

Wittgenstein on Culture and Civilisation

**AESTHETICS,
ETHICS AND
RELIGION**

Wittgenstein on Culture and Civilisation: Aesthetics, Ethics and Religion

Book of Reviewing Abstracts of the International Online Conference, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 19th – 20th October 2021

Ljubljana, 2022

“Human beings agree in the *language* of the form of life [culture].”

Wittgenstein (PI, §241)

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Varja Štrajn

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Wittgenstein, Philosopher of Culture

Wittgenstein's philosophy does not provide the immediate answer to the question of 'the meaning of life' [culture]. In the language, it is impossible to express adequately fundamental life questions (e.g., the meaning and existence of the world, the immortality of the soul, moral behaviour, the purpose of artwork and creation) that people often encounter in their daily ways of living. At the end of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein manifests man's inability to express aesthetical, ethical and religious truths. Nevertheless, in late writings, Wittgenstein redirects from searching for similarities between the language and the world to the act of 'speaking (of language) as a part of an activity or a form of life [culture]' (PI, I, §23).

Suppose we can understand *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as 'an expression of linguistic mysticism' (Janik & Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna) or/and a discussion of ethics (Paul Engelmann, letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a memoir). Contrarily, in *Philosophical Investigations* prevails an exposed tendency in support of a linguistic activity, which leads from the meaning *of* language to the meaning *in* language, from the meaning *of* life to the meaning *in* life and last but not least, from the meaning *of* culture to the meaning *in* culture.

To mark the centenary of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (the book was first released in 1922 in the English translation), we shall rethink the connection between the first (prevailing) part of the book, dedicated to the philosophical logic and philosophy of language, and the second (minor) part, dedicated to ethics, aesthetics, mysticism and to 'the meaning of life'. We shall concern ourselves with the question, what is the connection between the first and the second part of the book, and what Wittgenstein has to tell us about 'the meaning of life' and the world we

inhabit. Is the only possibility to look at the world from outside (sub specie aeterni), the viewpoint advocated by Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, or can the world also be interpreted in the context of ‘the form of life’ or ‘culture’, a philosophical position Wittgenstein introduced in the late texts? We shall look at the various manifestations of the human activity introduced into the cultural field, regardless of whether it is the natural language or the artistic movement in its entire dimension.

Alexandra Dias Fortes

Nova Institute of Philosophy, Portugal

Limits Made Clear and Beauty Laid Bare: Wittgenstein's Tractatus, Literary Form and Philosophy

Why are we reading if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened, and its deepest mystery probed?

Annie Dillard, *The Abundance*, p. 111

Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (TLP) aims to make clear the limits of the sayable; at the same time, it should lead the reader to that threshold where the world is finally seen "rightly" (TLP 6.54), but the reader can no longer describe it; words cease to make sense in face of something unutterable, austere, ineffable – though truly meaningful (we could even say, meaningful beyond words). And so, we must trade our impulse to speak – and to translate into sentences – for a contemplation. The condition is that we should read him, Wittgenstein, "with understanding" (TLP 6.54). Only a precise literary device could achieve such a feat. Thus, the book is formally thought through, concise, beautifully brief, and terse, without losing any of its philosophical complexity and acuity: "The Work is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary, but there is no babbling in it" (Wittgenstein to Ludwig von Ficker, his prospective publisher, November 1919; I follow Ray Monk's translation of the excerpt in Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius, p. 177). In my paper, I will try to investigate how these two facets, or aspects, of the Tractatus complement each other and manifest the "unwritten" content that its author considered of the utmost importance:

I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword which now actually are not in it (...) I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything I have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I'm convinced that strictly speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which many are babbling today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it (Wittgenstein to Ludwig von Ficker, undated but, according to Monk, 1991, p. 604, probably also November 1919; I follow the translation in Monk, 1991, p. 178).

The dyad – written/unwritten – reflects, or mirrors, another one, specifically, the pair saying and showing at the core of the book. It is not unimportant that, in another letter of the same year, this time to Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein declares that the issue of logical propositions is a corollary and that the real, cardinal problem of philosophy has to do with a specific distinction, that between what can be said (gesagt) – or, what is the same, what can be thought – and what cannot be said but can only be shown (gezeigt) in what is said. In order not to contradict this fundamental insight, Wittgenstein wrote a book that can show – in what it says – all that is left unsaid. Of course, part of the sphere of all that is left unsaid, if we are to believe what Wittgenstein proclaims in the quotation above, is the “Ethical”. In my paper I will start from the level of the proposition in the Tractatus, to try and see how the book reaches what it set out to do, which is an “ethical deed” (Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna, p. 24; cf. pp. 167-201) and aesthetical as well (in accord with the dictum “Aesthetics and Ethics are one”, TLP, 6.421). Along the way, I will consider questions such as internal relations, projection, bipolarity, contingency vs. necessity, fact and value, “the essence of the artistic way of looking at things” (Wittgenstein, Notebooks 1914-1916, p. 86e), and style conceived of as “the expression of a universal human necessity” and as “universal necessity seen sub specie aeterni” (Wittgenstein, Ms 183, 9.5.1930).

Gašper Pirc

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Wittgenstein and Kant's Third Antinomy: On Contemporary Reasons, Persons and Communication

In a well-known passage of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant presents four contradictions of a mind, which sets itself upon a reflection of transcendent reality. The third antinomy – that of spontaneity and causal determinism – has been particularly relevant for the later discussions on the nature and the possibility of freedom, the origin of ethics, and the contemporaneous human condition as such. In my paper, I intend to investigate how the research upon the peculiarities of the relation between two separate lines of causality can be useful in illuminating of some of the glaring issues presented by Wittgenstein's »rule-following paradox«. In particular, there is a certain aspect to the possibility of human freedom which can only be explained by positing the »in medias res« interlocutor; in that regard, the possibility of society demands the emergence of social agents which is both conditioned and spontaneous. While the results of the research do not stray too far from the interpretation of the rule-following paradox given by John McDowell, the paper intends to present a creative way in regards to approaching a well-known philosophical problem, and further the discussion by applying it to the contemporary social situation in which present-day game-like narratives which shape the social reality around us can be increasingly less reliant upon »facts of reason«.

Florian Franken Figueiredo

Nova University Lisbon, Portugal

On the Concept of Childhood in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations

Many authors who have written about Wittgenstein's work notice that, especially in remarks that originate from his later period, Wittgenstein often refers to children. For example, Beth Savickey observes, in her book *Wittgenstein's Art of Investigation*, that the child "is a central figure in the opening remarks of the *Investigations* and remains a recurring figure throughout the remarks that follow" (Savickey (1999: 69). Given the significance that Wittgenstein evidently sees in his reference to children, it is however striking that relatively little has been written on Wittgenstein's concept of childhood in the *PI*. Most of this research occurred during the 1990s with the occasional flare up during the past five years.

The main controversy that developed out of this research regards the question of whether, or not, Wittgenstein adopts a view of the child as some kind of 'ontological other', i.e., whether, or not, he highlights certain characteristics in the early life of human beings, thereby being committed to a binary opposition between the ideas of child(hood) and adult(hood). Such a view has historically taken the form of one of the two following interpretations, neither of which acknowledge and respect the child as an autonomous person. Going back to Aristotle, the first interpretation construes the child as an animal-like, incomplete form of human being who, in contrast to adults capable of acting rationally, lacks the capacity of choice and agency. According to the second interpretation, these deficiencies are turned into a romantic notion of the child as an innocent creature that, thanks to this alleged ontological difference, is saved and set apart from the vicious soul of society (cf. e.g., Rousseau 1948).

The question that I address in my talk is: Did Wittgenstein in his later work favour one of the views that diminish or demarcate the child as the 'ontological other'? Some authors have offered a reading of his remarks that seem to allow a positive answer to this question, mostly arguing that

Wittgenstein's concept of childhood can be understood as a manifestation of the romantic view. Others have not explicitly argued in this direction, although their readings have been understood in this way. In the first part of my talk, I explore the arguments by Stanley Cavell, Yasushi Maruyama, and Philip Shields for their views that Wittgenstein regards the child, through romantic glasses, as an ontological other. I examine their interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks and conclude that on a closer reading they do not justify this interpretation. In the main part, I develop the claim that Wittgenstein, in the *PI*, is committed to a strong and substantial concept of childhood that can be reconstructed by taking into account (i) the 'Motto' of the *PI*; (ii) Wittgenstein's reference to the philosopher Augustine; and (iii) the use of 'primitive'. Drawing on Toby Rollo's socio-historical discussion of civilizational progress and settler colonialism (cf. Rollo 2016), I reconstruct the opening of the *PI* as a decisive statement against any concept of civilizational progress that assumes the latter must favour an opposition between savage and civilised and the denigration and subordination of children and childhood.

Hanne Appelqvist

University of Helsinki, Finland

Hearing What Music Conveys: Wittgenstein on Idealism, Realism and Aesthetic Judgement

Towards the end of the *Brown Book* (1934–35), Wittgenstein discusses the phenomenon of being impressed by a sensuous phenomenon, mentioning several examples thereof. I may be impressed by a particular way of reading a sentence, by the color patterns of flowers, or by a piece of music. In each case, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that to be thus impressed means that the sensuous phenomenon could be explained by reference to something independent of that phenomenon itself. He maintains that “We wish to avoid any form of expression which would seem to refer to an effect produced by an object on a subject”, and adds: “Here we are bordering on the problem of idealism and realism and on the problem whether statements of aesthetics are subjective or objective” (BB, 178). In this talk, I address the latter problem by drawing on Wittgenstein’s lectures on aesthetics given in 1933 and 1938. I argue that, while Wittgenstein rejects the kind of subjectivism that follows from treating aesthetic phenomena as means of producing effects, he does not fall back on aesthetic objectivism either. Instead, for him, statements of aesthetics essentially involve both an objective and a subjective component. And this, I suggest, points to a possible way of overcoming both (dogmatic) idealism and (dogmatic) realism.

Cora Diamond

University of Virginia, US

Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics

Cora Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics*, Harvard University Press, 331 pp., ISBN 9780674051683.

Reviewed by Varja Štrajn, Institute of Civilization and Culture

Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics is Cora Diamond's latest work devoted to one of the greatest and most insightful philosophers of our times, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Wittgenstein's good friend and interpreter of his philosophy, Elizabeth Anscombe. As the book's title suggests, Diamond began reading *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's early work, together with Anscombe's commentary *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, which has had a lasting influence on Diamond's philosophy ever since: "Reading Wittgenstein has frequently brought me back to reading him with her Introduction" (Diamond, 2019: 1). Diamond's work presents, on the one hand, an expression of appreciation for Anscombe's reading of the *Tractatus* and her approach to philosophical problems, and on the other hand, a parting from Anscombe's Tractarian views.

"Thinking about what she had said—and then coming back to it and thinking about it again—helped me to see where I disagree with her, and why I think there are tensions in her views. Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe has meant never being sure I have seen to the bottom of the question" (Diamond, 2019: 5).

Accordingly, the focus is to summarize and explain Anscombe's Tractarian views and reassess her position regarding Wittgenstein's philosophy critically and further develop the questions she raises in her early and late philosophical writings.

The book consists of seven essays that are divided into three parts. Part I is dedicated to Diamond's reading of the *Tractatus* and Anscombe's *Introduction*. In Part I, Diamond is particularly interested in Anscombe's position concerning "philosophical clarification concerning Wittgenstein's understanding of the philosophical method," Anscombe's explanation of Wittgenstein's theory of propositions and Anscombe's critique of it (Diamond, 2019: 1). In Part II, Diamond also discusses Anscombe's reception of Wittgenstein's philosophy; however, she centres on Anscombe's post-humous collection of papers entitled *From Plato to Wittgenstein*. Diamond's interest in Anscombe's late writings lies in the "force of questions" previously unnoticed (Diamond, 2019: 2). These questions generally relate to the concept of truth in propositions, particularly to tautologies and their place in Wittgenstein's philosophy. In the second part, new dilemmas occur concerning truth, which Diamond further develops in Part III and connects with the truth in ethics. Accordingly, Part III summarises the debate between David Wiggins, who raised specific questions about truth in ethics, and Bernard Williams' account on nineteenth-century slavery. Essays in the book's third part can be read independently from the rest and concern Wittgenstein's later writings.

Regardless of the theme's diversity within the book, essays form a unity. Wittgenstein and Anscombe both engage in the process of thinking and its limits in their philosophical writings, especially when dealing with "thinking that has miscarried and gone astray" (Diamond, 2019: 2). Diamond's book also deals with thinking and its limits, but most of all, her interest lies in showing what can we learn from thinking that has gone wrong. Accordingly, Cora Diamond's book, introduced at the online international conference by the author herself, raises one of the most fundamental questions in philosophy concerning the nature of knowledge. At the heart of the book is the Kantian question regarding the investigation of the learning conditions. However, Diamond is not interested in a positive understanding of the world but rather in the limits of knowledge and our ability to respond to nonsensical thought.

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Saori Makino

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Reproduction as Wittgenstein's Self-Understanding: An Essay on Physiognomy of Language

The idea that Wittgenstein's texts should be read in their Viennese cultural context is shared by many Wittgenstein scholars. Toulmin & Janik (1973) are among the studies that have argued most forcefully for this type of reading with regard to the *Tractatus* (1921). To be sure, a reading that strips Wittgenstein's text of its Viennese historicity may be a traditional method for those seeking to combine analytic philosophy with Wittgenstein's thought, but it can be violent given that this stripping is often done without informing the reader. This paper argues that the violence of the tacit stripping of historicity should be resisted and that Wittgenstein's text should be read against the cultural background of Vienna.

Strictly speaking, however, I do not like to use the word "background" because my long-term goal is to show boldly that Wittgenstein's Viennese historicity does not retreat "behind" his texts but rather "manifests" itself in them.

To achieve the long-term goal of reading Wittgenstein's texts as a manifestation of Viennese historicity, I will focus on the conception of "reproduction." This word appears in *Culture and Value* (1998), a collection of reflections on art and religion:

I think there is some truth in my idea that I am really only reproductive in my thinking. I think I have never invented a line of thinking but that it was always provided for me by someone else & I have done no more than passionately take it up for my work of classification. That is how Boltzmann Hertz Schopenhauer Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos Weininger Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me. Can one take Breuer & Freud as an example of Jewish reproductive thinking? –What I invent are new comparisons. (CV p. 16)

You can as it were restore an old style in a new language; perform it afresh so to speak in a manner that suits our times. In doing so you really only reproduce. I have done this in my building work. (CV p. 68)

Here Wittgenstein uses the words “reproductive” and “reproduce” to describe in what way he is a bearer of Viennese culture. These words are used in the context of Wittgenstein’s self-understanding.

By focusing on the conception of “reproduction,” I will argue that Wittgenstein’s text shows the development of a “physiognomy” (*PI* 568) of language that generates a variety of uses from the same string of characters by copying other’s words and employing them afresh. This will be my short-term goal. The “physiognomy (of language)” is a way of thinking about language in which the understanding of human faces and the understanding of sentences are parallel. In other words, it is a way of thinking about the “features” (in German, *Gesichtszüge*) (*PI* 537) of a particular string of characters in terms of their various uses, just as one thinks about a person’s face in terms of her various expressions. The “features” of a particular string of characters are, in a nutshell, the individuality of a word, the way it can be perceived and can generate environments. Wittgenstein’s texts, in my view, practice a “physiognomy (of language)” that seeks to cultivate the “features (of a particular string of characters)” and give words a rich individuality.

If we can read Wittgenstein’s text as a physiognomy of language (if we are to achieve my short-term goal), we can reveal the nature of Wittgenstein’s self-understanding as both a reader of other’s words and a writer of the *Philosophical Investigations (PI)* (2009). We can show that through copying other’s words, such as Augustine’s *Confessions*, the creation of *PI* is Wittgenstein’s way of speaking about himself. Wittgenstein’s self-understanding in this sense can become a model for our own self-understanding as readers of *PI* attempting to say something about it.

The question of how I am going to achieve the long-term goal of reading Wittgenstein’s text as a manifestation of Viennese historicity through my short-term goal can be answered as follows. The conception of “reproduction” invoked in connection with Wittgenstein’s self-

understanding is directly reflected in the textual formation of the *PI*. The conception of “reproduction” reflects not only Wittgenstein’s self-understanding but also how to form the *PI*.

Varja Štrajn

Institute of Civilisation and Culture, Slovenia

Forms of Life (Cultures): Transformations in Art

In the present paper, I want to concentrate only on a particular part of life forms. I want to talk about culture, and more specifically, about modern and postmodern art. What interests me is approaching and understanding contemporary developments in art, especially in digital art and its transformations. How will digital changes influence our aesthetic conceptions of artwork? How will we categorize something as art? Furthermore, what can we learn from Wittgenstein regarding understanding these contemporary artistic trends?

As Arthur Danto elaborated in his well-known book, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, we can no longer perceive contemporary art as representational or mimetic (as it was in the times of Plato). Nor can we envisage art and reveal it within a theory as beautiful objects (a philosophical account of art developed by Hegel in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*).

If we can no longer visualize art in terms of representations or beautiful aesthetic objects, then the inevitable question remains, which is, what is art; and more specifically, what makes a specific thing a work of art?

By drawing on Wittgenstein's conception of certain concepts, such as life forms, language-games, culture, art, aesthetics, etc., and his philosophy (early and late), we will highlight the dilemmas modern art faces today.

Simo Säätelä

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Wittgenstein's Aesthetic Investigations

Wittgenstein talks about "aesthetic investigations" in both his 1933 lectures and his 1938 lectures on aesthetics. Especially in the 1933 lectures, he also hints that aesthetic investigations bear important similarities to philosophical investigations. The notion of "aesthetic investigation" also occurs in a remark in two notebooks from 1938, in which he explicitly comments on the "strange resemblance" between a philosophical investigation (perhaps especially in mathematics) and an aesthetic one. In these remarks, Wittgenstein evidently wants to point to a similarity in the "method" or approach between aesthetics and philosophy, i.e. a similarity in the investigation itself—he wants to say something about the way he understands his own philosophical activity, or at least point to important aspects of it. The remark can be supplemented by an observation from 1949, where Wittgenstein points to a similarity in the questions the investigation is supposed to resolve by comparing conceptual (philosophical) questions and "aesthetic questions" and distinguishing them from scientific questions or substantive problems (CV 91; MS 138,5b). Somewhat simplified, one can say that Wittgenstein (in any case in his later philosophy) often prefers to talk about the difficulties or puzzles when the first-mentioned questions are concerned, to distinguish them from scientific, empirical problems or factual questions. However, what are aesthetic questions, and what sort of investigation can deal with them? And why is it particularly the investigation of conceptual issues in mathematics that Wittgenstein wants to compare with "an aesthetic investigation"? In my presentation, I will try to throw some light on these and similar questions.

Gisela Bengtsson

Uppsala University, Sweden

An Aspect of the Right Method of Philosophy in Tractatus

My aim in this talk is to shed light on what it means to ‘say nothing’ in the Tractatus, as an aspect of the conception of ‘the right method of philosophy’, outlined in remark 6.53. In the debate on the concluding remarks of the book, the conception of ‘nonsense’ has often been in focus. The suggested approach instead brings the form of presentation of the book to the fore as well as the place of propositions without sense [sinnlose Sätze] in the method used by the author, for the purpose of clarifying how the notion of ‘saying nothing’ can be found at different levels of the exposition in the Tractatus.

The starting point for my discussion is formed by the opening words of remark 6.53: “The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing other than that which can be said [...]”. The approach is then to trace Wittgenstein’s use of certain key concepts in the book along two main lines: 1. His use of the word “nothing” and the expression “say nothing” in the book; 2. Places in the remarks where it is said (or demonstrated) that two or more elements of the metaphysical theory that appears to be presented “are one”, “are one and the same”, or “are in a certain sense one”. Following these two main lines makes it possible to show that Wittgenstein can be seen as using a method in the Tractatus which is similar to the “zero-method” he speaks of in 6.121, (cf. also 4.4611): a method that leads to an equilibrium in which nothing is asserted.

When clarifying the notion of ‘saying nothing’ as an aspect of the conception of the ‘right method of philosophy’ in the early work, I point backwards to remarks from Frege’s “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (1892) and forwards to Wittgenstein’s characterizations, in the thirties and in later writings, of his philosophical method and its aims.

Alice Morelli

University of Turin, Italy

Alien Forms of Life and Local Incommensurability: Wittgenstein's Imaginary Cases

My talk will be about the pervasive use of imaginary cases as it is found in Wittgenstein's later production. In particular, I will deal with those cases that require a remarkable use of the imagination, as we are faced with what I will call "alien forms of life", i.e., cases where the very conceptual system is radically different from ours.

Wittgenstein often asks us to imagine particular scenarios in which some of our "very general facts of nature" are different, if not completely alien to us. Although scholars tend to agree on the fact that such a strategy is of chief methodological importance, rather than being a mere matter of style, they disagree on at least three more specific issues: 1. The taxonomy, or classification of the various imaginary cases; 2. The function of the imaginative method; 3. The imaginability/unimaginability of the most deviant cases.

In this talk, I will try to give my own answers to the three problems quoted above by focusing on the cases in which we are asked to imagine alien forms of life. I will argue that 1. Cases depicting alien forms of life are just one among other types of imaginary cases used by Wittgenstein; 2. These alien cases, although more difficult to understand, are perfectly imaginable and conceivable; 3. These cases are used in order to create a "local incommensurability" between two or more different forms of life for methodological purposes, namely, clarifying the grammar of particular expressions.

In order to reach my point, I will first sketch a rough and flexible taxonomy of Wittgenstein's imaginary cases. In particular, I will suggest that, as far as deviant cases are concerned, the core point is to distinguish between cases in which Wittgenstein intends to present a different conceptual system, from cases in which he intends to present different, or deviant uses of our concepts, without pushing against the barriers of our

form of life. Secondly, I will show that the notion of imaginability or unimaginability is strictly tied to that of sense, by looking at the case of the “wayward child” in *Philosophical Investigations*. Thirdly, I will show that, contra Stroud, what is unimaginable is not the case itself, but the application of concepts belonging to one form of life to a different one, hence the acknowledgment of a kind of local incommensurability between two different systems.

Thomas D. Carroll

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

Civilisation and Whiteness: Wittgenstein and Baldwin on Racism and Culture

Despite the many differences between the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the writer and social critic, James Baldwin, both are sharply critical of claims of cultural and/or racial superiority and both value courage and integrity in self-examination. In this presentation, I explore how their similar ethical perspectives may mutually inform each other. The first part of the presentation concerns Wittgenstein's remarks across his corpus on culture and civilization, especially those that concern ideas of European and American cultural superiority. The second part delves into Baldwin's critique of the civilizational ideal in European and American societies, particularly as concerns constructions of "whiteness" and "Blackness." The third develops the idea that Cavell's notion of acknowledgment can unite the approaches of Baldwin and Wittgenstein in critiquing claims to cultural superiority. The overall aim of this presentation is to draw on insights from both Wittgenstein's and Baldwin's writings in order to gain clarification regarding problems of racism and culture that are particularly evident in the United States, although it is possible that this constructive dialogue will be relevant to problems relating to racism and culture in other social contexts.