

11/12/1974

Dave,

I do disagree with your evaluation of Pitkin's book. What is more significant, here I am writing you a letter about it.

First I'll review the way the last chapter is put together. The chapter is entitled "Political Theory and the Modern Predicament". Broken into the body are some subtitles: "The Possibility of a Wittgensteinian Political Theory" and "Language, Truth, and Politics".

The first section reviews the modern human condition, of the ubiquitous themes of alienation and uncertainty, the crisis of increasingly powerful objectivity, and the breakdown of traditionally structured reality. Wittgenstein's writings are entirely devoid of political or social commentary outside of a brief remark on "the darkness of these times". Here she says "And Hegel announced what more and more men had come to know for themselves — that God is dead." I ^{always} thought Nietzsche ^{about Hegel anyway} said that, but what she says makes a lot of sense to me.

She draws some ^{loose} parallels between the movements of Phenomenology, Existentialism, Pragmatism, and Wittgensteinism (England) upon the lines of 'alienation from reality', 'alienation from each other', 'loss of capacity for action'. At least she suggests they are concerned on these points. Or rather that any special approach is likely to be partial.

Could there be such a thing as Wittgensteinian political theory? Well, we might expect it to be skeptical of generalizations, and not have any system, with stress on particular cases, contexts, persons, and an acceptance of plurality and contradiction. ^{Any} Overview would be ad hoc. There is this terrible problem, not alone confined to Plato (Republic) that political theorizing becomes totalitarian. Why is this? Rampant Objectivity? Participatio abscondita? Well, David, I

do not think these generalizations are bad. Then she mentions Wittgenstein's treatment of moral discourse and moralism. Someone ^(Cowell) said: "Wittgenstein's originality lies in having developed modes of criticism, which are not moralistic, that is, which do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him." And that's well enough; Wittgenstein gave us a sense of how to ask about meaning, rather than any bunch of answers, specially structured, or a jargon and system. The very best book about Wittgenstein is the one by Fann.

So here we are in the middle of the math inning, and it's Pitkin at the plate. She says, "Perhaps one could say that a Wittgensteinian political theory would be addressed from one citizen to others — not necessarily his equals in intellect or insight, but still addressed as fellow members, as fellow human beings." And then, "Such a theorist would speak of the political situation of 'us', not 'you' or 'they'! My God! A great murmur arises from the stands, somewhere between "Ah!" and "Oh!"

Has she struck out? Did she fly out? Will we give her a break?

Note well the dialectic of the third and final section! The leading paragraph, about the problems of dialogue is the modern age, ties up with Hannah Arendt.

[I forgot to mention: the end of the last section asks again (says Pitkin) whether such a business as Wittgensteinian... could really be called theory at all]

And what she says from Arendt is that as a result of television-Disneyland-Nixonism (schooling?) children ^{and} (we) "no longer recognize even as a serious possibility what Arendt calls the truth-revealing function of language." The second

"Political life is determined by the possibility and
necessity of collective determination, and if that capacity
diminishes, political and the specifically human of our common
life, our freedom, are endangered at their roots."

What do you think of that?

There's still a long business about the individual of Wittgenstein.
"What does Wittgenstein tell us about the moral or scientific
best?" asks Mr. Pitkin.

I suppose Wittgenstein would say it's not his business to speak
for any individual, but for Wittgenstein. Or, one particular
in language, so what have you individual?



Fellows
2009 Angelo Ave.
San Diego, CA 92104

David Kohnen
1120 W. 27th
Los Angeles CA