Cavell's Challenge

Cynicism and Moral Realism in Light of the Later Wittgenstein

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Legitimacy challenges are part of human societies. Whenever we recognise a person, law, ideal or institution as authoritative, questions can be raised about their legitimacy. Why follow this law? Why strive to honour this moral ideal? If such questions are repeatedly raised, they pose an undermining threat to the authorities in question. This is good if the challenged law or ideal is harmful, but problematic, if it is beneficial. Where the first kind of legitimacy challenges are raised by ethical pioneers and moral critics, the last kind are posed by cynics, who disregard the demands of law and morality when they conflict with their interests. The threat to human society caused by cynicism is part of the reason why philosophers since Plato have sought to address and rid society of it.

This article discusses how philosophy can deal with cynicism. It does so by firstly looking at how Anthony Holiday defends a moral realist theory and disproves 'the theory of cynicism' as well as tries to subvert real life cynics. Secondly, the work of the later Wittgenstein is used to discuss Holiday's approach, finding it to some extent wanting in both its theoretical and practical aims.[2] Lastly, inspired by Stanley Cavell's thinking it is suggested that cynicism

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[2] There are three main schools of interpretation of Wittgenstein: 1) 'The standard reading', attributing Wittgenstein with a theory of meaning: a realistic correspondence theory in the early period and an anti-realistic use-theory in the later period. 2) 'Therapeutic/Resolute readings', claiming Wittgenstein makes no theory, that the aim of philosophy is therapeutic and that there are significant continuities between the early and the late Wittgenstein, and 3) 'Elucidatory readings', also claiming that Wittgenstein makes no theories, but that the aim of philosophy is also, for instance, to create conceptual overviews, rather than being purely therapeutic. For overviews of the discussions, see Crary (2000), Christensen (2003, 2011), Pleasants (2008) and Bronzo (2012).

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calls for not only problem solving and problem dissolving, but also something we might call reconciliation.[3]

Cynicism: Might is Right

In *The Republic*, Plato wants to prove that it is better to be just than unjust, and he investigates the idea of justice in order to understand the nature of a just republic (Plato 1987: 61-114). He does so in a playwright dialogue-style. The scene is Ancient Athens and the main character and protagonist is the philosopher Socrates, who discusses justice with the various people he meets. One of them is the sarcastic sophist Thrasymachus, who brings forth the line of thinking that: "justice or right is simply what is in the interest of the stronger party." (Plato 1987: 77). Today this line of thinking is called cynicism and is often referred to with the phrase 'Might is right'.[4] Cynicism often entails the claim that neither law nor morality have any genuine claim to legitimacy, and that questions of law or morality can be reduced without remainder to questions of what is in the interest of those in power. Also, cynicism often contains a view of humans as only being motivated by drives such as greed, ambition and gratification. 'Noble motives' are only a clever disguise of the true selfish motivation (Barney 2017). Holiday describes a modern-day cynic in the following way:

> He is in a special sense, worldly wise; he is master of a set of manipulative techniques, made possible by advances in the study of politics, psychology and the social sciences, and has a grasp of the theories which underpin his technology. He is, in the true meaning of the word, a professional, at home in the managerial world, in the intelligence

[3] In this article, the words 'moral' and 'ethical' are used interchangeably.

[4] The words 'cynicism' and 'cynics' has several – to some extent opposed – meanings. They also refer to the Ancient Greek and later Roman thinkers 'the cynics' ('disciples of the dog'). The ancient cynics saw the road to a good life as entailing a rejection of all possessions and human desires for power, wealth, and fame (very unlike modern day cynics). They also, like the modern cynics, had a deep disrespect for the law and conventional morality. The ancient cynics tried to live as they preached – the most famous among them Diogenes, living in a tub "to flaunt his disregard for the ways of men" (Copleston 1993: 118-121, 438-445). The question of how exactly to spell out 'modern day cynicism' and how modern-day cynicism relates to forms of 'moral error theory', 'moral scepticism', 'moral egoism' and 'moral emotivism' is debated. Neither will be clarified in this article. Holiday sees 'moral scepticism' as a 'gentler and more detached cousin' to cynicism, but both positions according to him share moral 'non-cognitivism and relativism in ethics' (Holiday 1989: x).

gathering 'community', in journalism and, above all, in politics, because his true calling is the attainment and exercise of power. (Holiday 1989: xi)

The former Italian prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi seems, in other words, to be a perfect incarnation of Holiday's modern cynic with his strong blend of politics and media control. History has witnessed plenty of politicians, kings and dictators, whose life and actions display this kind of cynicism. They have often undermined the rule of law when they – sometimes using the law – place themselves outside the law. For instance, in 2012 Ilham Aliyjev, president of Azerbaijan, forced the parliament to pass a bill that gave him and his wife immunity against prosecution of any crimes that they made during his time as president. Other presidents, as Francois Duvalier from Haiti, have placed themselves outside both criminal and moral law by declaring themselves Gods (Hem 2013). 'Cynicism' can thus refer to both a philosophical theory as well as ways of acting and living.

Because the rule of law and moral values are considered by most people to be worth protecting as parts of flourishing human lives, several philosophers have followed the lead of Plato and attempted to disprove the theory of cynicism as well as to convert real life cynics. In the next section we will look at one such attempt.

Moral Powers: How to Disprove Cynicism and Convert Cynics
In his book *Moral Powers*, Anthony Holiday wants to defend a version of moral realism (Holiday 1989: xiv). Moral realism comes in many forms (Joyce 2016), but is a theory which typically entails claims to the effect that morality is part of reality, that we can have knowledge about morality, and that some moral judgements are objectively true or false (Shaffer-Landau and Cuneo 2007: 157). Holiday expresses this as ethical life, and action is part of the realm of the rational (Holiday 1989: xiv). This article looks at the moral realist 'impulse', rather than a particular moral realist theory. That is, the impulse to prove that moral judgements are objectively true or false, and to do so by putting forth arguments to support a philosophical theory. Holiday's work is interesting, despite not having been influential in shaping the landscape of modern day moral realism, because it so clearly displays one form of motivation for creating a moral realist theory;

that is, it displays what could be seen as 'one of the seeds of' or 'possible first steps into' such theory-construction (Kuusela 2008; Conant 2011). Holiday's motivation for, and aim with his book, is explicit and two-fold: He wants to disprove cynicism as a philosophical theory, but his main goal is, however, to subvert real life cynics and offer a picture of the world that is less likely to breed a cynic culture than "the empiricist picture of the world as morally dead" (Holiday 1989: x-xi; 182).

In order to accomplish his aims, Holiday, like Plato, places himself in the philosophical tradition of 'the art of helping' (*hjælpekunst*) (Kierkegaard 1994: 96): the strategy of addressing the misled and confused from his or her point of view, and from that place leading them to a sounder understanding of things. Holiday does so by reasoning in the following way: A cynic only believes in, and craves, power. Therefore:

> the cynic will be responsive only to counter-arguments which incorporate a theory concerned with power, [and therefore] I propose to offer him a theory of moral powers – a theory which will show that moral powers are immensely potent sources of power. (Holiday 1989: xi)

Holiday sets out to do this by tapping into another great tradition in philosophy – the tradition of transcendental argumentation made famous by Immanuel Kant in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. This form of argument starts with an uncontested fact or experience, and in Holiday's case the starting point is the fact that we have a language and communicate successfully with it. The next step is to ask for the necessary conditions of this fact to be in place. Holiday argues that truthfulness, trust, fair-play, just-dealings and reverence are the necessary conditions for us having a language at all (Holiday 1989: 73-114). For instance, if we do not in general speak the truth or keep our promises, talking and promising would quickly cease to have any point at all. These conditions are according to Holiday all inherently morally normative phenomena.

> If my attempt to resolve the enigmas connected with the notion of semantic necessity is rightly directed, then neither the sceptical nor the cynical positions can be sound ones. For the questions 'is moral knowledge possible' and 'why should I behave morally' are undeniably framed in the medium of language, and that medium has been shown to be unimaginable without, and to depend for its coherence upon, certain value laden practices and moral certitudes. The cynic's questions, therefore, logically fail to square with the fact of his asking them. (Holiday 1989: 110)

Holiday concludes that the moral cynic cannot in any consistent way claim – thus using language – that morality is not part of reality. On the contrary, the cynic has to recognise that moral values and moral normativity form part of what exists, because otherwise he would not be able to speak – and thus formulate this theory – at all. This refutes cynicism as a philosophical theory.[5] Holiday then turns to his project of converting real life cynics.

Holiday goes on to show that language and thus moral values are among "the dynamic in society whereby social formations are created and decease" (Holiday 1989: 183). Moral values are thus *sources of power*. Without preserving the practices of truthfulness, trust, fair-play, just-dealings and reverence all power will eventually crumble, because the upholding of such moral values are necessities for any use of power. Anybody interested in attaining or holding on to power, like the real-life cynic, therefore ought to pay serious attention to and respect morality. Here, Holiday offers the cynic cynically-relevant reasons to stop acting cynically, which could motivate a morally better behaviour.

This is the overall structure of Holiday's argumentation. In the next sections I will mainly use the work of the later Wittgenstein to argue that Holiday's strategy for disproving the theory of cynicism is meaningful, but his strategy for subverting real life cynics is unconvincing.[6]

If Moral Cynicism is Empty, so is Moral Realism
In the work *Über Gewissheit* Wittgenstein investigates the concept of knowledge as well as different philosophical attempts to either doubt or prove the existence of the outer world. If we transfer the issue in *Über Gewissheit* to moral philosophy we can say that doubting or denying the existence of the outer world can be seen in analogy to moral scepticism and cynicism, where the reality of morality

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[5] The details of Holiday's arguments will not be discussed here, because it is his overall strategy in how he seeks to deal with real life cynicism that is under investigation in this article. For the rest of the article, it will therefore be assumed that Holiday has successfully shown the philosophical theory of cynicism to be incoherent and shown moral normativity in the form of e.g. the practices of truthfulness, trust, fair-play, just-dealings and reverence to be pre-conditions for us having a language.

[6] I also use 'A Lecture on Ethics' from 1929, which is not considered part of the later period. However, many scholars argue that Wittgenstein's view on ethics was one of the constant traits in his thinking during the early, middle and late periods (Christensen 2003, 2011).

is doubted or denied. Attempts at proving the existence of the outer world and our ability to have knowledge about it can be seen in analogy to Holiday's attempt to defend a theory of moral realism: that morality forms part of reality, that it is possible to gain knowledge about moral questions and that some moral judgements can be either true or false.

Wittgenstein is often interpreted as having shown that both the philosophical doubt about and denial of the existence of the outer world (scepticism), and the attempts to prove the existence of the outer world (realism), are equally meaningless, because both theories entail various misuses of the concepts of knowledge, proof and certainty (Wittgenstein 1997: § 37; Diamond 1999; Moyal-Sharrock 2004, 2009; Herman 2015). Whether Wittgenstein is successful in his endeavour is obviously contested. In this article, it will be assumed that he is. Given that Wittgenstein is right in this line of thinking, one could suspect something similar is the case in moral philosophy; that both the moral cynic theories as well as the moral realist theories are not wrong, but lack sense.

Holiday's work on disproving the cynical theory – by showing how it depends on the moral normativity, the validity of which it denies – can be seen as fulfilling the one half of the task of using Wittgenstein's insights from *Über Gewissheit* in moral philosophy: showing how moral cynicism as a theory is self-refuting or empty.[7] But Holiday's moral realist theory seems to represent an example of the other half of the kind of problem, which Wittgenstein deals with: if it is indeed impossible in the sense of meaningless to argue for the cynic theory (given that moral values, behaviours and practices are a precondition for language) then *proving* the reality of morality is equally meaningless.

One reason for this is that every proof Holiday makes also already presupposes moral values, behaviours and moral normativity, and his arguments are therefore viciously circular as he presupposes what he wants to prove and is thus not proving anything, i.e. he commits the fallacy *petitio principia*. Holiday can prove the cynical theory to be inconsistent and otherwise flawed (and it can be important that philosophers do so, as I will argue later), but he cannot prove

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[7] Other thinkers using *Über Gewissheit* as inspiration for work in moral philosophy are, for instance, Pleasants 2008, Herman 2015 and De Mesel 2015.

the reality of morality. Doing so amounts to 'digging after the bedrock has been reached':

> Das Schwere ist hier, nicht bis auf den Grund zu graben, sondern den Grund, der vor uns liegt, als Grund zu erkennen. Denn der Grund spiegelt uns immer wieder eine größere Tiefe vor, und wenn wir diese zu erreichen suchen, finden wir uns immer wieder auf dem alten Niveau. (Wittgenstein 1991: Teil vi, § 31)

Another way at getting at this point is to say that the reality of morality is as certain as, or rather immensely more certain than, any "proof" we can offer for it. The reality of morality, for instance the obligation to care for people in need, is therefore not a possible subject for a theory, as was the existence of the Higg's particle, for example. In the latter case it was possible (again in the meaning 'it made sense') to have a theory about its existence and possible to say in advance what could count as proof of its existence etc. The same is not the case with morality. Moral normativity is part of the bedrock and precondition of human language and life.

We are therefore left with the following question: What can philosophers offer the real-life, full-blown cynic as reasons to respect the – according to the cynic – non-existent demands of morality?

The Power of Rational Arguments

As we could read above, Holiday wishes not only to subvert a philosophical theory. His main aim is to address and subvert real life cynics. His attempt at motivating the cynic to become 'a better person' was to show that morality and power are internally connected: that is, one cannot retain the latter for long without respecting and protecting the former.

As far as I can see, this argumentative strategy gives Holiday a problem, namely it seems to be the case that a person cannot be considered morally good if she is doing good *only* in order to become, or stay, powerful. To be a morally good person involves, among other things, to some extent wanting to do good – not only as a means, but also as an end in itself. If the cynic respected some moral values merely to gain gratification, power or wealth, it would thus be questionable whether she had really become a better person. Holiday's project of finding a way of turning the real-life cynic into a better person is therefore

unconvincing so far. But maybe Holiday relies on something else to transform the cynic, namely what we can call 'the power of logical necessity'?

In order for Holiday's project to make sense, that is writing this kind of philosophical book in order to subvert real life cynics, Holiday seems to rely on the power of philosophical arguments to change people's lives. He is not alone in doing so. The same hope permeates many rationalistically flavoured books on moral philosophy, including Plato's The Republic: the hope that if only philosophers can *prove* once and for all that we *really* ought to be good, that it is *truly* better to be just than unjust, then the cynics of this world will change their destructive ways and the world will become a better place.

One possible Wittgensteinian interpretation of Holiday's optimism is to see it as the result of an unconscious conflation of causal and logical necessity.[8] We meet this conflation in the following conversation in *Bemerkungen über der Grundlagen der Mathematik*, where I interpret the remarks in '…' to be the remarks of a person whom Wittgenstein is trying to lead out of philosophical confusion:

> 'Du gibst *das* zu – dann mußt du *das* zugeben.' – Er *muß* es zugeben – und dabei ist es möglich, dass er es nicht zugibt! Du willst sagen: 'wenn er *denkt*, muß er es zugeben.' 'Ich werde dir zeigen, warum du es zugeben mußt.' – Ich werde dir einen Fall vor Augen führen, welcher, wenn du ihn bedenkst, dich bestimmen wird, so zu urteilen. […] 'Aber bin ich also in einer Schlußkette nicht gezwungen, zu gehen, wie ich gehe?' – Gezwungen? Ich kann doch wohl gehen, wie ich will! – 'Aber wenn du im Einklang mit den Regeln bleiben willst, *mußt* du so gehen.' – Durchaus nicht. (Wittgenstein 1991: Teil 1, §§ 51, 113)

Here, Wittgenstein is reminding thinkers – in the grip of being tempted to conflate causal and logical necessity – of the differences between the kind of force 'logical necessity' has compared to 'causal necessity', namely that the former, unlike the latter, leaves our freedom intact. We are not forced by rules or arguments to 'go in a certain way', like we are forced to the ground after jumping off a cliff. We can 'go as we want'. Yet, when philosophizing we can be tempted to think that logical necessity does nevertheless force us in some sense to go in

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[8] I call it 'unconscious' because presumably, or rather obviously, if asked Holiday would not claim they are the same kind of necessity. Yet, nonetheless, in order for his way of addressing cynics to make sense, it seems to presuppose something like this image or idea (i.e. his choice of writing style and argumentative strategy combined with the aim of converting cynics).

a certain way if we encounter a valid argument or follow a certain rule (see also Wittgenstein 1995: §§ 138-242).

Wittgenstein also offers an explanation as to why we can be tempted to conflate the two kinds of necessity during philosophising. What can happen is that we are led astray by a picture of logical necessity that comes natural to us, because it is part of our everyday language. It is evident in phrases such as "Based on the evidence I *have* to say, the butler killed him" or "2 plus 2 *always* equals 4". It is the picture of 'the hard, unyielding logical must' (Wittgenstein 1991: Teil 1, §§ 34, 51). This picture is doing fine work as part of many everyday practices, for instance when we teach people how to use the basic rules of mathematics or understand formal logic. But according to Wittgenstein it tends to lead us in wrong directions when we philosophise.

It is perhaps a giving into this temptation of conflating logical with causal necessity, which is the source of the optimistic belief in the power of philosophical proofs and rationality that lies implicit in the work of philosophers like Holiday and Plato, i.e., that good arguments can transform cynics into better persons. However, even though Holiday does offer the cynic reasons to stop acting cynically, it is hard to imagine that the cynic herself is not already aware that her doings are to some degree undermining society, and thus in principle (but clearly not always in practice) her ability to sustain power (as Berlusconi seems to be doing just fine). It seems that what the full-blown cynic is lacking is not knowledge or understanding of this fact, but rather a virtuous character for which such reasons would *count*, as they do to most other people. But in the case of hard-core cynics it seems pima facie unlikely that a Thrasymachus or a Berlusconi would be moved to change by an argument. And, if that should be the case, Holiday's strategy misfires again, if the aim is to subvert real life cynics.

Wittgenstein offers his readers an alternative picture to the tempting picture of logical necessity, which he hopes is less misleading when we are philosophising. In the alternative picture of logical necessity, it is we humans, not the argument, who decide what to do after reading it, and it is our practices, which determine the consequences of ignoring proof or having alternative ways of following rules. 'The hardness of the logical must' is consequently the hardness of our practices: how strict and rigid our practices are, how strongly we honour

the rules, criteria, principles, paradigms, laws and values in question. We never allow '2 + 2 = 5', and we always regard arguments with the structure of the *Modus Ponens* as valid. This firmness characterises logic and our mathematical practices (see also Christensen 2011: 808-809). "Was feststeht, tut dies nicht, weil es an sich offenbar oder einleuchtend ist, sondern es wird von dem, was darum herumliegt, festgehalten" (Wittgenstein 1997: § 144).

What surrounds unquestionable truths, unbreakable laws, rigid rules etc. is in Wittgenstein's thinking called 'a language-game', 'a practice', and ultimately 'a form of life'. In order to elucidate the demands that ethics places on us – what the nature of ethical normativity and the 'ethical must' is – we can therefore look at our practices and how we use words, when we use them with a moral aim.

The Hardness of the Ethical Must

We use the word good in various contexts (Wittgenstein 1995: § 77). Wittgenstein points to one of the characteristics of moral uses in the following quote:

> Suppose that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said 'Well, you play pretty badly', and suppose I answered 'I know, I'm playing badly, but I don't want to play any better,' all the other man could say would be 'Ah then that's all right'. But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said 'You're behaving like a beast' and then I were to say 'I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better,' could he then say 'Ah that's all right'? Certainly not; he would say 'Well, you *ought* to want to behave better.' Here you have an absolute judgment of value. (Wittgenstein 1993: 39)

The above remarks can serve to remind us of one aspect of the use of the words 'morally good'. What they show is that the hardness of 'the ethical must' is every bit as hard as the logical must: We can say, we don't care about being good at baking cakes or running marathons, but, without being blameworthy, we cannot not care about being ethically good persons. In one sense, the cynic is free to act exactly as she pleases, but when doing so, what consequences her actions may have, or how she will or ought to be categorised is not up to her; this is determined by our practices: "It is up to me what I do to another, but it is not up to me, whether what I cause in this person's life, is good or bad. It is not up to me to decide whether it is better to do good than to do bad." (Fink 2007: 52,

my translation). This statement can be understood as 'a grammatical remark' on the concepts of the morally good and bad, i.e. remarks elucidating the meaning of the phrases 'morally good' and 'bad'.

Furthermore, it characterizes human practice in ethical matters that we punish forms of serious moral wrongdoing. And we do so far more severely than when the rules of logic, tennis or good table manners are violated (Hanfling 2003: 27). According to Wittgenstein, we – and thus also the cynic – encounter here yet another kind of necessity than the causal and the logical:

> Mann kann aber dennoch sagen, dass die Schlußgesetze uns zwingen; in dem Sinne nämlich, wie andere Gesetze in der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Der Kanzlist, der so schließt, wie in (17), *muß* es so tun; er wäre bestraft worden, wenn er anders schlösse. Wer anders schließt, kommt allerdings in Konflikt: z.B. mit der Gesellschaft; aber auch mit anderen praktischen Folgen. (Wittgenstein 1991: Teil 1, § 116)

The full-blown real-life cynic clearly is a person 'der anders schließt' than the majority of people generally do. She furthermore does so in a way that runs the risk of a conflict with society; the kind of conflict which can end with a prison sentence or death and violent upheaval in the case of tyrants.

In this and in the above sections it was argued that Holiday's strategy for transforming real life cynics into better persons was not convincing. We can therefore ask: How do we then solve the problems we face in our societies stemming from cynicism?

The short answer to the above question is that nothing can silence the challenges to society raised by cynicism, *if* one is looking for 'a final solution', i.e. something that can rid us of cynicism once and for all. It will always be a possibility that when a law or moral value is authoritative in a society, then it can be challenged. This is so because there is an inherent openness to morality. The openness of morality makes room for moral change. If we couldn't challenge an existing moral conception or ideal, neither could we change it for the better. If morality did not contain this openness, a call like Nietzsche's to 'move beyond good and evil' could never make sense, and occasionally, such a call has made sense. This openness does not, however, entail that we never have moral certainty or that values, laws and ideals always *will* or always *ought* to be challenged:

> Kann ich nun prophezeien, daß Menschen die heutigen Rechensätze nie umstürzen werden, nie sagen werden, jetzt wüßten sie erst, wie es sich verhalte? Aber würde das einen Zweifel unserseits rechtfertigen? […] Aber das sagt nicht, daß wir zweifeln, weil wir uns einen Zweifel denken können (Wittgenstein 1997: § 652; Wittgenstein 1995: § 84).

In these quotes Wittgenstein points out that: the fact that we cannot be given a guarantee that the current basic rules of calculation will not be changed in the future and considered 'defect', does not constitute a valid reason to doubt them now. Neither does the fact that some moral doubt is intellectually imaginable mean that we in fact are in doubt or that we have morally good reasons to doubt or challenge, for example, a moral ideal. The latter is what the powerful cynic, challenging the rule of law and disregarding moral values shows us. It can be said that the cynic has reasons for what she does, but they are not morally good or valid reasons for challenging the laws, values and norms of society.

When we look at the world, stable societies governed by the rule of law, with a low degree of corruption, and with citizens who find their society good and just, do exist. Therefore, it is clearly possible in another sense – other than the 'once and for all' sense – to answer legitimacy questions and curb real life cynicism. Otherwise these societies would have been undermined and corrupted. To adequately answer how these societies manage to minimize breeding grounds for tyrants and a cynic culture lies outside the scope of this article, and it calls for resources and knowledge from outside that of philosophy – from the traditions, research, and experiences in areas like law, anthropology, psychology, history and social science. But can philosophy have any role at all in minimizing the breeding ground for cynicism?

I believe philosophy can have a role, and that part of what Holiday does in his book is one example of how to try to do so. As mentioned above, Holiday is reacting to what he sees as the harmful effects of a certain image of the world, which he deems influential in his culture, namely "the empiricist picture of the world as morally dead" (Holiday 1989: x-xi; 182). This image, Holiday argues, tends to breed a cynic culture. Among other things it breeds a conception of humans as essentially selfish beings, whose main goal in life is the attainment of power and wealth. If we believe that Murdoch is right in claiming humans have an ability and tendency to some extent to shape ourselves, our children

and our institutions according to our conception of what it means to be human (Murdoch 1999), then it can be morally important that philosophers, along with artists, anthropologists and psychologists etc., point to the short comings of the cynic world view and offer alternatives in its place. In this way we can help ourselves and our politicians not to be 'caught by a picture' (Wittgenstein 1995: § 115), which is harmful and from which we otherwise can have difficulty to escape when first our politicians and institutions repeats it to us inexorably. One way of doing so is by publicly speaking out against it, as Holiday does. And where it was *prima facie* unlikely that any full-blow cynics would listen to these arguments, it is on the other hand likely that people, who are not yet, will.

Cavell's Challenge: Reconciliation with Disappointment and Sorrow

In conclusion, if cynicism is an unavoidable possibility for any human in any society, then we might want to reconsider our way of understanding cynicism. It might not only be something that calls for problem-solving and -dissolving, but also be something we in one sense need to reconcile ourselves with. An inspiration to this approach can be found in Cavell's writing on scepticism:

> […] the griefs to which language repeatedly comes […] should be seen as normal to it, as natural to human natural language as skepticism is. (Hume calls skepticism an incurable malady; but here we see the poorness of that figure. Skepticism, or rather the threat of it, is no more *incurable* than the capacities to think and to talk, though these capacities too, chronically, cause us sorrow.) The philosophical pertinent griefs to which language comes are not disorders, if that means they hinder its working; but are essential to what we know as the learning or sharing of language, to our attachment to our language; they are functions of its *order*. (Cavell 1989: 54)

In this quote, Cavell displays an insight into a challenge, which life poses to us as philosophers and as humans: to accept certain problems – sufferings – as immanent to the human form of life. These are problems with our language and laws, with each other and with how to deal with failing criteria and values (Brock 2013). And the challenge is also to accept that in one sense it is not bad that we have these problems (even though in another sense it can be), because the alternative to these problems would be that we were creatures with no freedom, no ability to reflect and no ability to be creative. In the same way Cavell

understands scepticism as a function of the order of language, we might consider seeing cynicism as a function of 'the order of morality' – a function of its inherent openness.

Our challenge is how to deal with moral flaws, suffering and uncertainty and as part of that reconcile ourselves with the fact that it is difficult to accept flaws, suffering, and uncertainty: We cannot cure the world of the possibility of cynicism and we cannot *not* want to cure it. Our balancing act is between the temptations of giving up by giving in to despair or being blinded by the vain hope of a problem-free utopia.

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