criteria whose application cannot be clearly defined and agreed upon, Wittgenstein’s position seems to entail that mere convention or community carries the rule or belief” (Misak, 2016, p. 261). The answer isn’t found on the *Philosophical Investigations* but *On Certainty*. Two things are crucial: the relations among propositions where some serve as the basis (hinges) and some are doubted and revised against them. If one changes the basic ones, one (again, as Sellars said) changes one’s mind. Misak (2016) is aware of this: “sometimes Wittgenstein uses a metaphor straight out of the *Tractatus* that suggests that hinge propositions are not particular empirical claims, but rather, they have a special and general status that makes them serve as ‘the scaffolding of our thoughts’ (OC: p. 211) or our ‘frame of reference’ (OC: p. 83)” (p. 274). We propose –following Brandom (1994)– that they should be understood as *the basic linguistic skills* to deploy a discipline.

Second, the certainty on those propositions needs no proof and its taught not only through generations but across different disciplines. So, the questions ‘how do I know that I have a brain?’, ‘how do I know that I have not been on the moon?’, ‘how do I know if I have Human Rights?’ etc., are certain in the sense that they serve as basis for a discipline (neuroscience, astronomy, International Humanitarian Law, etc.). The interesting thing to note being that they are profoundly related to the practices of the communities that institute them.

So, the line of thought that has been developed is as following: thoughts (language) are a form of action; thus, they are rule-based. Saying that some propositions are hinges, must mean that some of them have to be rule-constitutive while others are just rule-regulative, strategic<sup>1</sup>. This game like theorization is fundamental to understand Wittgenstein constructively.

## Language: use, context and meaning

One of the *Investigations*’ most repeated affirmations is that *language* —understood as a *game* or *praxis*— is nothing but *customs and institutions* (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 199). If such remark is sound, then it should follow Kripke’s claim that language works —as Misak would herself endorse— from different agreements:

On Wittgenstein’s conception, such agreement is essential for our game of ascribing rules and concepts to each other. The set of responses in which we agree, and the way they interweave with our activities is our *form of life*. (Kripke, 1982, p. 96).

But we saw that such an agreement can’t be understood simply as a consensus. Otherwise, it would be only a simple instance of, let’s say, a *rendezvous*. It means, one can evaluate the competence of a rational practitioner in particular language games and, more precisely, her aptness of everyday use linguistic expressions. If words are bound to their everyday use, then the rules that govern them live in our practices, in our behavior. Sellars was fully aware of this when he noted that:

The more I brood on rules, the more I think Wittgenstein was right in finding an ineffable in the linguistic situation; something which can be *shared* but not *communicated*. We saw that a rule, properly speaking, isn’t a rule unless it lives in behavior, rule-regulated behavior—even rule violating behavior. (Sellars, 2005, p. 134)

This post-traction, pragmatist approach (post-Ramsian as Misak would say), leaves behind Kripke’s notion of agreement and helps Wittgenstein to get over the traditional metaphysical conception of language. It is not to establish direct links between propositions and the relations it picks form [from?] the world; language is, in that sense, *purely functional*. To understand this functional role is to understand that the meaning of a name, word, proposition or sentence, depends on its use in a certain linguistic universe, and not in its reference to a metaphysical meaning. Thus, all words are part of a grand *structured language family*, in which each particular

use takes a different part in the created and developed linguistic fabric. This regulated hierarchized structure proposes a functional-algorithmic conception of language in which one set of skills serves as fundamental (in terms of conditions of possibility) for another practice or vocabulary to deploy: that's why "naming and describing do not stand in the same level: naming is a preparation for describing" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 49). What is it to be (fully) rational is at stake in each level of complexity of this hierarchy.

We must consider language –according to the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*– as if it were a *tool box* (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 11). In this wide language family, words (sentences, propositions, etc.) work in several possible forms, depending on situations or contexts of application in which they are pronounced, written or simply used.

It's interesting to note that if a language only makes sense *within* the practice that constitutes it, then there are no strict patterns to extract an ultimate meaning. That is, meaning is not only context dependent, but it does not stand on strict axioms or patterns (formal unity, Wittgenstein would say) but on a family of reliable responses that resemble each other: language "is a family of structures more or less akin to one another" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 108). It should be highlighted the term *structure*: it is not that linguistic behavior is based on simple similarities. The analogies that give rise to such family resemblances are hierarchically ordered so they stand on skills and support meaning. This is what the proposition-hinges are about. It will be elaborated later on.

## Forms of life and linguistic community

As we just saw, the problem is not the correspondence or veritative criteria (i.e., the idea that language must correspond to the ultimate meaning of something), but the *acceptability* criteria within a language game. Hence, every word and sentence are part of the grand language family, and their meaning depends on the function performed within a linguistic universe, that is, their use in a determined language game. According to Wittgenstein's description, the expression "language game" must highlight that speaking a language is part of an activity or *form of life* (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 23).

Therefore, diverse linguistic universes may accept some forms of life while rejecting others, thus instituting certain valid propositions or not (for a certain community) and within the community, there is, again, a structured set of interactions that constitute patterns of resemblances in differentially reliable responses. Furthermore –as it is proposed in the *Philosophical Investigations*– it is a linguistic community (that is, a community of rational competent practitioners) who determines the convenience criteria of the used language, understanding criteria as correct/incorrect, valid/invalid or acceptable/unacceptable to be evaluated as 'mastering a trained practice'. Note that correction is a crucial part of this picture:

Those who deviate are corrected and told (usually as children) that they have not grasped the concept [...]. One who is an incorrigible deviant in enough respects simply cannot participate in the life of the community and in communication. (Kripke, 1982, p. 92)

Assuming that Kripke's reading holds, Wittgenstein, using these new criteria, not related to the classical verification model, proposes a language conception based on *justification or assertibility conditions* rather than truth conditions and —as with Sellars above— the question should be what explanations one should accept as a competent member of that community.

In this context, words or sentences are no longer used to 'enunciate facts' or correspond to certain objects. On the contrary, these must be part of a *linguistic fabric* in which the use establishes the criteria in order to understand the meaning of a particular expression (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 131). As Kripke (1982) has noted, "They are inapplicable to a single person considered in isolation" (p. 79).

Thus, if priority is given to its social aspect, then the "private language argument" is to be refused. Wittgenstein argues that there cannot be rules to be followed privately because rules are supposed to be

collective practices, undoubtedly a form of life. These new conditions are necessarily linked to a community (defined by a set of practical norms) and cannot be applied to a single individual in a private practice. Language, per definition, is public, not private. Moreover, internal sensations cannot be considered as ingredients of any language since they cannot be shared transparently. In this regard, Wittgenstein (2009) affirms in the *Philosophical Investigations*, as we already saw, that “To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)” (p. 199). But it is important that he immediately notes that “To understand a language means to be a master of a technique” (p. 199). Therefore, the following section would focus on the consequences one should draw from the previous statements to: “obeying a rule’ is a practice” (p. 202).

Any rule-following practice would constitute a community (Santamaría & Ruiz-Martínez, 2019). The authority that this basic linguistic practice confers to the rational evaluation made upon others in the public sphere shows that political representation, the sense of the institutions that normatively define our political action, depart from a linguistic practice of giving and asking for public reasons.

## The public domain: skills used when following rules

To this point, it could be said in a very simplistic way that a game happens when rules are being followed. Rule application and its corresponding evaluation, then, would not be a *mysterious thing* (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 454). On the contrary, it is a defined and clear agreement in which old and new movements are brought into play at the game; it is a status that defines what counts and what does not in it.

It is helpful to extend the notion of game a little bit further and bring about a practical example: for instance, in the game of chess, a knight is not a knight just because a piece of wood is shaped as such, but for the movements allowed in such game. To win the game is to have the *skills* to know the context (for instance, a Sicilian defense). When such context is not understood, meaning cannot be understood either (which move is best? Surely a clear defeat).

From the latter example, the most important conclusion drawn is that mastering a technique is the practical way of understanding a (language) game. That is, to master a game is not just moving pieces mechanically. On the contrary, it is to solve problems as they happen in the game; perhaps even it means playing the game itself. For a language to be considered as such, it must have, as a basis, a proper training: the sufficient skill to play and use any kind of strategy in practice. Actions and practices that require vague stimulus (such as one’s own feeling of pain) cannot be known as a language game. Skills are shown in the expertise exhibited in the context of the practiced game. Hence, using and practicing a language correctly *make explicit* the way we behave collectively.

For instance, both truth and falseness in certain propositions could, in some cases, demonstrate the expertise when moving in a particular linguistic universe. So, the truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements and if I make a false statement, it becomes uncertain whether I understand it (Wittgenstein, 1969, pp. 80-81).

There are practices where falseness is effectively a clear “mark” of lack of command on a certain linguistic universe. Notwithstanding, giving an incorrect response (action or play) can be enough reason to demonstrate to the other player that I lack the skill to play such game (which, for instance, bear great consequences when the game played is political representation). The conditions of truth and falseness are applicable to certain linguistic games, in which truth is demonstrated as a mastering of a technique. However, in this case, asking is an incorrect movement, and, answering the question shows an imbalanced knowledge in the language game<sup>2</sup>. Winch (1958), following on this regard, Wittgenstein, in *The Idea of a Social Science*, affirms that:

One has to take account not only of the actions of the person whose behavior is in question as a candidate for the category of rule-following, but also the reactions of other people to what he does. More specifically, it is only in a situation in which it makes sense to suppose that somebody else could, in principle, discover the rule which I am following that I can intelligibly be said to follow a rule at all. (p. 29)

Therefore, wisdom (as aptness, as being a master player) is not covering out the entire universe, but to know the different *contexts and uses*, which allows certain questions and answers. To know is not to know everything, to contextualize everything.

## Speech acts and the social institutions

We use language to describe the actions we perform, to evaluate them, to standardize them as norms. We employ language to evidence our mind's states that emerge in the realm of action. It is in our discursive practices, i.e., the different uses of language that speakers perform in determinate situations: politics, literature, communication, religion, among others. That's why, as Searle (1995) says, "it seems impossible to have institutional structures such as money, marriage, governments, and property without some form of language because [...] the words or other symbols are partly constitutive of the facts" (p. 59). The whole set of sentences of certain society, either orally stated or written, serve as the building blocks of socially institutional facts.

When instituted as a fact, language becomes *conduct* (able to evaluate). Likewise, such conduct constitutes itself in social facts: speech acts constitute the structure of social institutions. Words, in the way they used conventionally, are the ones that standardize actions, thus conforming to what is known as social facts. Is the use of language in the evaluative context of such institutions that helps to establish relations of power in Searle's theory of speech acts, it is not only about a linguistic study of expressions *per se*, but the beginning of a philosophy that binds language, mind and action. His studies aim to reveal the ontology of social reality, created by institutional facts; it's nature to which language underlies.

Hence, speech acts make evident the collective intention of those linguistic subjects —that is, speech act performers— that conform to such society. In other words, language use allows us human beings to comprehend the raw facts of the world we inhabit and create institutional facts bounded by the society we belong to. Without language, it would not be possible to speak about a social reality or a political practice. We thus make explicit what is implicit.

In mid-20th century, a special type of philosophy developed in the performative theme that there was a valuable tool, which in line with the second Wittgenstein, would rescue language and its different expressions as art, culture, religion and politics —in short, language as the constructor of the social fabric. The addition of Searle's theory of performative language allows us to reflect on the pragmatic dimension of thinking and acting, that is, studying in detail our sentences that've become actions, in the scene called 'reality' of the world we have to live in.

Language instantiates in texts and discourses. Hence, the analysis of language is nothing more than the different analyses of the discourses within the social fabric. People are social and linguistic beings, because of that language substitutes the subject-object relation for the relation among propositions and things to our relation as speaking subjects that create social institutions. Between language and world "analysis" of the so-called reality is materialized. As is argued by Apel (1994) "may be fulfilled in the long run by the process of communication in the indefinite communication-community of rational beings, which was intended and also brought along in all civilized language-communities by the invention of discussion of concepts" (p. 107).

The social phenomenon is nothing but a linguistic market or interchange, as Pierre Bourdieu (1995) rightly asserted. To understand us as persons, we must have in mind that we are born and made in society through language. We apprehend knowledge, we think, we structure our environment: habitus, morality, education, culture, religion: "therefore, political discourse cannot exist without the spectrum of language;

both moral and political discourse are referred to human action, to the participation on a linguistic community” (Santamaría, 2016, p. 39).

Here we see that in the beginning of *Speech Acts*, Searle states categorically that to speak a language is to take part in a form of conduct governed by constitutive rules. Such rules create the basis for the institutions we take part, thus constituting the social realm. That what means to belong to a linguistic community: from the ability to participate in (linguistic) practices, to acquire a know-how, to state which movement within the game is valid or not in a certain context, know how to do something in the sense of being able to do it. That is fixation and authority.

Finally, the role that our practices play will be to make explicit the implicit, because in language we find what we ourselves have introduced in it through our practices as members of such community—action and explicitation. This intersection of action itself and the act of doing it make such practices explicit. They are not just words anymore: with them we make worlds, because we are the creatures who end up, not just following rules blindly, but being governed by explicit rules of implicit norms (Brandom, 1994).

## Wittgenstein and the social practices

Richard Rorty (1992) borrowed the expression “The Linguistic Turn” from Gustav Bergman (1964) to characterize the degree of commitment and attention that English-speaking philosophy had towards language. Now, it is not about analytic philosophy dominating the interest in language, or the participation in the linguistic turn. In the end, other streams of contemporary thought such as structuralism, post-structuralism, the philosophy of dialogical reason of Apel or Habermas, and hermeneutics in a broad sense, have used such expression. For instance, Chantal Mouffe (2000) is a high-profile author that studies language in social research.

From “the linguistic turn” perspective, Chantal Mouffe (2000) highlights Wittgenstein’s importance when rethinking politics from language. The idea of language, ways of life, discourse, linguistic universes, rules, appear in a structured form in Mouffe’s work allowing to widen Wittgenstein’s work in terms of political thought. Mouffe’s (2000) affirms that his intention was “not to extract from Wittgenstein a political theory. I think the importance of Wittgenstein is to point out a new way of theorizing about the political” (pp. 60-61).

Mouffe (2000) warns that Wittgenstein’s late work —also known as the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*— can be useful to rethink democracy. The extension of this philosophy of action allows us to think politics from the perspective of ways of life and rule following, given that nobody is exempt from forms of life. As humans, we follow rules that allow us to enjoy language and to participate in linguistic communities. The reality is a meaningful social construction created by our participations in different accepted roles and games. Hence, the social is a discussion space where speakers participate.

Thus, the political discourse cannot be without the basic practice of language. Both moral and political discourses refer to human action, as the activity to participate in a linguistic community. Pitkin (1972) explains “the political discourse is itself a part of the activity of the participants and is used in the course of the same by them” (p. 298). There is a narrow and non-negotiable relation between language and action, words are acts and so we do things with words; it follows, then, that language and politics are closely connected.

Such contextualization is the basis of the theory of speech acts. Speaking a language, from Searle’s viewpoint, is “realizing speech acts” such as stating propositions, giving orders, asking questions, making promises, thanking, participating of a linguistic community, etc. In all of them rules are followed to be used in terms of linguistic elements. Following Searle (1969), the main reason to focus on the study of speech acts is that all linguistic communication includes linguistic acts.

Philosophy of speech acts that was started by Austin and the linguistic pragmatism developed by Searle and Rorty, paved the pragmatic road to the *oeuvres* of Robert Brandom and John McDowell. It was also its

articulation with previous works by Gilbert Ryle and Wilfrid Sellars, which focus on the Wittgensteinian critic of the mind, that is, the “myth of the given”, “metaphysics of the mind” or the popular idea known as “the ghost in the machine”.

In *Making it explicit*, Brandom (1994) aims to show “one of the overarching methodological commitments that orients this project is to explain the *meanings* of linguistic expressions in terms of their use — an endorsement of one dimension of Wittgenstein’s pragmatism” (p. xii). From this “pragmatist reading of Wittgenstein” the relevant political ‘realm’ of social pragmatism (in a Wittgensteinian sense) can be elaborated.

Such elaboration requires the acknowledgment that “being rational” means to have language structured by rules. This also implies that, to grasp the implicit logic of our social practices, 1) one must communicate expressions in virtue of the validity stated by the difference of material *inferences* as good or bad. 2) make competent use of the allowed and legitimate movements understood as reasons within the linguistic game; given “that one must be a player of the essentially linguistic game of giving and asking for reasons in order to be able to do it” (Brandom, 1994, p. xxi). Thus, Brandom’s (1994) conception of what counts as to perform a speech act is described as:

Being rational –understanding, knowing how in the sense of being able to play the game of giving and asking for reasons—is mastering in practice the evolution of the score. Talking and thinking is keeping score in this sort of game. (p. 183)

The function of this scorekeeping game is to make explicit what it is implicit; that is, “to express something is to make it *explicit*” (p. xxiii). Where? In the customs, in the institutions to make action subject of rational control. The linguistic custom for Brandom is the capacity to have “authority” and “responsibility” (justification) of our own propositionally content full expressions to participate in a linguistic community when speaking.

What can competent speakers *do* to have the *capacity* to say that something is such way, that is, to express something explicitly? On the one hand, to be called a rational being means to be fitted with language, that is, to participate in a linguistic community and be a player of the ‘linguistic game of giving and asking for reasons’. Therefore, Brandom (1994) proposes a pragmatism that recognizes the basic function of language as ‘a way of intercommunication’, which is basically to say something to someone and that such ‘something’ is meaningful for the listener —an idea based on Wittgenstein’s claim that meaning is given by the usage of the proposition.

The conception of *use* proposed by Brandom is not the search of a purely semantic vocabulary, a logically perfect language, or a purely naturalistic vocabulary. Paraphrasing Wittgenstein, Brandom avoids Escila, that is, the tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer in which “comprehend” is always to interpret; and Caribdis, which implies that everything is lawless and arbitrary. Brandom also proposes a *normative* vocabulary in the linguistic use as instituted norms by the social activity, i.e., recognized and authorized *fixations* born from the *speech acts*.

Bearing this in mind, the implicit norms in linguistic practices are presented in a specific *deontic* form. Brandom’s (1994) main social claim is that those practices “that confer propositional and other sorts of conceptual content implicitly contain norms concerning how it is correct to use expressions, under what circumstances it is *appropriate* to perform various speech acts, and what the *appropriate* consequences of such performances are” (p. xiii). Brandom warns that even though Sellars and Wittgenstein use the concept “rule” in a broad sense, they are clearly searching for a notion such as implicit norms in the practice. As we saw Sellars (2005) affirms it linguistically:

We always operate within a framework of living rules. (The snake which sheds one skin lives within another.) In attempting to grasp rules as rules from without, we are trying to have our cake and eat it. To describe rules is to describe the skeletons of rules. A rule is lived, not described. (p. 134)

The pragmatist base defines *representation* as an *expressive power*. If x represents y, that amounts to the normative stance where one is discursively committed to make material (practical inferences) of what deontic burdens that x inherits from y. In Wittgenstein's terms, it implies a practical substitution (of an applicable rule): The individual *represents* a particular community whose rules were made explicit from his behavior. Moreover, this notion could also help to define the relevant instances of political representation (Fossen, 2019).

## The development of the social and political

Fossen's ideas articulate what Mouffe and Brandom (2011) think about human normativity: we are the only beings that could participate in a linguistic community. Our participation evidences the capacity to "give and demand reasons" in the different linguistic universes in which we participate. To nuance this definition, Dennet (1971) (another important interpreter of Wittgenstein), argues that being rational is acting as one must rationally do, that is, as our intentional states *oblige us to act*. Therefore, making something explicit means making something in a way to be used as a reason to or something that allows reasons to be asked. Presenting something in an explicit form of affirmation is the basic movement of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom, 1994, p. 24). The *implicit* is what speakers do, and *explicit* is what speakers say when they participate in any given linguistic community (Brandom, 1994, p. 69).

This reveals, according to Mouffe (2011), that procedures only exist as complex sets of practices in different context, practices that contain the same diversity of rules. Following James Tully's (1989) work titled *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, Mouffe (2011) affirms that there is "multiplicity of languages and none could pretend or have the aspiration to play a foundational role in our political life" (p. 82).

From Wittgenstein's perspective, speaking a language is to participate in a linguistic universe, that is, *to take part a human practice governed by rules* (Acero et al., 2001, p. 201). Each game is assumed within a society, "others", as a way of life. A community that follows this way of life is already a linguistic community. The "accepted" practices of a linguistic community do not depend on the acceptance of a particular member. Only in evaluative stances of linguistic competence language generates social facts (Searle, 1995) always remembering us that rules are not followed privately. For Wittgenstein, following a rule is only possible when an individual is a member of a linguistic community that by the actions of its participants, ends up instituting itself, i.e., creating social institutions.

One relevant social institution in our political practices is democracy<sup>3</sup>; Mouffe (2000) affirms of it that to address democratic actions from a Wittgensteinian viewpoint can help us to reconsider the issue of fidelity towards democracy. Brandom, in turn, would affirm that the community of speakers must determine a meaningful norm according to the realized practices (he did not speak explicitly about democracy at any point). It is mandatory to differentiate the use of locutions, which can express diversity of contents, impose the determinant concept that articulates the relation between pragmatic and semantic components, either explicit or implicit. That is to say, expressing, giving reasons, sharing different speech acts, all amount *to make something explicit*. In Brandom's (1994) terms "[...] we are placing it in the logical space of reasons or justifying and being able to justify what one says" (p. 406).

Participating in a linguistic community emerges as the capacity to participate in instituted social practices, to know when a movement is valid in a given context and how to do something in the sense of being capable of getting it done (for instance, being more democratic). These are fixation and authority of beliefs and action. Finally, the role of our practices is to *make explicit* something implicit because we evaluate in language what we have practically introduced in its content, through being "members of a community": A discursive social commitment.

This encounter between action and realization makes such practices explicit: not simply words, we actually create worlds with them because “the approach being considered distinguishes us as norm-governed creatures from merely regular natural creatures by the normative *attitudes* we evince —attitudes that express our grasp or practical conception of our behavior as governed by norms” (Brandom, 2001, p. 35).

## The public reason

In order to achieve a democratic institution as understood by Rawls (2001), one needs, on a par with the skilled political players, a basic set of liberal reasons. We have seen how a linguistic practice is mainly social and how it can constitute institutions. Now it is time to see how these institutions can be political. In this regard, the pragmatist question arises: what must an institution do to count as political? Next, we will focus mainly in a democratic political institution.

From a contractarian perspective of liberalism, an institution is political if, in its absence, there would be a hypothetical state of nature (a rule less state; Kant, 1991; Pogge, 2010). This broad description may give a first approach to what it counts to be a political institution in the following sense: there should be an instance of a practice whose set of rules should allow us to speak of ‘justice’, ‘freedom’, ‘rights’ and so on. Thus, the rules are set by a democratic constitution should aim at establishing a commitment to them in the sense that one must follow such rules in order to count as a citizen.

That said it should be evident that a democracy (that is, a democratic political institution) based upon speech acts (Searle, 2010)<sup>4</sup>. This is crucial because it helps us to understand that political institutions were based mainly on discursive commitments. Hence, the original social contract accepted by the members of the community is nothing more than the idea that one should act and think *as if* the whole constitutional practice was true, both assuming and attributing to others that commitment.

To clarify this insight, to take a look on how Rawls (2001) proposes a democracy: “a basic feature of democracy is the fact of reasonable pluralism —the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is the normal result of its culture of free institutions” (p. 131). Thus, democracy could be understood as a game of giving and asking for political reasons. Such game aims to extract some fundamental ideas from the overlapping of the different comprehensive doctrines.

One of such fundamental ideas is that of ‘justice’. So, giving and asking for ‘justice’ should be regarded as giving and asking for the different conceptions of it: “Thus, the content of public reason is given by a family of political conceptions of justice, and not by a single one” (Rawls, 2001, pp. 140-141). Therefore, the overlapping of such conceptions should end in a basic conception of ‘political justice’ (justice *as* fairness, Rawls (2001) would say). This approach to the consensus of the concept should assure that the fundamental idea that would scaffold the political institution would not be purely arbitrary and would represent the different parties that took part on its constitution:

How though is the ideal of public reason realized by citizens who are not government officials? In a representative government, citizens vote for representatives—chief executives, legislators, and the like— and not for particular laws (except at a state or local level when they may vote directly on referenda questions, which are rarely fundamental questions). To answer this question, we say that ideally citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact. (Rawls, 2001, p. 135)

It is interesting to note here that such representation would not be possible without a discursive commitment. That’s why the *‘as if’* should be italicized in the foregoing paragraph because it broadly constitutes the definition of political representation. This also shows that such commitment lies in a deep net of structural beliefs. Such structure unifies the practices of a community that end up made explicit in the

game of giving and asking for reasons and one might say that it is coherent with the criterion of reciprocity that Rawls (2001) proposes:

Hence the idea of political legitimacy based on the criterion of reciprocity says: Our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions—were we to state them as government officials—are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons. (p. 137)

An apt conception of justice would understand actors as engaged in a linguistic practice of giving and asking for publicly relevant reasons. The fairness of this practice coheres with the basic principles in the sense that they should not be understood, as first guiding principles of conduct, but as first guiding principles of evaluation. The outcome from such institutional arrangement depends greatly on the performance of the agents that participate in them. This way, it would not be a utopian fantasy, but a self-actualizing institution. However, there is a downside: it would not be a theory of justice anymore; it would be a grammar of justice. Would it not suffice to a historically and socially conscious society that understands the mutable character of its own practices?

## Concluding remarks

Theorizing political conceptions after Wittgenstein's thought has always been problematic. But its force, whether such attempt is pertinent should be regarded not in Wittgenstein's words but in what it helps to achieve, through *edifying philosophy*, and to *maintain the political conversation open*—in a Rortyan sense (2009). Such pragmatic conclusion should help to understand that the reach of this proposal is not a systematic account of democracy but a different—hopefully more fruitful—way to understand 'what one should do in order to be counted as engaged in a truly democratic practice'. Furthermore, it should be interesting to see how the proposals by Brandom and Mouffe have articulated to achieve such pragmatic-political goal:

Brandom underplays the agonal character of his theory when he describes discursive practice as a cooperative endeavour while ignoring its element of contestation. Discursive practice is not just cooperative, but also contestatory: participants try to redeem their own claims and to get others to subscribe to their own standards of truth and propriety. (Fossen, 2014 p. 385)

The idea for Fossen is that a truly agonal character of a democratic society is only achieved through a description of such practice as a game of giving and asking reasons. Thus, democracy loses the burdens of *a priori* truths, privileged positions and, importantly, polarization of antagonism. A pluralism apt for an open society can only be achieved through Brandom's system:

The distinction between normative statuses and practical attitudes articulates a socio-perspectival distinction between actually undertaken commitments and merely acknowledged ones, which is brought into play through the activity of social participants mutually holding one another to account and contesting each other's words and deeds. This tension is inherent in social engagement, which, as mutual engagement, constitutively involves discrepancies between accounts kept from different perspectives. (Fossen, 2014 p. 391)

The discursive practices, as they were described by Brandom (1994), incorporate real things. The implicit is just an introduction to practices such as art, religion, love, friendship, education and politics, in a nutshell: culture. But, as the basis of all other human discursive practices, it lies in that one of giving and asking for reason, which serves as well as the foundations for democracy: to give reasons and to ask for them is just what political agents should do to be taken as engaged in a democratic practice. In Wittgenstein terms, the rules we follow while giving and asking for reasons should become the implicit democratic custom, a truly democratic institution.

Such approach based on a democratic linguistic community presupposes having skillful players in the game. To be an apt citizen is to be taken as a truly rights-as-rules follower. And this ability is learned at home: "the

family is part of the basic structure, since one of its main roles is to be the basis of the orderly production and reproduction of society and its culture from one generation to the next” (Rawls, 2001, p. 157)<sup>5</sup>.

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## Notes

- \* Research article.
- 1 This taxonomy of rules follows Searle (1995) for the former and the work by Von Neumann and Morgenstern (1953) for the latter.
  - 2 This idea is developed, in a different line, in Ruiz-Martínez and Rosanía (2021). There, the authors claim that the objectivity of a social science is possible given the basic practice of rule-following. The objectivity thus achieved is highly pragmatic and intersubjective throughout the practice. Therefore, scientific rigor is maintained while the interim character of the social theories stands as a condition of social change and communitarian self-actualization.
  - 3 Ramírez-Vallejo (2021) works the democracy as a linguistic construction with lots of promises to accomplishment. See more in Ramírez-Vallejo, D. A. (2021). La construcción lingüística del Estado moderno: el concepto de democracia como una descripción abreviada de promesas por cumplir. *Analecta Política*, 11(20), 133-151. <https://doi.org/10.18566/apolit.v11n20.a07>
  - 4 Also, speech acts could be understood under Wittgenstein's language games idea (Rodríguez & Ramírez-Vallejo, 2021).
  - 5 Not a particular form of a family: in a circular definition, precisely the environment in which we are taught all the relevant social (and political) norms.

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