Articles on Other Subjects

Wittgenstein, Relativism, and the Second-Person Perspective

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Abstract This paper addresses the problem of the relativist implications of Wittgensteinian non-cognitivism. If moral and religious language are only an expression of language users' attitudes, then both moral values and religious beliefs will be relative to just those language users. The paper attempts to respond to this charge in the following two ways. First, it seeks to show the common conceptual structure underlying the accusation of relativism as it relates to both Wittgenstein's non-cognitivism and his position on scepticism, where the latter reflects his contextualist anti-sceptical strategy (which is also charged with relativism). Second, it seeks to demonstrate that in both cases it is possible to offer a non-relativist reading of Wittgensteinian thinking by affirming the commensurability of different worldviews through an appeal to the second-person perspective, taken as characteristic of the human way of living (or human "form of life").

Keywords Ludwig, Wittgenstein; Non-Cognitivism; Relativism; Scepticism; Second-Person Perspective.

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1. Introduction

One of the most striking elements of the so-called later philosophy of Wittgenstein is his characterisation of moral and religious language in terms of non-cognitivism. According to this view, both moral and religious language are non-referential: that is, they do not refer to anything in the world such as objectively existing moral values or deities (see CV, 16, 64, 85).[1] Moral and religious language are not truth-apt, and are simply the expression of the moral or religious attitudes of language users. The latter are engaged in the corresponding moral and religious "language games," whose rules should not be breached as doing so leads to philosophical and linguistic confusion. If both moral and religious language are made up of particular and distinctive language games, then they rest on their own distinctive rules and claims, and need no justification via external or rational means as they are performing only an expressive role.

The serious problem that arises from such a picture of moral and religious language is that of relativism (see Schönbaumsfeld 2023, 46; Kusch 2011, 39): if morality and religion are just a matter of expressing attitudes on the part of language users, then moral values and religious beliefs will seem to be nothing more than relative to those particular language users (see LC, 56). If they do not refer to any objective moral values or deities, they will always be "situated" or "contextualised" by the particular attitudes of certain moral agents or religious believers.

In this paper, I would like to examine and refute this problematic relativist commitment associated with non-cognitivism by looking at a similar difficulty that we encounter in Wittgenstein's discussion of scepticism in his last work, *On Certainty*. In the latter, he develops a framework-invoking approach to the refutation of scepticism: a given commitment's epistemic justification is furnished by the conceptual framework within which, exclusively, it can possess its content. According to one interpretation:

> There could be . . . different epistemic systems, none of which would be intrinsically correct; each of them would be . . . as good as any other, and would certify as . . . justified different propositions. As a consequence, knowledge . . . would always be *situated*: what counts as knowledge within one system of justification might not be so within another. . . . The passage from one epistemic system to another would always be a form of *conversion* or *persuasion*, reached through a-rational means. (Coliva 2010, 1)

1. In the present paper I refer to the writings of Wittgenstein using the abbreviations explicated in the bibliography, specifying the numbered remarks or sections of the relevant works. In the case of secondary literature, all references are to page numbers within the texts cited.

There is, then, a remarkable similarity between the conceptual mechanism standing behind the non-cognitivist account of moral and religious language and the framework-invoking refutation of scepticism. Moreover, the serious problem which arises from both views is that they each appear to be committed to cognitive or epistemic relativism.[2]

Taking as its point of departure the so-called "hinge-epistemology" interpretation of Wittgenstein's discussion of scepticism as formulated by Analisa Coliva (2003, 2010; see also Baghramian and Coliva 2020, 110–14), this paper argues for its applicability to the problem of the relativistic commitments of Wittgensteinian non-cognitivism, and seeks to show that a kind of second-person perspective implicitly present in *On Certainty* can save us from having to grant that there are different mutually inaccessible world-pictures in play. Accessibility or commensurability is possible, because these are furnished by a unitary human world-picture community entailing limits to our access to language (in terms of what is conceivable for us). In other words, the limits of human language (consisting of different language games) determine the limits of our human world (its conceivability and commensurability).

In order to accomplish this goal, I shall proceed in the following way. Firstly, I introduce the most distinctive features of the Wittgensteinian anti-sceptical strategy. Secondly, I explain the arguments in favour of the interpretation that charges the Wittgensteinian view on scepticism and non-cognitivism with being committed to epistemic relativism. Thirdly, and finally, I offer a non-relativist reading of both scepticism and non-cognitivism by showing the commensurability of different attitudes or conceptual schemes within Wittgenstein's approach, in terms of the second-person perspective.

2. Following Grayling (1988, 118), we can distinguish between cultural and cognitive relativism: "Cultural relativism is the thesis that there are differences between cultures or societies, or between different phases in the history of a single culture or society, in respect of social, moral, and religious practices and values." However, "cultural relativism is not philosophically problematic, for it is clear that our being able to recognise cultural differences of the kind described presupposes an ability on our part to gain access to other cultures so that we can recognise the differences as differences." The real problem is cognitive relativism, as "it is the view that there are different ways of perceiving and thinking about the world or experience, ways possibly so different that members of one conceptual community cannot at all grasp what it is like to be a member of another conceptual community." The problem of the relativist consequences of Wittgenstein's later philosophy has been noted by many philosophers, both relativists and anti-relativists (see Rorty 1979; Hintikka and Hintikka 1986; Grayling 1988; Haller 1995; Glock 1996; Kirk 1999; and Boghossian 2006). Recently, an anti-relativist reading of Wittgenstein's later views has also been propounded to varying degrees (see Barret 1991; Putnam 1992; Grayling 2001; O'Grady 2002, 2004; Coliva 2003; Blackburn 2004, 2007; Williams 2007; and, especially, Coliva 2010).

The latter perspective emphasises that ethical and moral understanding is not just a matter of recognising facts, but also of entering into a reciprocal relationship or attitude with others. A commitment to another person's standpoint is taken to be essential for a recognition-based relationship.

2. The Anti-Sceptical Strategy of *On Certainty*

Scepticism is the view that knowledge or rational (justified) belief is impossible, either in general or with respect to a particular domain. Modern scepticism is based on the assumption that for a proposition to be known, it must either be evident (i.e. self-evident, or evident to the senses), or be adequately supported by other propositions that are so.[3]

On Certainty contains a series of more or less detailed remarks on scepticism. Some are directed specifically against the Dream Hypothesis, while others are more general. All contest any form of extreme scepticism. The primary target of *On Certainty* is Moore's famous argument against scepticism (and idealism). The latter just enumerates some of the many things he took himself to know. He claims that there are empirical truths which we know (i.e. can know) with certainty, such as "These are my two hands" or "The earth has existed for a great many years." He maintains that these truths provide proof of the existence of the external world, since the premises are known for certain and entail the conclusion.

Wittgenstein grants Moore his (psychological) certainty, but denies his knowledge about these truths. He rejects the idea that Moore has provided proof for the philosophical claim that there are objects that are physical and external to our minds. He does so because, for the sceptic, some sort of doubt still remains. Looking at my hands does not guarantee anything, as it is merely a move within our established "language games" (our conceptual scheme), while he does not challenge the move itself. What the sceptic challenges is the whole "language game" or conceptual scheme of the external world of physical-object discourse (see OC, 19, 23, 83, 617). In other words, in claiming to know he has two hands as instances of physical objects, Moore takes for granted the very conceptual scheme that is the target of sceptical attack.

3. This characterisation of scepticism captures an evidentialist assumption that underlies modern scepticism in the wake of Descartes and is also the main focus of Moore's anti-sceptical strategy as considered by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*. However, it may also be pointed out that scepticism does not have to be methodological (i.e. Cartesian) in character, where this involves defining criteria for something to be known, only to then try to show that knowledge claims fail to meet those same criteria.

Wittgenstein tries to undermine both the Moorean and sceptical positions by impugning the sense of the proposition about the existence of the external physical world. According to him, it is not an empirical proposition: for the sceptic, it does not matter whether there are physical objects or not in respect of our experience, which could be as it is even if we find ourselves unable to specify what it would mean for there to be no physical objects.

According to Wittgenstein, both Moore and the proponents of scepticism ignore the fact that doubting and the allaying of doubt can only make sense within a certain "language game" (conceptual scheme), while the "language game" itself cannot be justified or doubted: it is neither reasonable nor unreasonable (OC, 559, 609–12). Doubt and justification make sense only relative to the rules that guide the use of the propositions (expressions) involved in some "language game." They come to an end when we are confronted with doubts that are not themselves provided for by our rules—i.e. that do not count as legitimate moves or strategies in that particular "language game" (OC, 204). Moore's truths mark points at which doubt loses its sense. However, they do this only because they are the background against which we distinguish between true and false, serving as "hinges" on which even our doubts turn (OC, 94, 341–3, 401–03, 514–15, 655): "Doubt grammatically loses its sense. This language game *is* like that" (OC, 56; see also 494, 498).

Sceptical doubts are invalid or incoherent because their sense implicitly presupposes the very conceptual scheme they explicitly attack. The sceptical hypothesis that nothing around us is real or exists is of that sort—like the thought that all our calculations could or might be wrong. But what a given proposition means is itself an empirical fact. In other words, some empirical facts must be beyond doubt (OC, 55, 514–19).

3. The Relativist Reading of Wittgenstein's Position

Following Coliva (2010; see also Baghramian and Coliva 2020, 110–14), we can reconstruct the following arguments in favour of a relativist reading of Wittgenstein's view:

1. Language games "provide reasons for and against… propositions" that are subjects of our "assessing their truth," while at the bottom of language games lie hinge "propositions which are neither true (grounded, rational) nor false (ungrounded, irrational)" (Coliva 2010, 1). Therefore they cannot be rational, and it would not be possible to have other alternative or merely different grounds, which "would be as legitimate as ours" (Coliva 2010, 2; see OC, 162, 233, 262).

If we apply this description of language games to the non-cognitivist characterisation of moral and religious language, we can say that we hold different, incommensurable, views with regard to the world of values, or religious beliefs that constitute different, incommensurable, conceptual schemes or frameworks of reference for the users of moral or religious language.

2. "At the bottom of our language games lies a way of *acting*, and that it is just a part of our lives to take certain propositions, theories and methods of justification, for granted, and thereby to act in accordance with them" (Coliva 2010, 2). Then, "it is a mere accident that we act in a certain way, and our lives are what they are. . . . There may be other ways of acting and living . . . which would ground other systems of justification" (Coliva 2010, 2; see OC, 92, 132, 264, 338, 609). In other words, within a non-cognitivist framework of moral and religious language there will be alternative conceptual schemes that navigate human lives.
3. If "we find someone who doesn't comply with our system of justification, we could only *persuade* or *convert* them to adopt ours, by appealing not to grounds or reasons—as there are none that could support one system over the other" (Coliva 2010, 2; see OC, 92, 262, 612). On a non-cognitivist account of morality and religion, there will be no common conceptual scheme that we share that could constitute a common ground for the different conceptual schemes expressed in different moral and religious attitudes.
4. As Coliva points out, the metaphor of a mythology is used by Wittgenstein to describe the status of our isolated attitudes or conceptual schemes when he writes that "the propositions describing our world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology" (OC, 95, 97; see Coliva 2010, 2). This resonates with the non-cognitivist account of moral and religious language. As is rightly noted by Coliva (2010, 3), it seems to suggest that there is no rational justification for our beliefs or, putting it more broadly, our conceptual schemes expressed in the form of different moral and religious attitudes and practices: they are like myths.

4. The Non-Relativist Reading of Wittgenstein's Position

4.1. The Commensurability of World-Pictures

In order to show that Wittgenstein is not an epistemic relativist, I will argue that his view implies the commensurability of world-pictures, and that this in turn rests on the implicit second-person perspective that makes human language a communal or public endeavour, not a private one. Both *On Certainty* and *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* are interspersed with examples where Wittgenstein repeatedly imagines different communities, in which things we usually take for granted have ceased to be so. It seems at first sight that the conceivability of these communities would support a kind of Wittgensteinian relativism—i.e. the idea that it is conceivable that there could be people with altogether different conceptual schemes or world-pictures. However, in the case of the interesting example of wood-measurement analysed by Wittgenstein in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, what he has in mind is that if we fail to persuade the alien people operating with a different way of measuring wood that they are mistaken, we should revise our translation of their words. Wittgenstein thinks that we can imagine such a community which has a different way of measuring and paying for wood, and yet we will be able to deal with them and find a common factor when it comes to communication (cf. Coliva 2010, 13). It seems evident that he supposes that if we had to deal with them, we would try to convince them to measure wood by weight and pay for it accordingly. Furthermore, and more to the point, we would do this by using an entirely rational procedure: namely, that of showing them that the quantity of wood could remain the same even when its area and volume had changed. Were we to be successful in doing this, it would be an example not of an alternative epistemic method but, presumably, a case of people holding a false belief that had led them to employ an unreliable procedure to measure wood. Moreover, Wittgenstein argues that if rational argument fails then this probably means we have made a mistake when translating the words of those people into the meanings we ourselves attach to them (cf. Coliva 2010, 13–4, 16–17). The meaning of words seems to be a function of at least some central inferences we accept as common to both world-pictures (see Brandom 2008, 5–6).[4] Hence, were there to be any problem

4. This interpretation of the common background to a world-picture can lend support to a reading of Wittgenstein of the sort proposed by Robert Brandom. The latter, in line with his inferentialist interpretation, claims that while we have various language games in Wittgenstein, there is one underlying structural feature in the form of the strategy of giving reasons: we accept one element of such a language game on the basis of another element of it, as

with understanding the meanings of words, such that this turned out, by our lights, to be something others did not accept, we should not conclude that these people were actually refusing to accept them, but rather that their "words have a different meaning than the one we . . . attributed to them" originally (Coliva 2010, 17).

Here Wittgenstein, like Quine (1960) and Davidson ([1974] 1984), insists that there are minimum requirements that a form of linguistic behaviour must meet in order to be intelligible to us (CV, 37; Rhees 1965, 25). Anticipating the current debate about radical translation, Wittgenstein assumes something quite close to the "principle of charity": in order to interpret other people we should maximise agreement by attributing to them beliefs that from our own point of view are mostly true (Baghramian and Coliva 2020, 113–4). Wittgenstein writes that "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also . . . in judgments" (PI, 242). Furthermore, as we have seen, if seemingly radical differences were to emerge, we should revise our translations rather than attributing to them a large class of judgments that, from our point of view, are false. The crucial premise here is the claim that sharing a language is "not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (PI, 241; RFM, 353). Hence, understanding a different language presupposes convergence not only of beliefs but also of all the relevant patterns of behaviour—something which, in turn, would seem to presuppose common perceptual capacities, needs and emotions, realised in the form of an irreducibly basic second-person perspective. As Wittgenstein puts it: "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (PI, 206; see RFM, 414–21; EPB, 149; see also Grayling 1988, 120).

On the basis of the above, we can argue that Wittgenstein was not a relativist either with respect to his position on scepticism or as regards his stance concerning non-cognitivism.[5] To substantiate this argument, let us now turn to the key concepts elaborated by him in order to characterize

part and parcel of our rule-following, and this is the formal scheme common to all language games. It should be noted, however, that I am accepting in my interpretation only this minimal construal of the common elements of language games, and this does not necessarily mean I would endorse all of Brandom's supplementary theses. While he was heavily influenced by Wittgenstein, their theories of meaning are somewhat different. For Wittgenstein, words get their meaning from their role in language games, embedded in forms of life. For Brandom, words get meaning merely from the inferences they are involved in. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this difference.

5. Here I follow and extend the non-relativist readings of Wittgenstein on scepticism that are to be found in Coliva (2010) and Grayling (1988, 20–22; 2001), applying them to the present

his own project. In *On Certainty* he develops the notion of a world-picture, where this is integrated into his conception of language games and forms of life. The most significant aspect of language games is that "the term 'language game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (PI, 23; see PI, 19; Z, 173). In turn, forms of life consist of a plurality of language games, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail" (PI, 66). It seems that a "form of life" resembles a "medley-like" mixture of human practices somehow supporting or complementing each other (Kober 1996, 439). The term refers to a community sharing practices, customs, uses and institutions (PI, 199; RFM, 32, 43). Furthermore, it is not required that any one member of the community be competent in all language games performed by that community, and the second-person perspective makes us aware of this as a constant element of our orientation in the world. In other words, the notion of a "form of life" describes, or expresses, the setting in which language games are practised by such a community. It links the concept of a practice (a language game) with the concept of a community and the second-person perspective implicit therein.

The connection of the linguistic practice (i.e. rule-following language games) with the communal aspect of language acquisition and communication is possible only by virtue of the implicit second-person perspective. This perspective makes language a communal or public enterprise, not merely the private experience of the language user. It is significant that Wittgenstein does not construe language from the first-person perspective as an entirely private experience on the part of language users, or from the third-person perspective of strictly objective experience as a "view from nowhere," but in terms of the second-person perspective, as a phenomenon natural to the human world (PI, 293; Johnson 2013, 77). What makes us familiar with some particular language game is our participation in a community of language users and our practising of its rules through having an implicit imprint of our human orientation in the world as an orientation within the human community (the human "form of life"). In other words, a part of what we are as human beings consists in the second-person perspective implicit in our lives as language users (see PI, 240–47).

The same conceptual mechanism is also encountered with the term "world-picture." Wittgenstein's idea is that such a picture contains the

discussion of non-cognitivism and the second-person perspective. See also Schönbaumsfeld (2023, 44–56).

concepts through which we conceive of the world. It is characterised by him as a kind of "myth" or "mythology," in that it contains certain categories basic to our understanding of the world (see OC, 95, 195). A "myth" exhibits the views and convictions of a community or a form of life that we share with others (the implicit second-person perspective). It is a way of seeing the world (*Weltanschauung*). It might contain traditions, political views, moral values, or religious beliefs (PO, 125–29).

It seems that a world-picture is not necessarily a theory of the world, but is something that guides the behaviour of the community that holds it (PO, 125, 129, 137). In that sense, it could serve also as a "basis" (*Grundlage*) or "point of departure" for a community's way of looking at the world (OC, 105, 167). This latter function is possible as it contains both certainties and knowledge claims that rest on these. Hence, Wittgenstein says that "above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing" (OC, 167; see OC, 234, 281–82, 327, 621).

The notion of a "world-picture" describes a familiar cultural (anthropological) phenomenon: the intuitive or practical, rather than discursive, sharing of views that correspond to what is disclosed in a given community's customs (institutions) or ways of social behaviour and somehow overlap and supplement each other (OC, 102–3, 167, 275, 281, 298; PI, 129). The main point here is that a community's language will embody their world-picture uniquely and absolutely. It does so because there are no real alternatives to it, although other ways of seeing the world are imaginable. Hence, different possible world-pictures are accessible to each other, since they seem to be merely a kind of extension of the particular community's actual worldview. Such alternatives can only be imagined, as there are no such alternatives in reality. In other words, such differing yet imaginable world-pictures are commensurable with one another. We do not have here an instance of the first-person perspective (solipsism) such as would be implied by relativism, but rather a case of the second-person perspective, this being the overriding presupposition for any communal sharing of a form of life.[6]

Furthermore, Wittgenstein says that "I do not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (OC, 94). Apparently, according to him, we do not construct our world-picture: it is not a matter of reasoning,

6. This fits very much with current discussions of the second-person perspective. See, for instance, Darwall (2006, 2021), Pinsent (2012, 2013), and Eilan (2016).

or of engaging in some (spontaneous) conceptualizing activities—it is rather something we inherit or are given. Bernard Williams (1981, 156–57) points out, in similar fashion, that our language games and forms of life are "absolutely" acquired—that is, that they cannot be justified. Hence, the rules or grammar of our language games cannot be justified. They are not something that can be said to be "reasonable" or "unreasonable," but rather "there like our life." Presumably Wittgenstein has this in mind when he says:

> Suppose we meet people who did not regard that [i.e. the claims of physics—P.S.] as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for that we consider them primitive.) 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 games as a base from which to combat theirs? (OC, 609)

Following Williams, we can say that the various language-game communities exist in a merely empirical sense. From this, however, it does not follow that there are different world-pictures that are inaccessible to each other. Accessibility or commensurability are already in play, due to the fact that these are themselves constituted on the basis of a single human world-picture community that sets the limits to our access to language (and what we can conceive of). In other words, the limits of human language (consisting of different language games) determine the limits of our human world (its conceivability and commensurability). This is possible due to the second-person perspective implicitly assumed by Wittgenstein in his considerations regarding the commensurability of our world-pictures.[7]

4.2. Hinge Epistemology and the Common Human Form of Life

Emphasising the common elements of a human form of life, or even that there is a common form to human life, seems preferable in both hinge epistemology and Wittgensteinian philosophy because it grounds understanding, prevents thoroughgoing relativism, and illuminates those fundamentally shared behaviours that enable both language and knowledge (Conway 1989, 24). This foundational unity explains how humans can make sense of one another and forms the basis for shared ("hinge") certainty, which is crucial for knowledge and justification. In contrast, an exclusive focus on the plurality of forms of life risks undermining the possibility of mutual intelligibility and shared knowledge, leading to an untenable radical relativism.

7. In the next three sections, I respond to comments made by an anonymous reviewer for this journal. I am very grateful to the latter for their insightful and helpful remarks.

On this reading of Wittgenstein, it becomes possible to explain the mutual understanding that occurs between people of different backgrounds: any human being can understand another, because they share a common form of life (OC, 358–59; PI, 23). This commonality includes a shared set of behaviours, ways of living, and patterns of language. While acknowledging the existence of multiple ways of living and language games, a single common human form of life acts as a unifying force. It explains why there is not a complete breakdown of understanding, as there are certain universally shared behaviours that constitute the bedrock of human interaction and language (the "hinge" elements). The human form of life includes fundamental aspects of human existence, such as speaking, thinking, and having beliefs about the world (Moyal-Sharrock 2015, 23–26). This common foundation creates the "universal grammar" of mankind, enabling understanding of and communication through even foreign languages.

An emphasis on the shared human form of life provides a more robust and less problematic account of knowledge and justification than a view that only stresses plurality. It explains the possibility of intersubjective agreement and shared knowledge. By contrast, if we were to fully embrace a radical emphasis on the plurality of forms of life, this would lead to a situation where understanding another person could become impossible, much like the hypothetical inability to understand a talking lion. Moreover, the idea of a common human form of life directly links epistemological questions about knowledge and justification to the fundamental nature of human beings as social, rule-following beings.

It is these accounts taking seriously the idea of a single common human form of life, as against those mainly emphasising the plurality of forms of life, that give the main motivation for a reading of Wittgenstein in terms of so-called hinge epistemology. The latter, inspired by Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, studies the basic certainties that form the bedrock of knowledge (Moyal-Sharrock and Pritchard 2024, 33–34). These "hinges" are not the kind of propositions for which we typically seek justification, but rather presuppositions of our understanding. A common human form of life provides the shared foundation that allows for these universal hinges such as the certainty of one's own existence or the reliability of the senses. Therefore, the idea of a shared human form of life explains why we have a certain degree of agreement in respect of our fundamental beliefs. This shared background makes certain epistemological stances plausible and allows for justification to occur. Without this commonality, any attempt to justify a knowledge claim would be located in a vacuum. Hinge epistemology aims to address radical scepticism by providing a way to understand

why we can have basic certainties even if they cannot be strictly proven. The shared human form of life offers a crucial element of this understanding, as it reveals the common ground upon which we build our knowledge and certainty.

4.3. Non-Cognitivism and the Common Human Form of Life

Nevertheless, the position described above might be charged with imposing a false universalism, and so it is necessary to add further nuance to our argument here, especially in the context of the alleged non-cognitivism of Wittgenstein. This "universal" approach attempts to impose a uniform "form of life," where Wittgenstein's own philosophy acknowledges a rich diversity of unique and context-dependent practices making universal claims about morality or religion impossible within that framework. In the non-cognitivist reading of Wittgenstein on morality and religion, moral and religious language do not describe facts or objective truths, but rather function differently, expressing attitudes, emotions, or a way of life. The meaning of moral and religious expressions is found in their use within a specific form of life. This implies that these meanings are not universally applicable across different forms of life. Therefore, on this reading, to affirm a single "human form of life" and then use that to argue for universally shared moral and religious attitudes runs counter to Wittgenstein's ideas.

Translating the idea of a single human form of life into a non-pluralist interpretation of Wittgenstein's non-cognitivism about morality and religion will, in that case, prove problematic, because his concept of "forms of life" will be taken to refer to shared cultural, social and linguistic practices that are diverse, not singular (Weiberg 2025, 3–6). A non-cognitivist stance denies that moral and religious statements express objective truths, while Wittgenstein's ideas suggest that the meanings within these practices are relative to their specific forms of life. Therefore, trying to universalise a single "form of life" to impose uniform moral or religious attitudes goes against the Wittgensteinian view that meaning is generated through diverse and specific linguistic and cultural contexts.

This line of criticism emphasises that Wittgenstein's concept of "forms of life" serves to highlight how language, culture and social practices intertwine to create meaning and understanding within specific communities. On such an interpretation, the concept of "forms of life" is inherently plural, referring as it does to a multitude of diverse ways of living and communicating. There is no singular, universal "human form of life" from which all moral and religious practices might be said to originate.

4.4. Hinge Epistemology, Non-Cognitivism, and the Second-Person Perspective

The above criticism demonstrates the need for an explanation that appeals to the second-person perspective, as the latter can help disarm the aforementioned charge and bridge the gap between hinge epistemology and non-cognitivism. The second-person perspective is relevant to hinge epistemology just by virtue of the fact that it provides a unique way to ground knowledge through intersubjective interactions, offering a foundation beyond mere first- or third-person observation, where this is critical for understanding the shared, and often unquestioned, framework (of "hinges") that enables communication and knowledge acquisition. For any non-cognitivist account of ethics and religious belief, the second-person perspective is relevant in that it stresses the idea that moral and religious commitments are not merely abstract beliefs, but relational stances involving mutual acknowledgement and a shared "you" or "otherness," where this in turn lends support to the sort of views that hold such beliefs to be more about values and commitments than just stating factual propositions.

Indeed, the second-person perspective is arguably fundamental to developing a coherent understanding of intersubjective interaction more generally—wherever people make sense of each other's behaviour and adjust their own actions accordingly. This forms the basis for developing the trust and shared understanding necessary for any epistemic practice. Hinge epistemology, drawing on Wittgenstein, focuses on the unquestioned beliefs or practices (the "hinges") that provide the framework for all other knowledge (Pritchard 2025, 48–49), and the second-person perspective is relevant here because it shows how these hinges are established and maintained through direct interaction with and mutual acknowledgement of others. The second-person perspective can also help explain how differences in opinions and biases function within testimonial exchanges (Boncompagni 2024, 290–94). When a prejudice acts as a hinge, preventing proper evaluation of testimony, engaging with the second-person perspective can reveal the underlying prejudice by reintroducing a normative level where rational consideration of others is possible.

That last element brings us to the relation between the second-person perspective and non-cognitivist accounts. The second-person perspective stresses that ethical and moral understanding is not just a matter of recognising facts, but of entering into a reciprocal relationship with or attitude towards others (see OC, 204). A commitment to acknowledging another person's standpoint is essential for a recognition-based relationship

(Cockburn 1990, 6–10). Non-cognitivists argue that moral or religious judgments express emotions or commitments, rather than describing facts. The second-person perspective aligns with this by emphasising how our moral and religious stances are deeply tied to our interactions and our acknowledging of another's "you-ness" or "otherness." The concept of religious belief is sometimes compared to that of hinge commitment because both involve deep, foundational stances rather than simple empirical assertions. The second-person perspective suggests that religious belief is also a form of relational commitment, involving a reciprocal orientation toward a divine "you," which aligns with non-cognitive views that focus on commitment and value rather than just propositional content.

As rightly noted by David Cockburn:

> Wittgenstein was writing against the background of a tradition in which it was customary to mark off my thought about other people from my thought about, say, stones by saying that I believe that the former, but not the latter, "have minds." His introduction of the term "attitude" here represents a revolt against this way of speaking which has a number of dimensions. Part of what he wishes to highlight with this term is the fact that we feel about and act towards other human beings in ways that are utterly different from those in which we feel about and act towards, for example, stones. I have a certain "practical orientation" towards another human being with whom I am confronted. (1990, 6)

Cockburn emphasises an element of the thought of Wittgenstein that is crucial for our considerations relating to the second-person perspective. For Wittgenstein, the centre of the picture of the human way of living (or "practical orientation," as Cockburn calls it) was to have a certain "attitude towards" others, rather than to have a certain "belief about" them (PI, 178). It is a matter of our attitudes, as non-cognitivism emphasises, that we feel towards others as beings towards which certain ways of acting make sense or seem appropriate. In the course of presenting of his own philosophical argument for recognising other people as persons, Cockburn himself stresses that, for Wittgenstein, "the attitude is what is fundamental in our thought about each other" (Cockburn 1990, 9).

5. Conclusions

To conclude, we can therefore legitimately claim that Wittgenstein's views on scepticism and, by analogy, non-cognitivism, do not imply epistemic relativism. The form of relativism to which Wittgenstein is committed

might be simply anthropocentrism (Grayling 1988, 20).[8] He accepts the different cultures and "forms of life" of human beings, but also talks about "the common behaviour of mankind"—and in fact about a common human world-picture. Cultural pluralism, as we might call this form of anthropocentrism, itself makes sense only if we assume that there is mutual accessibility or commensurability between cultures at the cognitive or epistemic level. The different "forms of life" share an experiential and conceptual basis that permits mutual accessibility between them in terms of the second-person perspective. That is precisely the respect in which those "forms of life" are not epistemically relative at all.[9] The ability to detect that something is a "form of life," and that it differs from our own, requires these means just for us to identify its presence and be in a position to say what distinguishes it from ours.

I. WITTGENSTEIN'S WORKS

CV *Culture and Value*. Edited by G.H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman. Translated by Peter Winch. German-English parallel text. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

LC *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Edited by Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

EPB *Eine Philosophische Betrachtung*. In *Schriften*, vol. 5, edited by Rush Rhees, 117–237. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970.

RFM *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Edited by G.H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, and G.E.M. Anscombe. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

PI *Philosophical Investigations*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. German-English parallel text. 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.

Z *Zettel*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. German-English parallel text. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

OC *On Certainty*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright. Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. German-English parallel text. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

PO *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*. Edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. German-English parallel text where appropriate. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993. (Cited by original pagination only).

8. Anthropocentrism might be understood here as similar to what John McDowell's interpretation of Wittgenstein calls the "communitarian" view, though the second-person perspective heavily emphasised in the present paper is missing from the latter. In McDowell's view, Wittgenstein's philosophy moves beyond the idea that a linguistic community's agreement in judgment determines meaning or correctness. Instead, McDowell emphasises an individual's initiation into the space of reasons through upbringing and the acquisition of a "second nature" that shapes their conceptual capacities (see McDowell 1984, 325–63; see also Wright 1980, *passim*, and McGinn 2021, 145–60).

9. Where Wittgenstein's approach is concerned, there seems to be a kind of transcendentalist impulse (pursuing the conditions under which our knowledge is possible) that crisscrosses with a naturalistic one (invoking human behaviour as a common factor in respect of our cognitive activity, where this furnishes some sort of basis for a "principle of charity").

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