

John G. Gunnell: *Conventional Realism and Political Inquiry: Channeling Wittgenstein*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. Pp. 194.)

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There are three complementary and interwoven strands of argument composing this elegant book. One is an exploration of the relationship between political inquiry and philosophy as shaped by realist and mentalist modes of representationalism. The second is a compelling reading of Wittgenstein across his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *Philosophical Investigations*, and *On Certainty*. The third strand is a claim about conventional realism and its implications for social inquiry, ontology, epistemology, and our appreciation of first-order practices (e.g., political, religious, scientific). What distinguishes John Gunnell's work on Wittgenstein is the way he conceives of this orientation to language and philosophy as a mode of social inquiry unto itself. That is, Gunnell labors to present Wittgenstein as speaking to issues in social and political science as directly and as critically as possible. The reading of Wittgenstein's writings is contentious, but close, detailed, and substantial.

The central problem addressed in the introduction is political and social science's turn away from the investigation of first-order political and social practices and toward the second- and third-order discourses of philosophy, the philosophy of science, and the social sciences for epistemological and ontological tools and cognitive authority. In this horizontal move toward philosophy, political and social inquiry became enamored with representationalism, or questions about how the mind encounters reality (mentalism) or how reality is impressed on the mind (realism). Mentalism is predicated on the claim that there is an occult space called "mind" wherein prelinguistic thought or a private language of thought resides. Realism carries with it the Kantian framework whereby our apprehension of reality, what we call the world, conforms to the contours of *a priori*, transcendental categories. Both traditions carry with them a sense that we can never know reality directly. Reality, conceived uniformly, is a mirror image produced by mental processes or a mental image represented in language. Theorists and political scientists make this detour into representational philosophy because it holds out the promise of an epistemic authority that can fulfill "the practical goal of affecting political life" (6).

The structure of the first four chapters of the volume is designed to illuminate the challenge Wittgenstein and conventional realism pose to representational realism and mentalism. This contrast is set out in the first chapter and is anchored in the logical and temporal priority of "first-order practices" that "present the world." Second-order metapractices, such as political science and philosophy, entail general but representational claims about the nature and organization of reality. This includes the internal relation of theory to facts and the dichotomy that Gunnell, *vis-à-vis* Wittgenstein, wishes to challenge between "nature" and "conventional nature" or between the realm of

the natural sciences and the realm of the social sciences. For Gunnell, “everything is conventional” (19). There are third-order practices that entail self-reflection on the part of social scientists about what they are doing when they engage in the activity of inquiry. A significant logical and existential problem for theorists, philosophers, and political scientists is keeping these orders of discourse straight. As Gunnell shows in close readings of figures such as John Searle and Charles Taylor (among others), they tend to veer away from the first-order phenomena they set out to describe and explain and instead become immersed in metaphysical controversies and philosophical images of social and scientific practices. This volume is composed largely of Gunnell’s critical encounters with theorists and philosophers who, even while citing philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Austin, and Ryle, nevertheless cannot or will not break the hold of mentalese or break out of the category errors of mistaking models of reality for reality. The consequences of this kind of absorption into philosophical representations, such as confusion over presentational versus representational practices, is examined in a chapter devoted to realism in the study of International Relations.

Conventional Realism and Political Inquiry is the culmination of several decades of careful scholarship on the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Gunnell conceives of this philosophy as a better way of performing social inquiry. Moreover, where representational philosophy rests on ontological dualisms such as inner/outer, mind/body, and appearance/reality, and on pervasive claims about a mental life that precedes language learning, for Wittgenstein what we call mind and thought are our linguistic capacities and the reality that inheres in the language we learn as children. Gunnell encounters Wittgenstein’s writings directly, “channeling” him. But Wittgenstein’s philosophy is also wrested from and clarified through engagements with other anti-representational thinkers, such as Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Daniel Dennett. The book moves away from concerns internal to discourses of contemporary political science and theory to focus on conceiving of philosophy as an unmediated encounter with first-order practices and as presentational. This encounter resolves issues of the relation of thought to speech and language to reality. “Speech, action, and thought are all modes of convention,” writes Gunnell; “they are all discursive phenomena” (149). There is no getting outside of language with language, observed Wittgenstein. There is no pre- or extralinguistic basis for thinking or judging. This is to say that conventional realism entails more than the elimination of philosophical constructs or representations such as “the political” as found in the work of theorists contending that politics is fugitive or a special aspect of the human condition. It also means an end to seeking in philosophy a transcendental ground for judging a practice, belief system, or culture. The result is not the moral relativism feared by critics of ordinary language philosophy, but an acceptance that philosophy cannot be the source of regulative ideals or a tool for their discovery.

The book begins with a study of the relation between political inquiry and philosophy and ends with an enlarged sense of what social scientists, political scientists, and political theorists do as “social inquiry” by bringing them together with philosophy as second-order enterprises in relation to first-order social practices. The relation is one of perspicuity, interpretation, and appreciation of the range of uses of terms that emerge from the “rough ground” of practices. It is not a relation of authority or influence. It is not an external relation yielding foundations, privileged knowledge, or cognitive grounds for truth or judgment. Rather, for Gunnell, Wittgenstein gestures toward the inescapable conventions embedded in language that flow through humans and entwine them to others and to reality. Because there is no stepping out of language to reflect on it from a superior vantage, achievements such as scientific progress and social change are understood best in terms of democratic persuasion and negotiation.

On a final note, political theorists will find this book provocative. Space is created for political theorists to reflect on their enterprise and travel between third-order practices where the objects of inquiry are political science and philosophy, and second-order practices where the object of inquiry is the practices constitutive of politics and the job is to describe and explain them. The implication is that there is no special, more intimate relation between political theory and political practices. Indeed, Gunnell has moved past political theory and political science as second-order discursive practices and toward a broader category of social inquiry that is equipped to apprehend conventional reality as a singularity wherein the conventions demarcating political reality from social reality are all but impossible to conceive as *sui generis*.

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Paul Ludwig: *Rediscovering Political Friendship: Aristotle's Theory and Modern Identity, Community, and Equality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi, 347.)

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Paul Ludwig's excellent book describes civic friendship as utility friendship, while ennobling what utility can mean. Aristotle guides him as he provides a “bifocal” account of civic friendship that realistically emphasizes its utilitarian aims while idealistically articulating its implicit higher aims. The “bifocal” approach avoids the “blowback” effect of liberal political theory's