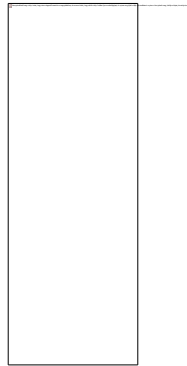


Theses of PhD Dissertation

**THE RADICALITY OF SILENCE –
APPROXIMATIONS TOWARDS A
THERAPEUTIC READING OF
WITTGENSTEIN'S TRAIL OF THOUGHTS**

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Aims and the Subject Matter of the Dissertation

Though it is a commonplace, nevertheless it is beyond doubt: oppressing and discriminating ideologies are more and more thoroughly shaping our daily life-experiences and political thinking. Regarding this phenomena, one cannot emphasize enough the responsibility of the representatives of the human sciences. I believe that Ludwig Wittgenstein – who himself, in his own life, faced all the consequences and manifestations of these nefarious ideologies: the horrors and despair of two cataclysmic world wars – could have conceived his philosophical therapy as a sort of ‘cure’ for these social-political ‘sicknesses’. I try to defend this intuition via exegetic and applied means; to show that those insights the majority of commentators treat as exclusively or mainly epistemological, can be read as demonstrating this sort of relevance as well. I consider such a (re)reading of this Wittgensteinian trail of thoughts as an adequate vehicle for topologizing the emergence, formulation and functioning of the forms of discrimination, and of describing what sort of individual and communal answers and possible solutions are at hand.

My principal aim is to prove that Wittgenstein’s thoughts (mainly although not exclusively focusing on his later work) can be conceived as a generally and thoroughly therapeutic. I aim to show that the corpus from a particular angle can be understood and applied as a kind of practical therapy, individually and collectively. Either by bringing the “world of the happy” to the individual through the resignation, or by achieving it communally, when a group of language-game ‘players’ revise their most fundamental beliefs when meeting with inhabitants of radically different world-pictures.

The very idea of this dissertation was born from a paper of mine, also reflecting on a current formulation of discrimination: the phenomenon of holocaust-denial¹. In that paper, through recontextualizing some *loci* of *On Certainty*, I tried to map the following

¹ Regarding this topic I find it important to emphasize the following: I treat the conclusions of this examination of the holocaust-denial equally and analogously applicable transitively to the examination of all sort of inhuman, chauvinist and discriminative ideologies – like racism, sexism, homophobia or xenophobia and so on. Since an in-depth analysis of an essentialist character typology would lead us way to far from our subject matter, all I want do here is to characterize briefly my interpretative stance: Namely that I consider the *objects* which differentiate these ideologies from one another as *free variables*; with regard to the recontextualization and application and I do not presume any difference between these ideologies – at least not of any importance regarding our very topic – raising from their diversity. As Nádás Péter puts it: “*the logic of racism is independent of its object.*”

mechanism: In the eyes of a holocaust-denier those proofs and authorities, which ‘we’ (who consider ourselves humanists in a broad and unspecified manner) take as proofs, either do not count as such in general, or (s)he can see them exclusively as evidences supporting *their* ideologies and truths. The opposition looks seemingly incommensurable just like it occurs so often in the later period’s fictive scenarios on the meeting of inhabitants of radically differing world-pictures and on the clashes of religious beliefs. So, seen thus, it is as if Wittgenstein’s relativism manifested in the pages of the *Investigations* or the *On Certainty* into our most ordinary reality. Consequently, in my reading, Wittgenstein’s thoughts on radical world-picture clashes (in which the world-picture grounding-, fundamental-, or, so-called hinge-propositions collide) can fruitfully and adequately represent this phenomenon. Hence we are prone to suppose that we can merely trust to achieve a *universal (meta)rationality* or *(meta)ethics* like one according to *Enlightenment* pretensions. But even in the case of two individuals’ of a (broadly) shared form of life, of a very similar familial, social and cultural background, the following case of total incommensurability can be found.

They share in their upbringing, but one will treat standard history books as relevant and authentic sources on the holocaust, while the other will treat far-right and chauvinist news-portals as such. My conclusion in that paper (which is half the dissertation’s conclusion as well) was that even under these circumstances and in these conditions, the impossibility of understanding and consent is never static or determined: there is no such incommensurable-seeming difference of world-pictures, which would not occur on the ground of some sort of similarities – due to the Wittgensteinian surmises – though, in order to recognize this (and hence: them), mutual sincerity, open-mindedness and willing are essential. Thus, I do not wish to treat my examination – both in that paper and in my dissertation – as one exhibiting a declaration of bottomless pessimism clothed in the ornament of a Wittgensteinian conceptualization. On the contrary: I aim to trace – in the refraction of this therapeutic optics – the possibilities of befriending and of hope regarding these rather difficult social dilemmas.

With this in mind, the basic question of my dissertation can be summed as follows: To what extent can Wittgenstein’s trail of thoughts be read as a form of anthropology and as a sort of anthropological criticism regarding the meaning, the role,

the possibilities and the limits of a (meta)rationality of (meta)ethics – which, due to the aims of the Enlightenment, could be conceived and grounded as universal ones – and concerning the relation of knowledge and decision (or: the will and the intellect); mainly in the lights of the (re-reading of the) remarks on the irreconcilable world-picture clashes? With regard this ground-question, I try to put special emphasis on the following questions: In what sense can the Wittgensteinian *philosophical therapy* (which, in my reading, permeates the totality of the *oeuvre*) be conceived as a sort of anthropology, as a possible horizon of an anthropological- and social-criticism? What are the limits and possibilities of such a – either constructive, positive, or a purely negative – political reflections in the Wittgensteinian *corpus*? To what extent can the immanent exegesis grant us an opportunity – for example, in regards of the very instance of holocaust-denial – to exhibit a Wittgensteinian solution? What can we read out if it concerning the chances of the transmission, the teaching of our world-picture’s and cultural community’s ethics – especially when facing moralities drastically different as ours?

I try to chisel out this fundamental question-horizon through paying attention to the following problem-fields: What reasons lead to these irreconcilable debates between the opposing world-pictures, what structures do these clashes exhibit, and what possibilities of understanding and mutual recognition are at hand?² What are the relations between the universal and relativistic tendencies equally present (mostly) in Wittgenstein’s (later-periods’) writings, which articulate the individual’s freedom and imprisonedness into the language-game alike?³ What connection can we trace between the insight of the independency of the individuum and the world (which is present from the *Tractatus*), between the will (not conceived in a psychological manner), the decision and rule-following (not normatively determined by the rules) and these (quasi) incommensurable mis- and non-understandings?⁴ What dynamics can be found between the “common behavior of mankind” qua a “universal anthropologic world-picture-transcending ground”, the multiplicity of diverse forms of life and world-pictures

² I examine these questions mostly in chapter 3.

³ These questions are elaborated in depth in chapter 4.

⁴ I circuit these problems in chapter 5.

(sometimes including radically differing hinge-commitments) and the secondary meaning and meaning-experience (which is rather chiefly typical of the individual)?⁵

To elaborate further these questions: What is the connection between the Wittgensteinian concept of transcendentalism (which, in my reading, is present from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty*), the idea of relativism (mostly to be found in the later period's writings), and the remarks on the (seemingly) incommensurable world-picture clashes? What relation can we draw between this relativism and the primary goal of the philosophical therapy, to lead the reader – via the change of aspect – to the “world of the happy”, or the aim to articulate a (quasi)universalistic “natural history of mankind”? Or, to rephrase it slightly: To what extent can the relativism (in the sense of all forms' completeness and unitary ungroundableness) be *said*, or to what extent should it be understood solely in the sphere of *showing*?⁶ And finally: to what extent and how can the therapy achieved (either through clarifying the relations of the logical-grammatical propositions, or via – which is related – the organon of aesthetic reasoning) on the individuals' level transmitted onto the level of the collective? That is: to what extent and how can the clarification – via the conceptual analysis and the perspicuous representation of our language-games and forms of life – function as a means of supporting a Wittgenstein-'application' with a focus on socio-, cultural- and civilization-criticism?⁷ What possibilities are at hand concerning the often incommensurable-seeming clashes of world-pictures between differing world-views, what are the chances of reconciliation? What does the corpus say in regards of the chances of war and peace – in the territory of “fools and heretics”, what is: the domain of the most ordinary incommensurabilities?

Methods applied in the dissertation

In my thesis, on the one hand, I try to muster textual evidence supporting the ethical, socio-critical and political interpretation of Wittgenstein's thoughts, through (re)interpreting, recapitulating and recontextualizing particular primary Wittgensteinian remarks I consider clear and relevant to my topic. On the other, I attempt to show – via

⁵ I investigate these subjects in chapter 4.

⁶ I analyze these problem-horizons in chapter 5.

⁷ I try to clarify these questions in chapter 6.

(re)interpreting these remarks in the frame of a case-study (the Wittgensteinian ‘modelling’ of holocaust-denial), which runs through the whole dissertation, and to which I sometimes pay more, and other times less attention – the following: This reading can provide us both with practical, therapeutic, and not merely philosophical insights regarding even our most ordinary and highly current social tensions as well. By this modelling I mean the following: I attempt to recontextualize several *loci* (mainly, but not exclusively from *On Certainty*) I consider clear and relevant to this topic through treating holocaust-denial as a paradigm of the investigation⁸. Sometimes by means of ‘displacing’ the persons (or other, virtual interlocutors) of Wittgenstein’s imaginary scenarios with a holocaust-denier and someone arguing against her. Other times I attempt to apply the Wittgensteinian insights – concerning the problems of relativism, anti-foundationalism and the ineffability of ethics – to this phenomena in a more general manner, either as a means of explanatory schemas, or merely as question-fields. A *caveat* here should be noted regarding this enterprise – which is an essential element of my conclusion, and which I wish to keep in evidence through the whole investigation as well: On the grounds of this *therapeutic philosophizing* – at least, on my understanding of it – one should fundamentally avoid those approximations, which tried to derive – from this often rather diverse and (intentionally) contradictory Wittgensteinian remarks – a theory, a systematic organon, corroborable and accessible by means of a philosophical hypothesis (*horribile dictum*: a tactic) concerning such a social- and ethical phenomenon. That is: those approximations, which attempted to treat the – according to the author’s intention – purely *descriptive* insights as *explanatory* ones.

Finally, I have to make a further methodological remark: I decided to elaborate on this topic in virtue of a double-faceted reason, since I not only wish to examine this subject from the direction articulated above, but from another one as well. Since, in my approximation, I am not only after the question, whether and how a Wittgenstein-application can shed light to such ethical-social dilemmas; but I also wish to present arguments supporting the idea that such an application can put the Wittgensteinian dilemmas into a new, fresher light as well. Thus, the understanding of the ‘classical’

⁸ The question of situating this phenomenon as the paradigm of the investigation is articulated in the chapter 2.

places – re-read from an *applied* interpretation – may be richened with newer and more-chiseled meaning-layers. Hence, my dissertation simultaneously attempts to present a ‘classic’ (textual, exegetical and philosophical) Wittgenstein-interpretation, and an applied-therapeutic angled analysis thematizing the question of whether and to what extent can we read and understand the corpus as a practical tool.

In my examination – as I have mentioned in the section above – as a preliminary interpretative decision (whose viability the examination itself will demonstrate), I argue for the unity of the *oeuvre*, and I attempt to articulate my socio-critical and anthropological interpretation on this ground as well. I consider this unity to be supportable via demonstrating that the following thematic fields and points are present through the whole *oeuvre*.

The therapeutic character (traceable since the time of the *Tractatus*), by which I mean that we can interpret the insights concerning the definition and demarcation of the peculiar role of the philosophy as therapeutic ones. I understand those rhetorical and philosophical maneuvers – which are more evidently demonstrable regarding the *Tractatus*, but which, in my reading, can be found in the later period’s writings as well – as supporting this view, which recursively applies the eliminative remarks on the possibility of the philosophical theses to Wittgenstein’s own insights as well, or which by other rhetorical and stylistic means exhibit a de(con)structive tendency (which self-deconstruction, I believe, is the heart of this therapy) against our attempts to see Wittgenstein’s ideas as a positivistic, theoretical, hypothetical grounding or declaration regarding any such (ordinary or philosophical) question or dilemma. Such a therapeutic interpretation in my reading includes the comprehension of such concepts of the later period’s writings – like those concerning the anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism, and which are organically related to them, such as the rule-following considerations, the conception of the family resemblance and the aesthetic reasoning – as a sort of *practical* therapy simultaneously applicable to individual and collective social dilemmas. I also (and relatedly) consider as a means of supporting the unitary reading the following concepts, which serve as a thematic and rhetorical organizing principle in the whole *oeuvre*: the ethical aim and content (whose pivotal ground is the idea of the ineffability of ethics, which I also apprehend to be pervasive through the totality of the corpus), the

inseparability of ethics and aesthetics, and the aesthetical reasoning. I also treat as such the remarks on the say-show distinction, the aspect-perception and the subject-matters of transcendentalism and anti-foundationalism to be found in the whole *oeuvre*. Moreover – in agreement with Neumer Katalin – I also find the following dichotomies’ present throughout the whole *oeuvre* as a support for the unitary view: Meaningful and nonsensical, grammatical and empirical propositions, description and explanation, universal and relativistic – and the organic inter-play of these concepts with regards to the understanding, certainty and the ineffability of ethics.

Neumer Katalin characterizes the Wittgensteinian therapy as follows: “*It is typical of the later Wittgenstein, that he considers not only philosophical propositions as instances of ‘language going on holiday’, but he sees the symptoms of alienation from the concrete in the philosophical problems themselves. Accordingly, for him the utmost aim of the philosophical investigations is therapy, to cure us of philosophical problems as a kind of sickness. Consequently, he doesn’t take philosophical problems to be ordinary theoretical problems as ordinarily conceived; hence he doesn’t pursue their ‘solutions’ as theoretical solutions. Since, for Wittgenstein, these problems are linguistic problems, that is, they cannot be answered as factual questions...*”⁹

As for myself, I would broaden this concern in the following way: Philosophical problems, from a particular aspect, can be analogously seen as life-problems, or, at least, they can be related to them. For instance, if we treat the skepticism of the skeptic’s (often invoked by Wittgenstein as an interlocutor) as a merely academic malady, then it – and Wittgenstein’s counter-remarks – concerns only a very narrow aspect of our forms of life. But – sticking to this instance, and having in mind, for example, Rupert Read’s paper¹⁰ reading the *Investigations* as a sort of ‘war book’ – if we can regard them as instances of a sort of ‘practical’ skepticism (in Read’s interpretation, for example, the Nazi ideology can be conceived as such), or as instances of a kind of anti-essentialism with ‘practical’, discriminative consequences, then we can read Wittgenstein’s understanding of these

9 Neumer, K. (1991), *Határutak*, Budapest: MTA Filozófia Intézetének kiadása, 25.

10 Read, R. (2010), Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations as a War Book, *New Literary History*, 41:3: 593-612.

problems as ones bearing relevance and affecting important segments of our daily life *as well*.

I consider the rather emphasized coreferentiality of language-game (*grammar*) and form of life (the totality of our social and political institutions and actions which show themselves in and through it) as pointing to the insight that our linguistic (philosophical) problems are deeply rooted and woven with a thousand strings into our utmost ordinary life-experiences – thus, this therapy for me is a social rather than a (merely of majorly) academic/philosophical-theoretic question.

And though Wittgenstein hardly ever mentions (actual)political questions in his primary texts, I still believe, that by applying his grammatical remarks to this field, such a reading can be plausible and adequate.

Hans Sluga in a recent lecture ironically declared¹¹: „*Wittgenstein is dead*”. The cryptic-sounding statement encapsulates and articulates a possible research horizon of the current Wittgenstein-exegesis. With this aphoristic move Sluga wants to underline that he finds it more important to ‘bring Wittgenstein out to the streets’, than to exclusively practice the solely corpus-immanent, ‘dry’ textual research. Since, as Wittgenstein himself puts it in a diary entry, it may have been more important to him to change the actual (political, cultural, social) establishment and state of affairs, than to start ‘philosophical schools’ and gather ‘followers’ through his writings.

Indeed, Wittgenstein is dead, but his *method* (and not his *system*, which should be evident – at least from a therapeutic standpoint –since the *Tractatus*) is living, or, to be more precise, it can be brought to life, if the research does not ‘stop’ at the level of mere exegetic, philological research; if we attempt to *apply* Wittgenstein’s *aspect* and *organon* to the problems of our current world phenomena (should it be scientific, cultural or political). (The aim to transform philosophy *per se* into an applied discipline, viewed from a broader angle, is a current and important direction in the domain of human sciences anyway – chiefly concerning such interdisciplinary fields such as bioethics or other, applied philosophies.)

¹¹ Sluga gave his lecture at the 35. International Wittgenstein Symposium's closing plenary session (Hayek's Error. Beyond the „New”, „Resolute” Wittgenstein), in Kirchberg Am Wechsel.

This methodology and approximation – which I also try to apply in my own dissertation – has gained an ever-broadening reputation in the Wittgenstein-research in the recent decades. After the publication of Gordon Baker’s monography, the *Neglected Aspects* (which emphasized the unity of Wittgenstein’s thought, and which saw in this unity its fundamentally therapeutic character), this applied approach became a widely renowned horizon within Wittgenstein research: Stephen Mulhall (relying on Stanley Cavell’s earlier, related insights) started to re-read classic and contemporary movies from this angle (he often interprets them as film-therapies, on the analogy of Wittgenstein’s favored metaphor, the objects of comparison)¹². Carl Elliott, in *A Philosophical Disease*¹³ applies Wittgensteinian insights to bioethical and biopolitical issues; Louis A. Sass does the same with regard to the vital questions of psychotherapy¹⁴). Rupert Read, Alice Crary and Cora Diamond approach through Wittgensteinian methods such actual, political subjects like animal rights, the sustainability of liberal economy, the reconceptualization of environmental ethics through a ‘non-standard’ Wittgenstein conception of ethics, and the controversies of modern, liberal democratic institutions in the era of globalization and multiculturalism. Regarding my own topic, I do think that this approach can be adequate and plausible.

Contrary to this, among Hungarian scholars, this approach is not as widespread and popular – except Nyíri Kristóf’s famous conservative interpretation in the 80s, one can hardly find anything of the like sort. Consequently, in virtue of this exegetical respect as well, I believe my approach is not forced, arbitrary and anti-Wittgensteinian.

Theses of the dissertation: In subchapter 1.1 I delimit my subject matter, and explain, why exactly I wish to investigate this very topic in the light of the Wittgensteinian conceptions; in sub-chapter 1.2 I introduce the methods applied and the methodical-

¹² Mulhall, S. (2005), *In Space No-One Can Hear Your Voice*, in Read, R., Goodenough, J. (ed.) (2005) *Film as Philosophy Essays in Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell*, 45-67., London: Palgrave MacMillan

¹³ Elliott, C. (1998), *A Philosophical Disease: Bioethics, Culture, and Identity (Reflective Bioethics)*, London: Routledge

¹⁴ Sass, L. (1994), *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature and Thought*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

interpretative strategies I will rely on. The aim of sub-chapter 2.1 is to clarify the concept of holocaust-denial – more precisely, the concept of that specific holocaust-denial I will treat as paradigmatic in my examination. In sub-chapter 2.2 I argue my decision of taking this particular phenomenon as the fundamental paradigm of my investigation, and I demarcate my peculiar approach towards examining this phenomenon. In sub-chapter 2.3, I introduce into the thematic map of the investigation the Wittgensteinian conceptions and trail of thoughts (chiefly concerning the applicability of the remarks on religious confrontations as a fundamental analogy) through a paradigmatic story about Edmund Gosse. The aim of sub-chapter 3.1 is to clarify the role and significance of *On Certainty* in the corpus, mainly because though I attempt to cite places and arguments from the whole oeuvre, but in the majority of the analysis I rely on the remarks of the post-1949 writings. I start the recapitulation, reconceptualization and (re)interpretation of the insights I consider the most pivotal and clear with respect to my subject-matter in sub-chapter 3.2; chiefly in order to show that the insights, which play a cardinal role in *On Certainty* – the world-picture grounding *Sätze*, the so-called hinge commitments, the grammatical-empirical dichotomy – can be read as having not solely empirical-epistemic, but ethical-anthropological relevance as well; and thus the emerging and functioning of these social dilemmas can be modeled by means of re-reading these remarks. In sub-chapter 4.1 I examine particular fundamental Wittgensteinian ideas from this ethical-anthropological aspect, such as language-game and form of life, or the rule-following considerations – attempting to do so through the optics of the questions of self- and communal identity. I try to analyze these questions in more detail by examining them against the background of the diverse remarks on religious debates, by paying special attention to the concepts of the experience of meaning, and secondary meaning, which become dominant in the so-called later periods writings. In sub-chapter 4.3 I attempt to critically analyze the concept of the common behavior of mankind as a universal anthropological world-picture transcending ground, at the same time I attempt to pay attention to the more general but highly related question of the possibilities and limits of understanding the other, of differing language games. In sub-chapter 5.1 my aim is to demonstrate the paradoxical relationship between anti-foundationalism, relativism and transcendentalism, through relating these surmises with the insights of the *Tractatus*. In

sub-chapter 5.2 I examine the problem-horizon of Wittgensteinian transcendentalism, chiefly through comparing it with the Kantian one, and by attempting to interpret this transcendental character's relation with anti-foundationalism and relativism as ethical and therapeutic strategies and maneuvers. In sub-chapter 5.3 I systematize the fundamental questions of the Wittgensteinian ethics, particularly the difference between the early and late conceptions of it, from the direction of such Wittgensteinian ideas, which, at first glance, do not seem to concern these subjects, like the rule-following considerations, the empirical-grammatical dichotomy and the age-old dilemma of the fact-value distinction. In sub-chapter 5.4 I articulate the problem of the broadly conceived relativism, particularly investigating it in regard to its relation to Wittgenstein's remarks on this. In sub-chapter 6.1 I enumerate the fundamental aims and ideas of Wittgensteinian therapy – as a possible means of solving these dilemmas – by comparing them with the Freudian. In sub-chapter 6.2 I investigate the tools of aesthetic reasoning, the interrelatedness and entanglement of ethics and aesthetics, and the concept of the change of aspect as possible attempts to solve these ethical-political conflicts. Finally, in sub-chapter 6.3 I survey the political applications, chiefly focusing on the so-called conservative interpretations. Sub-chapters 7.1 and 7.2 contain the conclusions of the investigations, which can be summarized as follows.

The grammars of our language-games, the foundations of our world-pictures, our ethical and aesthetic system of values, and the transcendental structure of these systems – typical of all forms of life – itself cannot be grounded *within* the world, but these are the possibility-conditions of every judgment and of any sort of judging. Superficially it leads to a *seeming* relativism, to an 'imprisonment' in my language and my world, since I cannot argue for the indubitableness of certain commitments and ideas with people who doubt these ethical or epistemic certainties functioning as *grammatical rules* of my world-picture. Yet, regardless of how uncertain the reconcilability of these conflicts may seem, I believe that the forms of strong incommensurability is just antithetic to the Wittgensteinian therapy. Because a crucial point of this concept is that a language is only a language in so far as it can be *learned* and *taught*. Given that – pessimistically viewed there is no 'guarantee' that could ensure that humankind won't start playing horrific and inhuman language-games like neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers, but – through an

optimistic lens – the opposite can be true as well. No-one can be so committed an anti-Semite, that she would not be able – given her *will*, *imagination* and *sincerity* to act so, all of which are important virtues for Wittgenstein – to learn her way ‘into’ or ‘back to’ the language-game(s) of humanism. Chiefly, if we treat the *Investigation’s common behaviour of mankind* as a (quasi) universal frame of interpretation of the radically remote (seeming) world-pictures and forms of life, as a transcendental possibility of understanding (or, in a weaker form, of interpretation).

But putting it this way is no more than a vulgar-philosophic, propagandistic *credo of unchained tolerance*. For the *real difficulty* lies in our ability to recognize when we should ‘suspend’ or ‘bracket’ the insight of the equal groundlessness of our beliefs, and simply *accept our forms of life* (and *moral certainties*), and *follow the (moral) rule blindly*. And when e.g. the Holocaust denier wants to draw our attention to our former relativism towards others – when she demands to practice it towards them, too – *then* we should be able to realize that this relativism (our recognizing the contingency of our world-picture) ‘should’ have limits. As sometimes we should ‘see the reason’ of anti-foundationalism in so far that we should not criticize the others’ belief if our beliefs are (to the same ‘extent’ and on the same way) ungrounded, too; but other times we should (also in an ungrounded way) treat this ‘insight’ the other way round. Since in these cases (e.g. when judging anti-Semites) the groundlessness – which is likewise ungrounded as in the former case – of our judging *simply* should not bother us.

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