

## Research Project

# Left Wittgensteinianism: A Non-Foundationalist Ameliorative Framework for Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline

### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Left Wittgensteinianism: A Non-Foundationalist Ameliorative Framework for Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline

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In terms of which concepts should we think? This kind of concern now looms large in philosophy, as there has been a marked turn to questions of how we can improve rather than just describe our conceptual practices. This turn has involved a radical break with Wittgensteinian ideas. While Wittgenstein has convinced many that we should not seek to derive the one definitively right set of concepts from timeless rational foundations, what he advocates instead has widely been felt to be overly conservative: he insists that justifications come to an end in the "bedrock of practice," that we should defer to the practices we find ourselves with. Many have concluded from this that Wittgensteinianism inevitably leads to a conservative or *Right Wittgensteinianism*.

Contemporary approaches seeking to improve our concepts try to break free from Wittgensteinian conservatism by breaking free from Wittgensteinianism. Yet this total abandonment of Wittgensteinian insights introduces fresh failings. One contemporary approach, conceptual engineering, takes progress through conceptual innovation in science as its model and seeks to forge new concepts in order to ask better questions; but it suffers from a tendency to treat the motley of our practices as something that can be designed from the philosopher's drawing board, like artificial languages in logic. Similarly, the ameliorative metaphysics approach seeks to decide which (if any) of the warring conceptions of concepts like *human nature* we should use by appealing to ethical and political criteria; but it remains overly abstract in asking whether we should use any of these conceptions *tout court*, thereby overlooking the needs in actual situations from which each of these conceptions might derive a point in practice. These are failings which Wittgensteinian attention to what our concepts do for us in practice can remedy. What is needed is a middle path between Right Wittgensteinianism and the revisionary approaches.

The long-term aim of this project is to trace such a middle path between Wittgensteinian conservatism and more revisionary approaches by developing a *Left*

*Wittgensteinian Framework*—that combines the *revisionary* ambitions of conceptual engineering and ameliorative metaphysics—hence "Left"—with Wittgensteinian attention to the *point* of our concepts given our *needs in actual situations*—hence "Wittgensteinian." It thereby aims to offer a concrete model for how philosophy can function as a *humanistic* discipline—i.e., in *integration with* other disciplines.

The short-term aim over the first eleven months is to

develop a *Stratified View* of our practices that reveals a non-foundationalist basis for ameliorating our concepts in a layer of changeable and context-sensitive practical needs.

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**Add publication**

**Add documents**

**Specify cooperation partners**