Conservatism and Common-Sense Realism

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ABSTRACT

Whether understood as an adherence to the given, as an appeal to observe traditions, or as the wish to return to some bygone age, conservatism is bedevilled by paradoxes. The present essay attempts to overcome these paradoxes by putting forward a new conception of conservatism, identifying it as a world-view bent on the preservation of the totality of human knowledge with the aim of enhancing the survival chances of future generations. Conservatism thus understood targets the achievement of real knowledge. Hence by necessity it must associate itself with a realist epistemology and ontology. I argue that any realism worthy of the name is common-sense realism, and that common-sense realism takes into account not merely the verbal level of cognition but also its visual and motor dimensions. The paper devotes special attention to Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work has been intensively discussed in recent decades in the context both of conservatism and realism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Paul Engelmann, the Austrian architect who became a friend of Ludwig Wittgenstein's during World War I, writes that although the notion of "a God in the sense of the Bible, the image of God as the creator of the world, hardly ever engaged Wittgenstein's attention", the idea of a last judgement "was of profound concern to him. 'When we meet again at the last judgement' was a recurrent phrase with him", Engelmann explains, "which he used in many a conversation at a particularly momentous point. He would pronounce the words with an indescribably inward-gazing look in his eyes, his head bowed". Wittgenstein "saw life as a task", looking upon "all the features of life as it is, that is to say upon all facts, as an essential part of the conditions of that task". Wittgenstein, Engelmann continues, consistently held that if there was a discrepancy between himself and the world, "the reason for the discrepancy lies in himself alone", thus rejecting "the belief that changes in the external facts may be necessary and called for".[1]

The stance here described by Engelmann is one of *humbleness*, a stance I take to be characteristic of the conservative mentality—and there is no doubt that Wittgenstein held conservative views. In what follows I will refer to some further aspects of the conservative mentality, and attempt to explicate the notoriously elusive notion of conservatism, before returning to the issue of what Wittgenstein's conservatism involves. I will then argue that the alternative, left-wing/liberal, mentality clearly tends to lead to the epistemological and ontological positions of relativism and constructivism. The conservative stance, by contrast, should lead to realism, and ultimately to common-sense realism.

The author whose work first alerted me to the connection between conservatism and realism is the Gestalt psychologist and art theorist Rudolf Arnheim. In his essay "Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology" written in 1969 Arnheim noted a contrast between, on the one hand, British empiricist philosophy "proudly asserting the dominion of the individual's views and judgments over the environment", and, on the other hand, the world-view of the Gestalt psychologists, who showed "respect for the structure of the physical world as it impinges upon the nervous system", affirming that it is "man's task to find his own humble place in the world and to take the cues for his conduct and comprehension from the order of that world."

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In the social realm, Arnheim went on, Gestalt theory "demanded of the citizen that he derive his rights and duties from the objectively ascertained functions and needs of society".[2]

I will come back to Arnheim's conservative views below. For the moment I want merely to point out that Arnheim was a central figure heralding the 'iconic turn'—the turn to visual thinking—today gradually gaining ground in the humanities,[3] even perhaps in philosophy. Arnheim stressed the primordial and continuing significance of visual thinking, of autonomous pictorial meaning ultimately founded on so-called descriptive gestures, and of the motor dimension inevitably involved in the understanding of images. Now if Arnheim was on the right track in all of this, as I believe he was, then the lesson for philosophy is that ontology cannot remain satisfied with being based merely and entirely on intuitions suggested by the structure of verbal language, and epistemology cannot go on ignoring the fact that our knowledge of the world out there is founded more on immediate visual images than on the mediating capacity of words.

I will argue that not only Arnheim but also Wittgenstein followed the path from conservatism to realism. Wittgenstein in his later philosophy gradually worked out the elements of a novel, sophisticated, common-sense approach to both ontology and epistemology, one of these elements being a rudimentary theory of pictorial meaning.[4] Because the mainstream view associates him with relativism rather than with realism, Wittgenstein might seem an unlikely candidate for a conservative exponent of a realist philosophy. Another unlikely candidate, though unlikely from a different perspective, is the emblematic figure of common-sense realism, Thomas Reid. I suggest that Read, too, can be referred to as a 'conservative', even though the term was not yet in use in the eighteenth century. Conservatism, in the view I will be propounding, is a timeless human attitude. Significantly, while Reid obviously played a role in the Scottish Enlightenment, at the same time he insisted upon the perennial function of *authority*.[5] In the twentieth century, I similarly take F.A. Hayek to be a conservative[6] holding a realist, even if not an epistemologically direct realist, position.[7] And one can of course point to some more recent, very unequivocally conservative-and-realist figures: both David M. Armstrong and his colleague David Stove were blatantly conservative, and also blatantly realist.

2. PARADOXES OF CONSERVATISM

In November 1930 Wittgenstein composed a foreword to the typescript that came to be published posthumously as *Philosophical Remarks*. "I would like to say", he wrote, that "'This book is written to the glory of God', but nowadays that would ... not be rightly understood."[8] More than a decade later, he made the following remark in a conversation, to his student and friend M. O'C. Drury: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."[9] This formula appears to me to be a perfect expression of the vague, diffuse, religiosity which the conservative stance characteristically involves. Such religiosity was certainly not foreign to Arnheim. Recall his reference to man's "humble place in the world". Or note this passage from his *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*:

> the very nature of religion and its tasks are now so open to question that their external expression is no longer governed by reliable standards. … all the more rewarding [are] those examples of church architecture that succeed in translating dignity and spiritual devotion into twentieth-century idioms.[10]

Now although Arnheim displayed an acute sense for modern art, he was nonetheless a conservative. His conservatism had two quite different dimensions, a creative, forward-looking, ontological–epistemological one to which I have already alluded and to which I will

return; and the old-fashioned backward-looking one, as when he complained of contemporary "social conditions that atomize the human community into a mere aggregate of individuals or small groups", "the chaos of our present way of life", our "individualistic civilization".[11] It is this backward-looking type of conservatism which the Austrian novelist and essayist Robert Musil distanced himself from when writing in 1923:

> Having freed himself from all the old bonds, man is recommended to subject himself to them anew: faith, … austerity, … sense of national community, a concept of civic duty, and abandonment of capitalist individualism and all its attitudes. … – The belief is that a decay has to be cured. – … I can think of hardly any account which conceives of our present condition as a problem, a new sort of problem, and not as a solution that has miscarried.[12]

What Musil here describes is a fundamental paradox of perhaps the most common variety of conservatism. The suggestion that we should *give up our current patterns of life and return to those of some earlier age* is a revolutionary one, in need of argument. If on the other hand conservatism is taken to mean that we should maintain whatever social conditions we happen to live under, we are once more faced with a paradoxical doctrine which would imply acquiescing to different values according to different times and places. Now yet another cluster of paradoxes emerges when conservatism is equated, as it almost invariably is, with *traditionalism*. Twentieth-century scholarship has shown beyond any possible doubt that traditions in the rigorous sense of the term are *instruments for preserving knowledge in pre-literal cultures*—that is, instruments for preserving practices, techniques, and knowledge in the form of oral lore. Of course the term 'tradition' is quite often used also in a broader, looser sense.[13] But it is a blunder to speak of traditionalism where conditions of alphabetic literacy obtain. Hence it is blatantly misleading, too, when Karl Mannheim defines conservatism as "primarily nothing more than traditionalism become conscious".[14] Mannheim is not willing to regard conservatism as "a phenomenon universal to all mankind".[15] When searching for an expression to designate the "general psychological attitude" underlying modern conservatism, he chooses Max Weber's term "traditionalism" as opposed to Lord Hugh Cecil's formula "natural conservatism".[16]

Here by contrast I will defend an interpretation of conservatism as a timeless, perennial attitude and world-view. As a first step, let me quote from a recent paper by political scientists Hatemi and McDermott:

> Political attitudes in modern human society encompass fundamentally the same issues of reproduction and survival that confronted group life in ancient humans because they involve the same interpersonal traits. ... The labels and meanings of issues, groups, and policies might change across time and cultures, but the underlying connection between the core issues that are important to humans, including survival, reproduction, and defense, will remain. Indeed, genetic influences on attitude differences may be a remnant of ancient behavioral adaptation pre-dating modern human society.[17]

The fundamental political attitudes Hatemi and McDermott discuss are conservatism and liberalism in a broad sense of these terms. And what their paper suggests is that in this broad sense not only conservatism, but also liberalism—the striving for ever more freedom, if you like—is a perennial attitude. As a second step, let us take a look again at the passage I quoted from Arnheim on humility and on the epistemological stance of the Gestalt school of which he is a representative. What this passage implies is that one can identify a constant task that conservatism has to face at all times, namely to understand the world as given, and to gain objective knowledge. Drawing together the Hatemi–McDermott and the Arnheim threads, I

suggest that what conservatism in any historical age primarily strives to conserve is in fact *knowledge*, specifically the knowledge required to preserve the survival chances of future generations. This formula I am putting forward as an explication, which means: a reasoned re-definition, of the concept of conservatism. I will henceforth refer to conservatism explicated in this way as 'knowledge-conservatism'.

Now the knowledge required to preserve the survival chances of future generations varies greatly depending on the dominant information and communication technology of the age. Knowledge-conservatism will thus appear in a variety of guises in the course of cultural history. In pre-verbal cultures, we can assume that images—think of cave paintings and the like—served not just ritual purposes; they came into being as an answer to the felt need of storing and communicating knowledge.[18] In cultures that have developed a verbal language[19] but are still preliterate, knowledge is carried predominantly by words. However, because in a preliterate culture words cannot be written down, knowledge is memorized through repetition of formulas the truth of which is accepted as unquestionable due the fiction that they are handed down unchanged from generation to generation all the way back to some ultimately divine source. This is the age of traditions. The adherence to traditions characterizes the whole of premodernity. Premodern conservatism strives to preserve the life of generations to come by seeking to ensure the survival of the mores and beliefs of former generations. Modern conservatism by contrast, that is conservatism in the age of the printed word, is forced to recognize that change is inevitable. It attempts to slow down change in order to reduce the destruction that it causes. It defends the idea of evolutionary social growth and thus attempts to halt the devastating influence of speculative theories. Beginning with Burke, modern conservatism emphasizes that genuine knowledge is embedded in the institutions and practices of society. And now in the age of online networked communication, postmodern— that is, *post-typographic*, post-mid-twentieth-century—conservatism has to cope with the very phenomenon of incessant change, indeed with change that is rapid and bringing mostly unforeseeable consequences. Bedevilled by the paradox of having to prepare for a future that it cannot predict, postmodern conservatism—knowledge-conservatism coming of age—faces the daunting task of preserving and keeping in readiness as it were the entirety of human knowledge. To that end, it has to have a solid philosophy of the nature of knowledge. And it is precisely an adequate view of knowledge that, seen from the conservative perspective I propose, left-wing liberalism is lacking.

3. RADICALISM: LIBERATED FROM REALITY

In his book *The Social Construction of What?* Ian Hacking complains that the "traditional right/left spectrum of politics and alliances has run into problems".[20] Hacking confesses to having difficulties in taking a stand on how constructivism—today's dominant form of relativism— hangs together with leftism. Now radical leftism in fact tends to embrace anti-realism in the form of relativism, but before coming back to Hacking I want to point out that the right/left spectrum is not one on which it is invariably possible to find a place for conservatism.[21] Conservatism is not necessarily right-wing, and especially contemporary conservatism, though opposed to the anti-realism of the left, should definitely not be seen as belonging to the political right. World-views do not fit into any simple one-dimensional space.[22]

Hacking finds that "[s]ocial construction has in many contexts been a truly liberating idea", and that even though the most influential decades of the trend have passed, it "can still be liberating suddenly to realize that something is constructed and is not part of the nature of things, of people, or human society". However, Hacking senses a dilemma. "In terms of the unmasking of established order", he writes, "constructionists are properly put on the left.

Their political attitude is nevertheless very much not in harmony with those scientists who see themselves as allies of the oppressed, but also feel like the special guardians of the most important truths about the world, the true bastions of objectivity."[23] In section 6.2 below I will adopt the position that there are indeed scientific theories that have a merely instrumental function—that is, they are not actually true descriptions of the world. But not even such merely instrumental theories are constructions in the sense social constructivists attach to this term. For the theories in question are not arbitrary, they can be refuted by empirical data, they aim at having a hold on some objective reality.

Anti-realism is not necessarily left-wing, but radical leftism—say in the sense given to this term by Lenin—is necessarily anti-realist. Two interesting early examples instantiating this connection are the Russian revolutionary Alexander Bogdanov and the young Georg Lukács. In the 1962 foreword to his *Theory of the Novel* (1916) the aging Lukács—having long ceased to be a radical leftist—chided himself for having combined his youthful left-wing ethics with a right-wing epistemology. His position now was that the combination had been a theoretically unsound one. When we compare this position with the 1967 foreword to his seminal *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), it emerges that what had been missing in his early work, according to Lukács in retrospect, was *realism*. It is obviously the case that the young Lukács did not hold a realist epistemology. By contrast, Lenin—a communist dictator—was realist through and through, and he criticized Bogdanov for not being one. Bogdanov, Lenin wrote, was left-wing, and his epistemology was a Machian anarchism. Similarly, I suggest, the young Lukács's notion in *History and Class Consciousness* of the proletariat as the "identical subject–object"—as the *subject* which, by coming to know itself in the course of its revolutionary practice, comes also to know its *object*, namely society—is an anarchist, left-wing idea.[24]

A more recent example of such anarchism is that of Feyerabend. Feyerabend's attempts to differentiate between his "epistemological anarchism" and anarchisms of the more familiar "political" kind have however been generally found unconvincing. Only when "universal ideas" such as "truth" and "reason" are rejected, will man, according to Feyerabend, "cease to be a slave and gain a dignity that is more than an exercise in cautious conformism".[25] Feyerabend's ideas should of course be seen in the context of the history of social constructivism. Think of Mannheim and Ludvik Fleck in the 1920s and 1930s.[26] Or think of the Putnam of the 1970s and 1980s.[27] Think of Rorty. Think of feminism.[28] Constructivism holds that there is no objective knowledge. Conservatism—most conspicuously in its form of knowledge-conservatism—has no choice but to come to grips with reality. It necessarily maintains that objective knowledge is attainable.

4. THE CONSERVATIVE VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE

4.1 Back to Hayek?

It was Burke's late-eighteenth-century description of knowledge as embedded in the institutions and practices of society that Hayek took up and elaborated in the 20th century. What Hayek appears to have shown is that the knowledge needed by society in order to uphold its economy emerges from, and fundamentally consists in, the practical experience society's individual members acquire in local conditions. Whether in a premodern small-scale or in a modern large-scale economy, such knowledge is distributed among individual market actors and is mediated by the dynamics of prices. It is, as Hayek again and again stressed, impossible to centralize. But now what is true of knowledge in the world of production and commerce, seems to be true of knowledge in general, too. John Gray famously referred to Hayek's insight that

all our theoretical, propositional or explicit knowledge presupposes a vast background of tacit, practical and inarticulate knowledge. Hayek's insight here parallels those of Oakeshott, Ryle, Heidegger, and Polanyi; like them he perceives that the kind of knowledge that can be embodied in theories is not only distinct from, but also at every point dependent upon, another sort of knowledge, embodied in habits and dispositions to act. Some of this practical knowledge is found in rules of action and perception imprinted in the nervous system and transmitted by genetic inheritance. But much of the significant part of the practical knowledge expressed in our dealings with each other is passed on mimetically, in the cultural transmission of traditions or practices...[29]

Let me note, first, that in the list of names Gray here provides, Wittgenstein should certainly have been included. The idea of *practical knowledge* has a central place in Wittgenstein's later philosophy.[30] Secondly, it is clear that when Gray uses the word "mimetic" he does not thereby allude to *visual* imitation. The issue of visuality did not play a role in the history of conservative thought from Burke to Hayek. By contrast Wittgenstein, as I have indicated above, indeed attempted to elaborate a theory of visual images. This is important in a number of ways from the point of view of the argument I am striving to construct in the present paper. First, though, I want to call attention to the way in which Hayek's emphasis on knowledge as being *merely* local threatens to lead to yet another paradox of conservatism. For knowledge that is merely local is *relative* knowledge—and, from a broader social perspective, *fragmented* knowledge. In order to meet the challenges of the modern and postmodern ages, we need also to grasp the possibility of some kind of *unified* knowledge. Here visuality comes into play because pictures are not only radically better at conveying practical knowledge than texts, but they can also much more efficiently mediate across disciplinary borders.[31]

4.2 Conservatism and the Visual Image

Images can, it is true, be radically subversive. But they have been much more often used throughout history as instruments for preserving the status quo. In his book *Augustus and the Power of Images* Paul Zanker provides a fascinating description of the way the penetration of Roman society by Greek art, from the 2nd century BC onward, played a part in dissolving traditional conditions; but he shows also how the new visual world that emerged at the time of Octavian's rule contributed to the permanent peace of the empire.[32]

Second, images are conservative also in another way, in that they preserve in unchanging form pictorial knowledge. And with the advent of the mechanical image—the photograph, the film—innumerable details become stored the recording of which had not even been purposely intended. Third, as I suggested above, when citing Arnheim's "Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology" essay, the pictorial is conservative in the sense that it tends to represent the invariant, given, structured elements in the world around us.

5. WITTGENSTEIN

5.1 Wittgenstein's Conservatism

The idea that Wittgenstein was a conservative thinker was first proposed by Ernest Gellner in his *Words and Things* (1959), whose suggestion was then taken up by Herbert Marcuse in his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Gellner saw § 124 of the *Philosophical Investigations* ("Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language... It leaves everything as it is") as exuding a conservative spirit, a spirit Gellner was unhappy with.[33]

I myself have published from 1976 onwards a series of papers arguing, first, that one way to understand Wittgenstein's later philosophy is to see it in the context of German conservative social-political thinking as it blossomed in the 1920s and 30s; and secondly, that Wittgenstein actually worked out philosophical arguments that were suited to underpin the conservative case.[34] These papers have elicited many negative, but also some positive, comments. Let me here just refer to the recent discussions (offering also summaries of some of the earlier polemical papers) in the volumes *The New Wittgenstein*, and *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*.[35] The commentators have correctly pointed out that I had exploited a "relativist" (a term, I must remark, I did not actually use) interpretation of the later Wittgenstein in order to give his arguments a conservative flavour. Today I believe that towards the end of his life Wittgenstein became critical of relativism; and that it is actually his criticism of relativism that should be seen as a natural and logical implication of his conservatism. However, in the present subsection all I want to point out is that, on any description, Wittgenstein indeed had a conservative mentality and held conservative social views.

Think of the oft-quoted passage in the foreword to his *Philosophical Remarks*[36] where he wrote that the spirit of his book "is different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand". Or recall what Fania Pascal, who taught Wittgenstein Russian at Cambridge in the mid-1930s, wrote about him: "At a time when intellectual Cambridge was turning Left, [Wittgenstein] was still an old-time conservative of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire."[37] Or consider this remark, written by Wittgenstein in 1948:

> I think the way people are educated nowadays tends to diminish their capacity for suffering. At present a school is reckoned good if the children have a good time. And that used *not* to be the criterion. Parents moreover want their children to grow up like themselves (only more so), but nevertheless subject them to an education *quite* different from their own.—Endurance of suffering isn't rated highly because there is supposed not to be any suffering—really it's out of date.[38]

And a second remark, written some months later: "Tradition is not something a man can learn; not a thread he can pick up when he feels like it; any more than a man can choose his ancestors.—Someone lacking a tradition who would like to have one is like a man unhappily in love."[39]

5.2 Wittgenstein as a Common-Sense Realist

There is another highly interesting remark, jotted down by Wittgenstein in 1946, in which the term "tradition" occurs. Hypothesizing about some possible ways a tribe imagined by him might think, he wrote: "To this people certain gestures, certain images, & so also certain words, are natural. And some of this is tradition, some are / original / reactions which were not (or at least not directly) given rise to / caused / by the influencing of the child on the part of the adults".[40] Gestures and images are primary natural carriers of meaning, some of our core vocabulary derives from them, but handed-down conventions still do have a bearing on how we use those gestures and images. Wittgenstein was a common-sense realist,[41] and his realism is a unique combination of, first, a stress on ordinary language, the deviations from which are taken as the source of (bad) philosophy; secondly, his awareness of the significance of the pictorial and the motor; thirdly, his emphasis on established use, that is, on traditions.

The work in which Wittgenstein explicitly dealt with the issue of common-sense philosophy is *The Blue Book*.[42] It is on p. 45 that Wittgenstein formulates his crucial argument. He offers

a kind of parable illustrating the difficulty we are in, and also showing the way out of this sort of difficulty: We have been told by popular scientists that the floor on which we stand is not solid, as it appears to common sense, as it has been discovered that the wood consists of particles filling space so thinly that it can almost be called empty. This is liable to perplex us,

it need not do so however, since to say that the floor is not solid is simply "to misuse language". The popular scientist, just like the philosopher, is misled by the surface grammar of ordinary language. I understand Wittgenstein as striving to make "the coarse views of the man in the street"[43] compatible with the seemingly contradictory views of the scientist. The task of (good) philosophy, as Wittgenstein saw it, was to enable common sense to integrate the ever-evolving discoveries of the sciences.[44]

In the *Philosophical Investigations* it is references to ordinary language that assume the role of references to common sense. Remarks suggesting a tendency towards philosophical realism are occasional, but significant. For instance: "if things were quite different from what they actually are...; if rule became exception and exception rule ... our normal language-games would thereby lose their point"[45]. Wittgenstein here inserts: "What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality".[46] This insertion clearly foreshadows the first paragraph in Part II, section xii, of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Earlier in Part II, in section xi, Wittgenstein makes us realize that it is an obvious philosophical error when someone "tries to explain the concept of a physical object in terms of 'what is really seen'". Wittgenstein's common-sense realist point is that people learn, necessarily, to handle, and to refer to, physical objects first, and only later come to talk about things like visual impressions. One should therefore, or so Wittgenstein implies, not pretend that seeming is as it were prior to being.

Wittgenstein returns to the problem of seeming and being in notes he has written during the last two years of his life, published under the title *Remarks on Colour*.[47] Let me quote from these notes three consecutive paragraphs:

> Don't we just *call* brown the table which under certain circumstances appears brown to the normal-sighted? We could certainly conceive of someone to whom things seemed sometimes this colour and sometimes that, independently of the colour they are.—That it seems so to men is their criterion for its *being* so.—Being and seeming may, of course, be independent of one another in exceptional cases, but that doesn't make them logically independent; the language-game does not reside in the exception.[48]

When Wittgenstein here writes that men take *seeming* as the criterion for *being*, he does not at all suggest that people are as it were making a mistake. On the contrary, he assumes the stance of the common-sense realist: the world, generally, is what it seems, and if scientists tell us that it is different from what it seems, philosophy should explain in what way they, the scientists, deviate from ordinary linguistic use.

6. THE VISUAL ROAD TO REALISM

6.1 Visual Thinking

In his seminal book *Visual Thinking* Rudolf Arnheim wrote: "What makes language so valuable for thinking ... cannot be thinking in words. It must be the help that words lend to thinking while it operates in a more appropriate medium, such as visual imagery." The visual

medium, Arnheim adds, "is so enormously superior because it offers structural equivalents to all characteristics of objects, events, relations."[49] Some pages earlier Arnheim had related mental images to *descriptive gestures*, suggesting that what a descriptive gesture pictures is primarily the motor experience underlying a corresponding mental image. As Arnheim puts it:

> Gestures enact pushing and pulling, penetration and obstacle... the perceptual qualities of shape and motion are present in the very acts of thinking depicted by the gestures and are in fact the medium in which the thinking itself takes place. These perceptual qualities are not necessarily visual or only visual. In gestures, the kinesthetic experiences of pushing, pulling, advancing, obstructing, are likely to play an important part.[50]

What Arnheim here says is, I believe, of great significance, since it implies not only that our verbal constructs—direct designations, idioms, metaphors—are meaningful because they convey mental images, but also that it is our bodily, physical experiences, our physical contact with reality, that gives rise to these images. Arnheim adhered to the Gestalt school's founding view that one cannot experience images without experiencing the patterns of forces they embody and convey. He was aware of the pioneering role of the German philosopher-psychologist Theodor Lipps here;[51] while on the broader topic of visual thinking he essentially drew on the work of Galton, Ribot, Binet, and Titchener.[52]

Neither the view that thinking is primarily a matter of images rather than words, nor Arnheim's position on descriptive gestures, are feasible without a broader gestural theory of the origins of language.[53] This theory has had a continuous history ever since Plato's *Cratylus*, with Reid giving a good summary of the main argument in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind*. As he wrote,

> if mankind had not a natural language, they could never have invented an artificial one... For all artificial language supposes some compact or agreement to affix a certain meaning to certain signs ... but there can be no compact or agreement without signs, nor without language; and therefore there must be a natural language before any artificial language can be invented.

The elements of the "natural language of mankind", Reid continued, are "modulations of the voice, gestures, and features", adding: "Where speech is natural, it will be an exercise, not of the voice and lungs only, but of all the muscles of the body; like that of dumb people and savages".[54] In *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* Reid recalls the art of pantomime in ancient Rome, noting that "it required neither study nor practice in the spectators to understand [pantomimes]. It was a natural language, and therefore understood by all men, whether Romans, Greeks, or Barbarians, by the learned and the unlearned."[55]

6.2 Pictorial Truth

In his book *What Is This Thing Called Science?* Alan Chalmers programmatically accepts and presupposes that "a single, unique, physical world exists independently of observers".[56] However, he depicts it as a mistake to believe that our knowledge of the external world is based on what our senses, in particular our eyes, tell us. He refers to ambiguous drawings and to children's puzzles, stressing that as we look at them what we see will, in a few moments' time, change, while the corresponding retinal images remain the same.[57] Neurophysiologists and cognitive scientists usually make an even stronger case, pointing out that what we see is always and entirely underdetermined by retinal images. Donald Hoffman, towards the end of his influential book with the telling title *Visual Intelligence: How We Create What We See*,

draws the consequence: the hope of "scientific realism", he writes, is "as yet unrealized", and "cannot be proved true".[58]

However, these arguments are spurious. Our eyes mostly do not err; and we do mostly agree with each other on what we see. The world our eyes and brains build up tends to be the very world in fact surrounding us. As Devitt puts it: "Why does the world seem the way it does? The obvious answer is that the world seems that way because it *is* that way."[59] Of course we are aware, because scientists tell us so, that some animal species see the world differently from the way we see it. This does not pose a challenge to common-sense realism. As Stephen Boulter points out: "The fact that an organism's perceptual systems do not pick up or respond to all of reality does not imply that what they do pick up are not objective features of an extralinguistic reality."[60]

Now common-sense realism assumes not only that the world we see is, in its visual aspects, identical with the world as it actually is, but also that we can draw and paint veridical pictures of bits of the world, make photographs of them, film them. Here we must admit that pictures can be ambiguous, fuzzy, and distorting. But distortion can be a mode of emphasis, fuzziness a way of representing the generic, and disambiguation is achieved both by captions and by creating a sequence of images, as obviously happens when making movies. Of course the contrary views of Nelson Goodman still cast a long shadow. His extreme constructivism and his conviction that pictures have no autonomous meaning go happily together. However, I find Goodman entirely unconvincing. I see no reason to attenuate what—drawing on an extensive body of literature critical of him—I wrote some fifteen years ago: "It lies in the nature of Goodman's arguments that they typically invite, not careful refutation, but polite rejection."[61]

Common-sense realism has a delicate relationship to scientific realism. The common-sense world is one of observable objects. Modern science is positing unobservable entities in order to explain the observable world. Scientific realism holds that the unobservable entities posited by science are real. Some or all of the entities of the common-sense world might then turn out to be mere appearances. In a profound analysis Wilfrid Sellars comes close to concluding that the scientific image of the world will ultimately supplant the common-sense (the "manifest") one.[62] By contrast, Devitt argues that "scientific realism does not undermine common-sense realism".[63] He believes that common-sense realism does not need to defend itself by having recourse to operationalism or instrumentalism—to positions maintaining that "unobservables are simply 'useful fictions'". These positions, in Devitt's view, require observability to have "an epistemic significance which it cannot have".[64] Now I can agree neither with the main drift of the argument Sellars puts forward, nor with the particular point Devitt makes about instrumentalism. Common sense should integrate scientific discoveries, but it should not, and cannot, give up its primacy over science. I suggest that we are indeed justified in taking many scientific theories to be purely instrumental; however, here our guiding criterion should be not observability, but rather imaginability. We cannot imagine what we cannot visualize. The limits of scientific realism should be drawn at the point where the possibility of visualization ends.[65]

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that if conservatism wants to come to grips with the contemporary world, it must overcome the paradoxes it faces as a backward-looking or status-quo-preserving ideology. I have introduced the notion of knowledge-conservatism to capture what I believe is the essence of conservatism unobscured. Conservatism should reinvent itself as a program that is not so much political as ontological and epistemological—a program of

common-sense realism, aiming at real knowledge and the preservation of real knowledge with the aim of enhancing the survival chances of future generations.

NOTES

[1] Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein: With a Memoir*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, pp. 77 and 79.

[2] Rudolf Arnheim, "Wertheimer and Gestalt Psychology" (1969), in Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, p. 34.

[3] Two programmatic volumes, both published in 1994, were W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), and Gottfried Boehm, ed., *Was ist ein Bild?* (München: Fink). Mitchell introduced the term "pictorial turn", Boehm the term "ikonische Wendung".

[4] See esp. my paper (with extensive references to the secondary literature of the topic) "Image and Metaphor in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein", in R. Heinrich et al., eds., *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, Proceedings of the 33rd International Ludwig Wittgenstein Symposium, vol. 1, Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt: ontos Verlag, 2011, pp. 109–129. Accessible at https://www.academia.edu/16676525/Image_and_Metaphor_in_the_Philosophy_of_Wittgenstein.

[5] See, e.g., Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), critical edition, edited by Derek R. Brookes (Pennsylvania: The State University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 487 f.: "Before we are capable of reasoning about testimony or authority, there are many things which it concerns us to know, for which we can have no other evidence. ... If children were so framed, as to pay no regard to testimony or to authority, they must, in the literal sense, perish for lack of knowledge. ... But when our faculties ripen, we find reason to check that propensity to yield to testimony and to authority... We learn to reason about the regard due to them, and see it to be a childish weakness to lay more stress upon them than reason justifies. Yet, I believe, to the end of life, most men are more apt to go into this extreme than into the contrary; and the natural propensity still retains some force."

[6] If in doubt as to the adequacy of this label, just cast a glance on Hayek's "Individualism: True and False" (1945), in F.A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949, see esp. pp. 8 (here Hayek calls for "an attitude of humility" as against an "exaggerated belief in the powers of individual reason"), 15 ("men are in fact unequal"), p. 23 ("true individualism affirms the value of the family and ... believes in local autonomy"), p. 26 ("It must remain an open question whether a free or individualistic society can be worked successfully if people are too 'individualistic' in the false sense, if they are too unwilling voluntarily to conform to traditions and conventions"), and p. 32 ("the fundamental attitude of true individualism is one of humility toward the processes by which mankind has achieved things which have not been designed or understood by any individual").

[7] See esp. F. A. Hayek, *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952, p. 108: "the microcosm in the brain progressively approximates to a reproduction of the macrocosm of the external world".

[8] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, transl. from the German by R. Hargreaves and R. White, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975, p. 7.

[9] M. O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein" (1976), in Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 94. For a detailed discussion of this remark see Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, London: Routledge, 1993, and more recently William Child, *Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2011, ch. 8: "Religion and Anthropology".

[10] Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, p. 206.

[11] *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, pp. 17 and 67. The passage on p. 17 begins with Arnheim deploring "the visual, functional, and social chaos of modern life"; on p. 206 he refers, again, to "the prevailing individualism of our civilization". The term "civilization" to Arnheim's German ears clearly suggested something of the opposite of "culture", just as it did, say, to Thomas Mann, Oswald Spengler, or Ludwig Wittgenstein. In English of course the two terms are more often than not used as synonyms, cf. e.g. Franz Rauhut, "Die Herkunft der Worte und Begriffe 'Kultur', 'Civilisation' und 'Bildung' " (1951), *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 34 (1953), pp. 81–91, and especially Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding et al., *Kultur und Zivilisation* (*Europäische Schlüsselwörter*, vol. III), München: Max Hueber, 1967, see in particular pp. v–vi, 180 ff., 196 and 313 f.

[12] Robert Musil, "Der deutsche Mensch als Symptom" (1923), in Robert Musil, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Adolf Frisé, vol. 8, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978, p. 1382, here quoted from the English translation in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri, ed., *Austrian Philosophy: Studies and Texts*, München: Philosophia Verlag, 1981, p. 185.

[13] A notorious example in philosophy is Thomas Kuhn's drawing a parallel between paradigmatic and traditional practices, most conspicuously in his paper "The Essential Tension: Tradition and Innovation in Scientific Research" (1959). For a detailed discussion see my "Introduction: Notes towards a Theory of Traditions", in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri, ed., *Tradition*, Wien: IFK, 1995, pp. 7–32 (accessible online at https://www.academia.edu/4365551/Notes_towards_a_Theory_of_Traditions).

[14] *From Karl Mannheim*, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993, p. 288. The quoted passage is from Mannheim's "Conservative Thought", an English translation based on his 1925 Heidelberg dissertation.

[15] *From Karl Mannheim*, p. 280.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 280 f.

[17] Peter K. Hatemi and Rose McDermott, "The Genetics of Politics: Discovery, Challenges, and Progress", *Trends in Genetics*, vol. 28, no. 10 (Oct. 2012), pp. 525–533, the quoted passage on p. 528. From the wealth of literature in political science and psychology discussing the issue in a similar spirit, let me here single out John T. Jost, "The End of the End of Ideology", *American Psychologist*, vol. 61, no. 7 (Oct. 2006), pp. 651–670, and James H. Fowler and Darren Schreiber, "Biology, Politics, and the Emerging Science of Human Nature", *Science*, vol. 322, 7 Nov. 2008, pp. 912–914.

[18] Discussing the tool-making revolution of the Upper Palaeolithic, John Pfeiffer refers to the enormous increase in complexity of the social world, and the ensuing information overload. See John E. Pfeiffer, *The Creative Explosion: An Inquiry into the Origins of Art and Religion*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982, cf. esp. pp. 121 ff. and 185 ff.

[19] I side with the view that the primordial human language is a visual one, a language of facial expressions and gestures. See my study "Time and Image in the Theory of Gestures", in Kristóf Nyíri, *Meaning and Motoricity: Essays on Image and Time*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2014, pp. 121–143. The volume is accessible at https://www.academia.edu/12683510/Meaning_and_Motoricity_Essays_on_Image_and_Time. For a slightly expanded version of the chapter on the theory gestures, see https://www.academia.edu/16619247/Image_and_Time_in_the_Theory_of_Gestures.

[20] Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 95.

[21] That is, I agree entirely with what Kieron O'Hara says on this in his *Conservatism*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, pp. 207 and 210.

[22] I have distinguished between eight subspaces in a three-dimensional space of possible political views (defined along the dimensions of *equality*, *freedom*, and *social change*) in my paper "The Pitfalls of Left-Wing Epistemology: Anarchy vs. Scientific Method", *Doxa* 10, 1987 (Budapest), pp.17–25, accessible online at www.academia.edu/16417833/The_Pitfalls_of_Left-Wing_Epistemology_Anarchy_vs._Scientific_Method_1985.

[23] Hacking, *op. cit.*, pp. vii, 35 and 95.

[24] For the references to Lenin and Lukács here see my "The Pitfalls of Left-Wing Epistemology", cf. note 22 above.

[25] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (1975), London: Verso, 1982, pp. 187ff. and 191.

[26] Cf. esp. Dick Pels, "Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge: Toward a New Agenda", *Sociological Theory*, vol. 14, no. 1 (March 1996), p. 37.

[27] See here esp. Susan Haack, "Reflections on Relativism: From Momentous Tautology to Seductive Contradiction" (1996), in Haack's *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 153.

[28] Of the innumerable hilarious formulations emerging from the social constructivist camp, my favourite collection is that given by Michael Devitt, in his *Realism and Truth* (1984), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 256 f.

[29] John Gray, "Hayek as a Conservative", first published in *Salisbury Review* in 1983, reprinted in John Gray, *Post-liberalism: Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1993, the quoted passage on p. 34.

[30] Cf. my "Tradition and Practical Knowledge", in Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri and Barry Smith (eds.), *Practical Knowledge: Outines of a Theory of Traditions and Skills*, London: Croom Helm, 1988, pp. 18 f. The volume is accessible online at http://goo.gl/LaFhvf.

[31] I have discussed this issue in some detail in my paper "From Texts to Pictures: The New Unity of Science", in Kristóf Nyíri, ed., *Mobile Learning: Essays on Philosophy, Psychology and Education*, Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2003, pp. 45–67. The paper is accessible online at www.academia.edu/4494104/nyiri_pictunity_2003.

[32] Paul Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*, München: Beck, 1987.

[33] See Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things: A Critical Account of Linguistic Philosophy and a Study in Ideology*, London: 1959, esp. pp. 100 ff., 196ff. and 214f., and Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 177.

[34] See in particular my "Wittgenstein's New Traditionalism", *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, vol. 28, nos. 1–3, (1976) pp. 503–509; "Wittgenstein's Later Work in relation to Conservatism", in B. McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and his Times,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, pp. 44–68; and "Wittgenstein 1929–31: The Turning Back" in S. Shanker, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments,* London, Croom Helm, 1986, pp. 29–69.

[35] Alice Crary and Rupert Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000; Cressida J. Heyes, ed., *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

[36] Cf. note 8 above.

[37] Fania Pascal, "Wittgenstein: A Personal Memoir", *Encounter* (August, 1973), repr. in Rush Rhees, ed., *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (cf. note 9 above), pp. 26–62, this quote from p. 31.

[38] MS 168, p. 2, entry dated 30.5.48, here quoted from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, transl. by Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 71e. The expressions "if the children have a good time" and "only more so" are in English in the German original; the quotation marks around "if the children have a good time" have been inserted by the editors of *Culture and Value*.

[39] MS 137, p. 113, remark entered on Nov. 29, 1948. Here quoted from *Culture and Value*, p. 76e.

[40] The words "on the part of the adults" crossed out. MS 133, p. 41r, entered on Nov. 17, 1946. My translation.

[41] I discuss the topic in greater detail in my paper "Wittgenstein as a Common-Sense Realist", forthcoming in *Conceptus*, issue 101 (2016). Wittgenstein is taken to be a common-sense realist "in some relevant aspects of [his] thinking" by Mario De Caro, cf. his "Realism, Common Sense, and Science", *The Monist*, vol. 98, no. 2 (April 2015), p. 200. More hesitant was William Child, in his "Wittgenstein and Common-Sense Realism", *Facta Philosophica* 2, 2000, pp. 179–202. "Is Wittgenstein ... a common-sense realist? There is", Child wrote, "a real tension in his position. The common-sense realist interpretation fits with much of what he says. But some of his writings clearly express a much less common-sense view." And there clearly are, Child stresses, difficult questions that "have to be addressed if common-sense realism is, ultimately, to be a satisfactory position and a satisfactory reading of Wittgenstein". My present paper is a partial attempt to answer some of those difficult questions.

[42] See *Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations". Generally Known as the Blue and Brown Books*. By Ludwig Wittgenstein. Preface by Rush Rhees. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, repr. 1964.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 59.

[44] Compare Annalisa Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein: Scepticism, Certainty, and Common Sense*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 190 ff.

[45] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Part I, § 142, source: TS 227a, 1944–45 (I am quoting the Hacker–Schulte translation, in the revised 4th edition by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). The same clearly realist view is succinctly summed up in one of Wittgenstein's last notes: "Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the sureness of the game.—Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit / On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, Engl. transl. by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969, § 617.)

[46] Proximate source: TS 228, 1945 or 1946.

[47] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schättle. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

[48] *Remarks on Colour*, Part III, §§ 97–99. Manuscript source: MS 173, pp. 22r–23r, entered on March 30, 1950, or shortly after.

[49] Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 231 f.

[50] *Ibid*., pp. 117 f.

[51] As Arnheim wrote: "Lipps anticipated the Gestalt principle of isomorphism for the relationship between the physical forces in the observed object and the psychical dynamics in the observer" ("The Gestalt Theory of Expression", in Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art: Collected Essays*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, p. 58).

[52] For a more detailed description of this story, see my volume *Meaning and Motoricity* (cf. note 19 above), pp. 26 f. and 105–119.

[53] Cf. note 19 above.

[54] Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind: On the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), 3rd ed., London: Cadell–Longman, 1769, pp. 73–75.

[55] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, critical edition (cf. note 5 above), p. 487.

[56] A. E. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science?* 3rd ed., Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999, p. 9.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 4 ff.

[58] Donald D. Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How We Create What We See*, New York: Norton, 1998, p. 199.

[59] Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (cf. note 28 above), p. 74. As Devitt implies, the seems/is convergence is clearly "explicable along Darwinian lines", *ibid*., p. 78.

[60] Stephen Boulter, *The Rediscovery of Common Sense Philosophy*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 103.

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[61] See my paper "The Picture Theory of Reason", in Berit Brogaard and Barry Smith, eds., *Rationality and Irrationality*, Wien: öbv-hpt, 2001, pp. 242–266, digitally accessible at https://www.academia.edu/16652571/The_Picture_Theory_of_Reason. On Goodman see sect. 3 of the paper.

[62] Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (1960), repr. in Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality*, London: Routledge, 1963, cf. esp. pp. 19, 27, 31 f., 36–39.

[63] Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (cf. note 28 above), p. 5, cf. pp. 81 f.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[65] For a detailed argument see my paper "Visualization and the Horizons of Scientific Realism" (based on a talk given in 2008), in my volume *Meaning and Motoricity*, cf. note 19 above.