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Political philosophy and education politics:
F. A. Hayek's epistemological argument against central planning -
A (meta-)critical comment

ΔΙΠΛΩΜΑΤΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ

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to Katerina and Fotis

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Περίληψη

Το σκεπτικιστικό επιχείρημα του Hayek ενάντια στον «κεντρικό σχεδιασμό» και υπέρ της «αποκεντρώσης», το οποίο αποτελεί τον θεμέλιο λίθο της κριτικής του στους «σοσιαλιστές όλων των κομμάτων» και τον πυλώνα της (νεο)φιλελεύθερης / (νεο)συντηρητικής αναδιάρθρωσης των κρατικών δομών, συμπεριλαμβανομένης και της εκπαίδευσης, χαίρει γενικής αποδοχής τόσο από εθνικές κυβερνήσεις και υπερεθνικούς οργανισμούς όσο και από διανοούμενους ανεξαρτήτως πολιτικών πεποιθήσεων, φιλοσοφικών απόψεων και μεθοδολογικών επιλογών. Σύμφωνα με τον Hayek, η αναδιάρθρωση αυτή όχι μόνο θα βελτιστοποιήσει την ποιότητα των παρεχόμενων υπηρεσιών, στον βαθμό που θα επιτρέψει στους δημόσιους λειτουργούς, όπως οι εκπαιδευτικοί, να αξιοποιήσουν την άρρητη γνώση τους, αλλά και θα τους απελευθερώσει ότι τις γραφειοκρατικές και άρα καταπιεστικές δομές οι οποίες τους εμποδίζουν να αναδείξουν τη δημιουργικότητά τους και τους αποτρέπουν από το να αναλάβουν καινοτόμες πρωτοβουλίες. Στη βάση του επιχειρήματος αυτού βρίσκεται μια οντολογική εικόνα σύμφωνα με την οποία η κοινωνική ευταξία επιτυγχάνεται όχι όταν τα δρώντα υποκείμενα υπακούν στις διαταγές που εκδίδονται από μια κεντρική αρχή, η οποία καταστατικά αγνοεί την άρρητη γνώση τους, και για να επιβάλει το κεντρικά σχεδιασμένο πρόγραμμά της αναγκαστικά θα καταφύγει στη βία και την επιβολή, αλλά όταν συντονίζουν τη δράση τους προσφεύγοντας σε αφηρημένους κανόνες συμπεριφοράς τους οποίους γνωρίζουν άρρητα, ακολουθούν ασυνείδητα και χωρίς να μπορούν να τους προσδώσουν μια προτασιακή μορφή. Στην παρούσα εργασία επιχειρώ να αποδομίσω τη λογική συνοχή του εν λόγω επιχειρήματος. Αξιοποιώντας τη διάκριση του Wittgenstein ανάμεσα «στη διαδικασία που βρίσκεται σε συμφωνία με έναν κανόνα» και στη «διαδικασία που εμπλέκει έναν κανόνα» θα ισχυριστώ ότι ο Hayek, συγχέοντας τις δυο διαδικασίες, επιχειρεί να παρουσιάσει τις υποκειμενικές – πολιτικές και κοινωνικές – απόψεις του ως κανονιστικά και περιγραφικά αντικειμενικές. Παράλληλα, βασισμένος στην κριτική του Ryle στον διανοουμενισμό, θα καταδείξω ότι τόσο ο Hayek όσο και ο συνοδοιπόρος του Michael Polanyi υποπίπτουν σε κατηγορικά σφάλματα και δεν αποφεύγουν την ατέρμονη αναδρομή. Καταλήγω ότι και οι δυο θεμελιώνουν τη (νεο)φιλελεύθερη επιστημολογία τους σε μια συντηρητική κοσμοεικόνα η οποία, όντας ελιτίστικη, αντιβαίνει στους διακηρυγμένους στόχους της.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: «κεντρικός σχεδιασμός», «αποκεντρώση», «άρρητη γνώση», αφηρημένοι κανόνες, νεοφιλελευθερισμός, συντηρητισμός

Introduction

My first encounter with the issue of (de)centralization occurred in 2002. At that time, I was struggling to write a doctoral dissertation on the changes in the appointment system of teachers in Greece that had triggered the most violent clashes between teachers' unions and the riot police ever recorded in the history of Greek education (see Athanasiades and Patramanis 2002a); but at no avail. In mid-2002, I was invited to participate in the *European Science Foundation Workshop on Globalization, Educational Restructuring and Social Cohesion in Europe*. Given that the prospects of writing a dissertation were diminishing, I decided to present something irrelevant to my then focus of research and, along with Harris Athanasiades, we delivered the 20,000 words long paper "Globalization, Education Restructuring and Teacher Unions in France and Greece: Decentralization Policies or Disciplinary Parochialism?" (Athanasiades and Patramanis 2002b). In this paper, which was informed by the metatheoretical tenets of Critical Realism (Archer *et al* 1998) and the strategic-relational approach to state theory (Jessop 2002) that sought to account for contemporary developments in terms of a transition from the Keynesian, Welfare, National State to the Schumpeterian, Workfare, Post-national Regime, we argued that the concepts of decentralization, de-concentration, delegation and devolution, increasingly fail to capture the broader dynamics and strategic shifts that characterize current educational restructuring and are invariably attributed to "globalization". All these terms assume a centre and a periphery comprising a static, uni-scalar, self-enclosed, territorially bound and functionally fixed system with the lines of authority and responsibility moving along a single, vertical axon. At the root of the problem lies a definition of the state as a sovereign, centralized authority over a territorially fixed geographical area. This representation assumes an isomorphic link between territory and sovereignty and perceives the state as a self-enclosed container of economic, political and cultural processes. As a result of this state-centric epistemology, recent transformations are interpreted either as a process of state demise, withering away or decline or, alternatively, in a "business as usual" manner. Contrary to that, we argued that the state is actually being rescaled, a process manifested in two, among others, overlapping processes: the de-nationalization of statehood and the de-statization of politics. The former process refers to the increasing de-prioritization of the national scale as the "natural" and "appropriate" level

of policy- and decision-making and the latter to the de-prioritization of the statist mode of governance and its tendential replacement by hybrid forms of public-private, contractual regimes. Drawing upon the reactions of academics and teacher unions in France and Greece over the “Anglo-Saxon” turn of their education systems as well as upon their distinct historical trajectories, we suggested that in the former case what seemed to be at the centre of attention was more the de-nationalization of the politics of education, while the Greek teacher unions had focused more on the de-statization of the politics of education. We concluded that, despite the discursive convergence and the ubiquity of policy shift, common trends are mediated by specific institutional paradigms and social struggles that produce distinct policy outcomes.

Upon my return to Greece, I decided to act strategically and extend the already long paper into a PhD thesis. Still, gradually, not only I became dissatisfied with both the metatheoretical and theoretical framework on substantive and methodological grounds (cf. Gunn 1989, Pleasants 1999, Cruickshank 2004, Bonefeld 2014) but also started to detect similarities between the social ontologies and methodological principles proposed by Critical Realists – whose explicitly aim was to provide the full-blown philosophy of science that Marxist lacks (Bhaskar 1991, see also the debate in Brown *et al* 2002) – and Hayek’s social theory which was grounded in a transcendental-realist philosophy and presupposed a transformational social ontology (Peacock 1993, Fleetwood 1995, Lawson 1997, Runde 2001, Beaulier and Boettke 2004, Lewis 2005). In particular, I became increasingly concerned not only with a) the separation between metatheory and theory that they both defended and their shared attempt to ground the latter in the former but also b) by the ontological picture painted by both, namely that people are tacitly knowledgeable rule followers (Hayek ([1973] 2021, Wainwright 1994, Bhaskar [1993] 2008). Meta-critically speaking, (a) leads into i) infinite regress, ii) logical contradictions as it seeks to combine ontological infallibilism with epistemic fallibilism and iii) normative impasse since it attempts to derive substantive social and political theses from metatheoretical principles. But (b) actually attracted most of my attention as it was this picture that supported both Hayek’s and Critical Realists’ (and other socialists’) critique of central planning, traditional social democracy and the Leninist left and as well as their proposals for decentralized

and/or market (-socialist) based modes of governance¹. As the argument goes, this institutional reform would harness people's tacit knowledge and thus increase not only efficiency and effectiveness in the allocation of scarce resources but also create the conditions of possibility for liberation from bureaucratic and thus oppressive structures (Hayek [1945] 2014: 94-8, [1979] 2021: 488, Elson 1988, Wainwright 1994: 118, 171; 2003: 27, Adaman and Devine 1996).

In Hayek's ([1945] 2014: 98) formulation,
If we can agree that the economic problem of society is mainly one of rapid adaptation to changes in the particular circumstances of time and place, it would seem to follow that the ultimate decisions must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them. We cannot expect that this problem will be solved by first communicating all this knowledge to a central board which, after integrating all knowledge, issues its orders. We must solve it by some form of decentralization².

At that time, I found this (meta-)theoretical alignment between (apparently) opposite political projects puzzling and embarrassing. Thus, disillusioned as I was by the unexpected turn my initial focus of attention had taken, I delved into the problematique of "tacit knowledge" and "rule-governed" action only to realize that this picture was not only

¹ In fact, these socialists show a great appreciation for Hayek's overall oeuvre. For example, Wainwright (1994: 5) maintains that "[r]eading Hayek ... should contribute to new foundations for the left" and Blackburn (1991: 38, fn. 57) goes as far as to argue that "[w]e socialists should, however, be gentle in our critiques of the Austrian notion of a catallaxy, since it is so obviously first cousin to the notion of 'freely associated producers' in a world where the state has withered away". Writing in a similar vein, Holland (2011: 156), in his *Nomad Citizenship: Free-Market Communism and the Slow-Motion General Strike*, suggests that Hayek's "analysis of the market as a mechanism for distributed decision making is too valuable to dismiss as mere right-wing cant".

² For Wainwright (2002: 7) "a theoretical recognition of the importance of practical, tacit knowledge does provide an important underpinning for a political programme of participatory democracy. It is an understanding of knowledge which contrasts starkly...with the narrow understandings of scientific knowledge which has underpinned authoritarian, social engineering forms of socialism". Or, alternatively, "These [social movements] are examples of knowledge that was at the time uncoded and, in the case of tacit skills, inherently uncoded; knowledge that is nevertheless vital to an economy, a society, and a political system able efficiently to meet people's changing needs. These movements asserted a knowledge and an awareness of needs over which state institutions in their ignorance trample. They challenged the conventionally narrow mentality of science and its applicability to social policy. This combined rebellion and creation of alternatives is a feature too of today's global movements for social justice. One reason for the growth and impact of these movements is that through them people become knowing creative agents of change. The whole process by which these movements develop, like those of the late 1960s and 70s, depends on a mutual valuing of people's active energies and creativity. It is a political methodology which the old social democratic parties, with their conceptions of knowledge and political agency, could not even have contemplated" (Wainwright 2003: 24).

widely held in social democratic and leftist circles alike (Giddens 1994, Gamble 1996) but that it was treated as an undisputed epistemic fact by an array of political philosophers and social scientists irrespective of political persuasion (Pleasants 1999). In fact, most of the contemporary debate has a distinctive managerial flavour and is confined on how, in the context of “knowledge economy”, to establish “communities of knowledge” and to take advantage of employees’ tacit knowledge so as to enhance the innovativeness and comparative advantage of various institutional settings including education (cf. Guile 2010, Freeman and Slusser 2024; for reviews see Venkitachalam and Busch 2012, Mohajan 2016, Terhorst and Krumpholz 2025).

To my surprise, support for my attempt to challenge this picture came from unexpected quarters. Historians of science had criticized the concept of “tacit knowledge” as a theoretical device devised by Cold-War liberals during the debates with their socialist opponents over the role, function and scope of science. More importantly, however, it was Wittgenstein and Ryle, two philosophers who can hardly be accused of having socialist inclinations or of working in a philosophical tradition opposed to Hayek’s, who provided the intellectual resources for a, hopefully, effective deconstruction of this picture. Although neither of them made any reference to Hayek and his fellow traveler, Michael Polanyi, their critiques of “rule-following”, “tacit knowledge” and/or “intellectualism” exposed the logical incoherence of this picture, the metaphysical problems it creates and their attempt to present their moral and political views as epistemic facts.

Chapter 1

1. On Hayek's epistemological critique of central planning³

1.1 Hayek's critique of "central planning": "constructivist rationalism" and the "French enlightenment"

Hayek, in order to reverse the decline classical liberalism had witnessed during the first half of the 20th century (Arblaster 1984, Cockett 1995), sought to revive the liberal tradition (Hayek 1948: 433) by devising a "positive programme" that would counterpose "planning for competition" (Hayek [1944] 2007: 91) or "planning for freedom" to the socialist or interventionist "planning for constant interference" (Hayek [1939] 1997: 194-5). To this end, and on the basis of a selective reconstruction of the "British" or "Scottish Enlightenment" (Petsoulas 2001, Gray 1988a, Βάκη 2012), he criticized "central planning" as an exemplification of "constructivist rationalism" (Hayek [1965] 2014: 51) and "the engineering type of mind" (Hayek [1952] 2010: 80) held to be typical of French Enlightenment (Hayek [1960] 2011: 109). For Hayek, this tradition holds fast to the idea that human reason is unlimited (ibid:108) and can intentionally design complex social structures, such as the economy, language, law or morals, on the basis of a conscious and deliberate plan (Hayek [1973] 2021: 19) "laid down by a central authority" (Hayek 1967: 82)⁴. Shared by the "socialists of all parties" (Hayek [1944] 2007: 36), this "intellectual error" (Hayek [1976] 2021: 340) is indicative of "the hubris of collectivism, which aims at

³ Throughout this essay, I will remain agnostic regarding Hayek's claim that central planning is an impossibility. My sole concern is the mode of argumentation and line of reasoning that sustains this claim.

⁴ For Hayek, the "French Enlightenment" tradition was represented by Descartes and Rousseau (Hayek [1970] 2014: 341, [1978] 2022: 4) who, along with Hobbes, Hegel and Marx, "carried the cult of reason", which was initiated by Plato, even further (Hayek [1965] 2014: 52). Kukathas (1989: 208, original emphasis) questioned Hayek's classification of Hegel and Marx as constructivist rationalists pointing out that "[t]here can surely be no doubt that Hegel and Marx did *not* think of society as the product of conscious design. Indeed, it is a crucial feature of their social philosophies that society is understood as the product of the historical evolution of human institutions" (see also Diamond 1980: 357, Antonio 1987: 61, Sciabarra 1995: 99). Caldwell (2010: 13, fn. 33), Hayek's editor, also challenged Hayek's view that Marx and Hegel overvalue the power of human reason, while Barry (1979: 64) and Hayek's student, Eugene Miller (1979: 251), doubted that Rousseau and Hegel belong to this tradition. On Hayek's "residual platonism", see Vernon (1978). Davie (1973) provides a rather different account that highlights the centrality of the idea of common sense in the Scottish Enlightenment and, on this basis, reconstructs it as an anticipation of late Wittgenstein's insights. For a materialist reading of the two traditions that grounds their differences in the distinctive needs they sought to address – in the case of the French the needs of the state and in the case of the English the needs of capitalist property – see Wood (2012: 289-317).

conscious direction of all forces of society” (Hayek [1952] 2010: 153), and of “earlier, anthropomorphic modes of thinking” (Hayek [1973] 2021: 26). Hence, the “Cartesian” or “naïve” rationalist tradition (Hayek [1965] 2014: 43, [1960] 2011: 131) rests on “the innocent sounding formula that, since man has himself created the institutions of society and civilization, he must also be able to alter them at will so as to satisfy his desires or wishes” (Hayek [1970] 2014: 338). Thus, the argument goes, it put forth “a conception which leads to the treatment of all cultural phenomena as the product of deliberate design, and on the belief that it is both possible and desirable to reconstruct all grown institutions in accordance with a preconceived plan” and, as a result, it is “contemptuous of tradition because it regards an independently existing reason as capable of designing civilisation” (Hayek [1967] 2022: 274, cf. [1960] 2011: 75⁵).

Accordingly, the adoption of rationalism as an epistemological principle, which a) assumes that intelligence requires the unity and explicit self-awareness of the Cartesian ego (Hayek [1973] 2021: 25-8), b) conceives reason as “the capacity of the mind to arrive at the truth by a deductive process from a few obvious and undoubtable premises” (Hayek [1965] 2014: 42) and c) lies at the root of “all modern socialism, planning and totalitarianism” (Hayek 1967: 85), has severe social and political implications that span from gross inefficiency to an undue restriction on human creativity and individual freedom (Hayek [1941] 1997: 217, 1948: 18-9, [1952] 2010: 149, cf. [1960] 2011: 121⁶). Therefore, Hayek undertook the task of settling the debate by scientific means and, to this end, he devised an epistemological argument that sought to prove the impossibility of “rational, conscious and deliberate planning” and to highlight the superiority of liberal order⁷.

⁵ “The conception of man deliberately building his civilization stems from an erroneous intellectualism that regards human reason as something standing outside nature and possessed of knowledge and reasoning capacity independent of experience. But the growth of the human mind is part of the growth of civilization”.

⁶ “The greatest difference between the two views... is in their respective ideas about the role of traditions and the value of all the other products of unconscious growth proceeding throughout the ages. It would hardly be unjust to say that the rationalistic approach is here opposed to almost all that is the distinct product of liberty and that gives liberty its value. Those who believe that all useful institutions are deliberate contrivances and who cannot conceive of anything serving a human purpose that has not been consciously designed are almost of necessity enemies of freedom”.

⁷ “The main point of my argument is, then, that the conflict between, on one hand, advocates of the spontaneous extended human order created by a competitive market, and on the other hand those who demand a deliberate arrangement of human interaction by central authority based on collective command over available resources is due to a factual error by the latter about how knowledge of these resources is and can be generated and utilised. As a question of fact, this conflict must be settled by scientific study. Such study shows that, by following the spontaneously generated moral traditions underlying the competitive market

1.2 Hayek's epistemological argument and the primacy of the tacit

According to the standard account of this argument (see Lavoie 1981), that Hayek ([1935] 1997: 89-116, [1945] 2014: 93-104, [1955] 2014: 200) developed since the socialist calculation debate to counter the neo-classical and market socialists⁸, a Central Planning Board faces two unsurpassable problems: a) the “computation problem”, namely the fact that the information needed, for an efficient and rational allocation of resources under conditions of scarcity⁹, is extremely voluminous and b) the “knowledge problem”, namely that this information can never be concentrated into a central agency, given its local, context-specific, time-relevant and subjective nature and the fact that it is fragmented and dispersed among the millions who participate in the market process. These two problems, thus interpreted, occupied the attention of Hayek's opponents well into the mid-nineties (see, inter alia, Cockshott and Cottrell 1993, Roemer 1994).

And yet, as Lavoie (1991), Fleetwood (1995) and Vaughn (1999) have persuasively argued, for Hayek, the real problem was not so much that information was voluminous and/or local, subjective, dispersed etc, in which case, at least in principle, it could be communicated, but that the relevant knowledge was tacit, that is inarticulate and

order (traditions which do not satisfy the canons or norms of rationality embraced by most socialists), we generate and garner greater knowledge and wealth than could ever be obtained or utilised in a centrally-directed economy whose adherents claim to proceed strictly in accordance with ‘reason’. Thus socialist aims and programmes are factually impossible to achieve or execute; and they also happen ... to be logically impossible” (Hayek 1988: 7).

⁸ Despite the fact that it is often presented as a debate mired with technicalities over the “(im)possibility of central planning”, “socialist accounting” and the “efficiency of market calculation”, the actual stakes were much higher as “the question [was] whether human beings must submit to the impersonal results of the market process, or could subject their collective lives to their knowledge and their will” (Whyte 2020: 33).

⁹ The significance of the replacement of “political economy” by “economics”, that this definition of the problem implies, will not be touched upon here. In passing, however, I need to point out that this definition not only does it treat the production relations among people, that always assumes a historically specific social form, as an illegitimate field of study, thus imposing undue restrictions on our knowledge of human relations (Perlman 1972), but also, by concealing the fact that scarcity is a modern invention put forward by “classical liberalism” (Xenos 1987) and by naturalizing social relations (Clarke 1991), it seeks to define the legitimate boundaries of social action along (neo)liberal lines. Actually, Robbins, who, on the grounds that “[s]carcity of means to satisfy ends of varying importance is an almost ubiquitous condition of human behaviour”, defined economics as “the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” (1945: 15-16), was the one that, as head of the Economics Department of LSE, hired Hayek to counter Keynes (Biro 2019: 82, Beck 2018: 2). On Robbins' abandonment of “guild socialism” and his “conversion to economic liberalism” under the influence of Mises's critique of “economic calculation under total Collectivism”, see his own recollections quoted in Cockett (1995: 26).

inarticulable, and thus, by definition, impossible to centralize (Petsoulas 2001: 23¹⁰), to communicate in an explicit, symbolically codifiable and/or propositional form, and to make it public (Hayek 1988: 79)¹¹. In Oguz's formulation (2010: 159, see also Hunt 2007: 54) “[t]acit knowledge became a central element of a liberal order for him. Inarticulate knowledge provided a reason why a liberal order is superior to alternatives. Moreover, a liberal order creates a ‘perfect’ environment for making use of tacit knowledge”¹².

Hayek, particularly in his later writings (Vaughn 1994, De Vlieghere 1994, Fleetwood 1996, Ioannides 2000, Sousa 2002, Lewis 2014, Tebble 2016, Festré and Østbye 2025), a) realized that the price mechanism (or its proxies¹³) alone would not suffice to cope with radical uncertainty and unpredictability since “the articulate information supplied by prices is only informative because they are juxtaposed against a wide background of inarticulate knowledge gleaned from a vast experience of habitual productive activity” (Lavoie 1991: 228, cf. Hayek 1948: 96) and b) highlighted the importance, or even the primacy, of tacitly grasped and unconsciously followed rules of social conduct, namely rules that guide agents, while undertaking skillful actions, despite the fact that they are unaware of their existence and the reason they follow them (Hayek 1948: 24, Hayek [1960] 2011: 108). As Hayek ([1969] 2014: 317-8) put it,

[A]ll our actions must be conceived of as being guided by rules of which we are not conscious but which in their joint influence enable us to exercise extremely

¹⁰ “Hayek claims that knowledge cannot be centralised because it is dispersed, local and temporary. However, even if these obstacles were to be removed somehow, the fact that a large part of human behaviour and interaction rests on tacit rule-following would still render knowledge impossible to centralise”.

¹¹ In fact, in Kukathas' words, (1989: 101, original emphasis) Hayek “argue[s] that it is the *epistemological* rather than the calculational problem which characterizes not simply the production process but the human condition generally”; see also Tebble (2010: 58). Actually, for Hayek ([1945] 2014: 101), the problem of “how to extend the span of our utilization of resources beyond the span of the control of any one mind; and, therefore, how to dispense with the need of conscious control and how to provide inducements which will make the individuals do the desirable things without anyone having to tell them what to do” is “by no means peculiar to economics but arises in connection with nearly all truly social phenomena, with language and with most of our cultural inheritance, and constitutes really the central theoretical problem of all social science”.

¹² This argument has been used by (neo)liberals and conservatives alike to justify decentralized and/or market-based modes of educational governance, on the grounds that this institutional reform, by increasing school autonomy, would harness teachers' tacit knowledge and thus would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of educational provision (Tooley 1996, Prabhakar 2002, O'Hara 2011, Currie-Knight 2012).

¹³ In the field of education, these would include League Tables, Standard Assessment Tests, Ofsted Reports and other performance indicators that were introduced in the mid-nineties, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries, to fabricate a pseudo-market (Marginson 1997), and to introduce the culture of “competitive contractualism” (Robertson and Dale 2000) and the spirit of “new managerialism” (Willmott 2003) in state organizations.

complicated skills without having any idea of the particular sequence of movements involved. (This capacity is often inadequately described as ‘intuitive knowledge’). From Gilbert Ryle’s now familiar distinction between the ‘knowledge how’ to do a thing and the ‘knowledge that’ it is so and so, through Michael Polanyi’s analysis of skills...to R. S. Peters’s highly important discussion of the significance of non-articulated rules in determining action, there has been an increasing stress on mental factors which govern all our acting and thinking without being known to us, and which can be described only as abstract rules guiding us without our knowledge¹⁴.

Or as his fellow traveler Michael Polanyi¹⁵, from whom Hayek appropriated the concept of tacit knowledge (Caldwell 2004: 294n¹⁶), put it a “skillful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them” (Polanyi [1958] 2005: 51, emphasis omitted)¹⁷.

In short, according to the skeptical argument marshaled by both Hayek and Polanyi against “central planning”, people a) know more than they can explicitly communicate to others¹⁸ and, thus, the socialist models that necessarily require the articulation of tacit knowledge to the CPB, or some similar body, are doomed to fail¹⁹ and b) due to the limitations of the human mind and the radical ignorance of any central policy-making body (Hayek [1973] 2021: 29), people resort, to solve the social coordination problem, to

¹⁴ Or alternatively, “[w]e make constant use of formulas, symbols and rules whose meaning we do not understand and through the use of which we avail ourselves of the assistance of knowledge which individually we do not possess. We have developed these practices and institutions by building upon habits and institutions which have proved successful in their own sphere and which have in turn become the foundation of the civilization we have built up” (Hayek [1945] 2014: 101).

¹⁵ Biro’s (2019: 58) account of the relation between Hayek and Polanyi is apt: “Just as Hayek became Robbins’ fierce combatant against Keynesian economics, Polanyi became his ally against socialist economic theories”.

¹⁶ Contrawise Bladel (2005: 25) argues that Hayek already had an understanding of “tacit knowledge” and Polanyi provided only the term. Be that as it may, in Festre’s (2021: 7) words, Hayek and Polanyi “shared the idea that the epistemological basis of liberalism (versus planning) lies in a theory of knowledge that focuses on the tacit nature of knowledge and its related implications for science and society”.

¹⁷ This idea is not confined to the neoliberal Right. Cf. Giddens (1984: 22): “Most of the rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social practices are only tacitly grasped by actors”.

¹⁸ As Polanyi ([1966] 2009: 4) (in)famously put it “we know more than we can tell”.

¹⁹ “Indeed, any social processes which deserve to be called ‘social’ in distinction to the action of individuals are almost ex definitione not conscious. In so far as such processes are capable of producing a useful order which could not have been produced by conscious direction, any attempt to make them subject to such direction would necessarily mean that we restrict what social activity can achieve to the inferior capacity of the individual mind” (Hayek [1952] 2010: 149).

spontaneously evolved rules of conduct²⁰ that embody the collective wisdom of society – “the wisdom of our ancestors” and the “accumulated stock of knowledge” (Hayek [1970] 2014: 345, [1960] 2011: 78, cf. Polanyi [1958] 2005: 55-6)²¹ – and have emerged to compensate for our “irremediable” and “constitutional ignorance” (Hayek [1973] 2021: 28, [1976] 2021: 188)²². Accordingly, “[a]ction is guided by rules...which the acting person need not explicitly know (be able to specify) discursively to describe or verbalize” (Hayek [1962] 2014: 234) and social order is spontaneously produced when we submit to “tradition-bound”²³ and “undesigned rules and conventions whose significance and importance we largely do not understand” and we “may not even be consciously aware of their existence” (Hayek [1960] 2011: 122-4), and are the outcomes not of reason but of success (Hayek [1979] 2021: 526)²⁴.

1.3 The socialist reaction to Hayek’s critique in the 1990’s (or neoliberalized leftism?)

The debate over “central planning” resurfaced in the nineties when a number of socialists explicitly recognized that the key insight of Hayek was the importance of tacit knowledge

²⁰ Polanyi (1951: 159) writes: “When order is achieved among human beings by allowing them to interact with each other on their own initiative - subject only to the laws which uniformly apply to all of them - we have a system of spontaneous order in society. We may then say that the efforts of these individuals are co-ordinated by exercising their individual initiative and that this self- co-ordination justifies this liberty on public grounds. The actions of such individuals are said to be free, for they are not determined by any specific command, whether of a superior or a public authority; the compulsion to which they are subject is impersonal and general”. And Hayek concurs: “Such an order involving an adjustment to circumstances, knowledge of which is dispersed among a great many people, cannot be established by central direction. It can arise only from the mutual adjustment of the elements and their response to the events that act immediately upon them. It is what M. Polanyi has called the spontaneous formation of a ‘polycentric order’” (Hayek [1960] 2011: 230).

²¹ Cf. Burke ([1790] 2003: 74): “we are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages”.

²² For Hayek, knowledge “include[s] all the human adaptations to environment in which past experience has been incorporated. Not all knowledge in this sense is part of our intellect, nor is our intellect the whole of our knowledge. Our habits and skills, our emotional attitudes, our tools, and our institutions—all are in this sense adaptations to past experience which have grown up by selective elimination of less suitable conduct. They are as much an indispensable foundation of successful action as is our conscious knowledge” (Hayek [1960] 2011: 77).

²³ “Since we owe the order of our society to a tradition of rules which we only imperfectly understand, all progress must be based on tradition. We must build on tradition and can only tinker with its products” (Hayek [1979] 2021: 527).

²⁴ For Hayek ([1944] 2007: 212), “the only alternative to submission to the impersonal and seemingly irrational forces of the market is submission to an equally uncontrollable and therefore arbitrary power of other men”.

and sought to incorporate it in their proposals for “participatory democratic planning” (Adaman and Devine 1996) and “participatory economics” (Albert and Hahnel 1991, 2002), or in their attempts to modernize and revise social democracy along neoliberal lines (Giddens 1994: 66²⁵, Gamble 1996: 192²⁶) and even to philosophically cement the “social movements Left” (Wainwright 1994). In this episode of the debate, the importance of tacit knowledge was highlighted to criticize, on the one hand, the neo-classical socialists and the central planners (Adaman and Devine 1996) and, on the other, to castigate the “all-knowing state”, the traditional European social democracy and the Leninist left (Wainwright 1994, Bhaskar [1993] 2008: 344), on the grounds that their failure to appreciate the tacit knowledge of the immediate producers resulted in an elitist, instrumentalist and bureau-technocratic mode of reasoning, paternalism and the “derogation of the lay actor” (Giddens 1979: 71, cf. Bhaskar [1993] 2008: 276-7, 345). According to this line of argumentation, “[a]ll competent members of society are vastly skilled in the practical accomplishments of social activities and are expert ‘sociologists’” (Giddens 1984: 26). Thus, they not only have “greater confidence in their own practical know-how and their capacities for self-government”, but also are “no longer content with being passive recipients” and want “to be recognized as knowledgeable and coproducing actors in the creation and delivery of public services” (Wainwright 2018b: 186).

²⁵ “What is at issue as regards economic planning is the impossibility of turning essentially practical knowledge into a matter of economic calculation; many decisions, to be taken effectively, have to be made ‘on the ground’ through the use of tacit knowledge and practical skill. Successful planning on a comprehensive scale is shown to be an ‘epistemic impossibility’”.

²⁶ “Hayek has much to contribute to the renewal of the socialist project. His fundamental importance for social science was in directing attention to the way in which institutions form as a means of co-ordinating the myriad decisions and preferences of individual agents. He directed attention to the dispersed nature of knowledge, the problems of co-ordination, the appropriate level for planning, the unintended consequences of social action, and the importance of spontaneous orders in human affairs. Although he sometimes resisted them, the implications of his theories are towards decentralized, local forms of governance, enabling rather than command structures, and the need to reinforce (and if necessary create) institutions which can co-ordinate the information and decisions of individual agents and lead to outcomes that benefit the whole society”. Gamble is not the only one who has read the concept of “spontaneous order” in value-free terms. Gray (1998: 115) has presented it as a “value free explanatory schema”, Smith (2006: 1) as a “descriptive and explanatory approach to social theory”, Gissurarson (1987: 42), as a “methodological tool rather than an ethical postulate” and (Shearmur 1996: 4) as a “technical rather than value based” argument. Yet, Βάικη (2012) has challenged these readings, suggesting that the concept of “spontaneous order” not only constitutes an ideological justification of “commercial society” but also that it can be read as a cynical exposition of its moralistic assumptions. Arnhart (2007: 128) goes even further when he writes that “[s]pontaneous order is the fundamental insight in the conservative view of liberty”.

As a result, a) pace Polanyi who explicitly and deliberately devised the concept of tacit knowledge – “as a weapon for the intense political and intellectual struggles of the early years of the Cold War in which he himself was passionately engaged” (Schmidt 2012: 173, see also Hull 2006: 141)²⁷ – to secure the autonomy of science and to insulate scientists from public scrutiny and democratic control by “foreclos[ing] the possibility that anyone other than scientists might know what is best for science” (Fuller 1992b: 393, Lynch 2013: 68)²⁸; and b) contra Hayek who asserted that “managers and entrepreneurs must be left to control and invest as they see fit, free from outside intervention (that is, outside of the market’s ‘spontaneous order’)” (Pleasant 1999: 94), on the grounds that this order is too complex, delicate and fragile to be tampered with²⁹, these socialist proposals were presented as a means for the “democratization of knowledge” (Wainwright 1994: 60), or as a way social movements could “extend their knowledge and therefore their effective power” so as to bring about a “conscious social project” (Wainwright 1992: 157) or even “to rationally inform emancipatory praxis” (Bhaskar [1993] 2008: 251). In this context, “workers’ participation” and “self-management” sought to “contest the view that the discovery of tacit knowledge is possible only through entrepreneurial activity in the market process and argue[d] that participatory planning would promote the discovery and social

²⁷ As Polanyi put it ([1966] 2009: 86-87) “the revival of the liberal tradition can be assured only if we can establish it on a new, conscious understanding of its foundation on grounds which will withstand modern self-doubt coupled with perfectionism”, the two evils threatening our civilization (ibid: 4) and exemplified by Marxism (ibid: 59-60). In this context, “tacit knowledge” was meant to provide the necessary foundation for the political philosophy of Hayek and Polanyi (Lynch 1997: 112, Doing 2011: 302). On Polanyi’s intervention in the struggle over the politics of science, that broke out in UK and the USA during the 1940’s and 50’s between defenders and opponents of liberalism, but had its roots in the interwar era (Congdon 1992, Hull 2006), see McGucken (1984), Barber (1990), Thorpe (2009) and Nye (2011), For the similarities and differences between Hayek and Polanyi, see Mirowski (1998-9), Jacobs (2000), and Jacobs and Mullins (2016). On Polanyi’s involvement in neoliberal think tanks and “Cold-War liberals” initiatives, see Cockett (1995), Hull (2006), Fischer and Mandell (2009), Mirowski and Plehwe (2009), Jackson (2010) and Beddeleem (2019).

²⁸ As the preface of the 1964 edition of *Personal Knowledge* reads: “The enquiry of which this volume forms a part started in 1939 with a review article on J. D. Bernal’s *The Social Function of Science*. I opposed his view, derived from Soviet Marxism, that the pursuit of science should be directed by the public authority to serve the welfare of society. I held that the power of thought to seek the truth must be accepted as our guide, rather than be curbed to the service of material interests” (Polanyi [1958] 1964: ix).

²⁹ For Hayek ([1978] 2022: 389, original emphasis), “[t]hat we have been able to achieve a reasonably high degree of order in our economic lives despite modern complexities is *only* because our affairs have been guided, not by central direction, but by the operations of the market and competition in securing the mutual adjustment of separate efforts”. This view is not confined to the neo-liberal Right. For Habermas (1990a: 16-17), “the revolutionary changes taking place before our eyes teach us an unambiguous lesson: complex societies are unable to reproduce themselves if they do not leave the logic of an economy that regulates itself through the market intact”.

mobilisation of dispersed tacit knowledge more efficiently” (Adaman and Devine 1996: 524). Or, as they argued in another passage, through “democratic participatory planning...tacit knowledge is discovered and articulated and, on the basis of that knowledge, economic decisions are consciously planned and coordinated” (ibid: 531-2)³⁰.

And yet their models for “deliberative democratic planning through negotiated coordination” (Adaman and Devine 2001) or “socialized markets that would utilize the practical economic knowledge that democratic networks accumulate” (Wainwright 1994: 172, cf. Bhaskar [1993] 2008: 250) and wherein “the vital innovation of recent social movements lies” (Wainwright 1999: 141) fare no better than the ones they criticize as they still assume that tacit knowledge, which is taken as an uncontested epistemic fact, can be articulated, shared, communicated or socialized (Wainwright 2018a, ch.2), irrespective of whether it is attributed to some or all.

As Hodgson (1998: 418-9) cogently replied, these proposals avoided this problem by wrongly assuming that all tacit knowledge can be articulated. Having made this untenable assumption, they then argued that all relevant knowledge can be made explicit and subject to discussion and reason. The same erroneous argument underlay former proposals for centralized planning that have been found wanting, both in their theoretical formulation and their practical application. Such proposals for ‘centralized’ and ‘democratic’ planning are both founded on a similar

³⁰ In passing it needs to be reminded that, in the context of the Cold War, the New Left “emphasized that knowledge should be shared and made a common resource for all, as a means for breaking up the accumulation of power and abolishing undeserved privileges held by expert-led administrations” (Arnold 2021: 358). Habermas, among others, questioned “the pseudo-scientific propagation of the cognitive monopoly of science” (1971: 71) and the experts’ culture and knowledge in both the East and the West (1987: 326-331) and proposed, as a remedy against the experts’ colonization of the lifeworld, the concept of public/collective knowledge which is generated in “non-coercive” participatory democratic deliberations, an idea that he defends even in his last magnum opus (1996: 107-131 and 287-328, cf. Wainwright 1999). For a critique of “deliberative democracy” from a Hayekian perspective, which highlights the inarticulability and thus the incommunicability of tacit knowledge, see Pennington (2003) and for a Habermasian reply, see Benson (2019), who builds his case on the “mechanism of trust in testimony”. However, the problem with this account runs deeper. Habermas, in a manner not dissimilar to Giddens’s (1984: 26), suggests that “according to the presuppositions of the communicative model of action, the agent possesses just as rich an interpretive competence as the observer himself...[Thus] we lose our privileged position as observers in relation to the object domain...As soon as we ascribe to the actors the same judgmental competence that we claim for ourselves as interpreters of their utterances, we relinquish an immunity that was until then methodologically guaranteed” (Habermas 1984:118-9). And yet even a cursory reading of Habermas’s oeuvre suffices to detect a “performative contradiction” (Habermas 1990b: 129) in his writings simply because the means he has chosen to communicate his argument would be inaccessible to the vast majority of laypersons, his potential interlocutors in “participatory democratic deliberations”. The same charge can be raised against Bhaskar as well.

misapprehension of the nature of knowledge, and a corresponding overestimation of the power and scope of human reason.

In fact, Hodgson, expressing a widely held view that is indicative of the degree Hayek's and Polanyi's thought has colonized our philosophical, scientific and political imagination³¹, writes:

Tacit knowledge forms the indissoluble core of all skills. All skilful human activity involves the use of rules and principles which are not known openly to the person involved. For example, we may be unable to articulate the rules of grammar, but in our use of language we largely conform to them. We may be able to ride a bicycle or fly an aeroplane but we shall be unable to communicate anything but the barest principles of these activities in codifiable form. Indeed, all productive human activity has these features: we use rules but we are unable to make many of them explicit. The tacit realm is irreducible... this type of resolutely tacit knowledge ... is problematic for any planning process, participatory or otherwise. The insurmountable barrier is the vast amount of vital knowledge that cannot be the subject of rational deliberation (ibid: 418).

Still, Wainwright (and Co.) never undertook the task of meeting Hayek's challenge head on. On the contrary, and although she attributed neoliberalism's "remarkable resilience", to the fact that "the challenges of the social democratic left to neo-liberal economics did not dig up its philosophical foundations with sufficient thoroughness" (Wainwright 2003: 16)³², she remained content with criticizing "Hayek's theory of knowledge, the foundation stone of the neo-liberal belief in the unfettered market" (Wainwright 1999: 141)³³, on the

³¹ As Giddens (1994: 29) pointed out, fully concurring with Hayek and Polanyi in many respects, "In politics as elsewhere, rationalism presumes the superiority of 'universal' solutions to the problems over answers coming from tradition or embedded practice...All forms of knowledge, no matter how general they appear to be, are saturated by practice, by what cannot be put into words because it is the condition of linguistic communication". Cf. Polanyi (1969: 144): "While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable".

³² Remarkably, some of those who dug up Hayek's philosophical foundations found several similarities with the critical realist tradition that Wainwright adheres to (Peacock 1993, Fleetwood 1995, Lawson 1997, Runde 2001, Beaulier and Boettke 2004, Lewis 2005).

³³ At this point it needs to be reminded that Hayek, far from being an advocate of "unfettered markets", not only did he argue that "[p]robably nothing has done so much harm to the liberal cause as the wooden insistence of some liberals on certain rough rules of thumb, above all the principle of laissez-faire" ([1944] 2007: 71) and attributed this idea to the "French rationalist tradition" ([1960] 2011: 119) but also suggested that "[t]here is no reason, why in a free society government should not assure to all protection against severe deprivation in the form of an assured minimum income, or a floor below which nobody need to descend. To enter into such an insurance against extreme misfortune may well be in the interest of all; or it may be felt

grounds that “knowledge is a social product, rather than an individual attribute” (Wainwright 1994: 60, see also Adaman and Devine 2001: 233)³⁴. As she writes,

My main challenge to Hayek is to his theory of knowledge: not to his recognition of practical, uncodified knowledge that cannot by nature be centralized, but to the idea that this experience-based knowledge is necessarily exclusively individual in character and cannot provide a basis for collective action (Wainwright 1994: x-xii)³⁵.

to be a clear moral duty of all to assist, within the organized community, those who cannot help themselves. So long as such a uniform minimum income is provided outside the market to all those who, for any reason, are unable to earn in the market an adequate maintenance, this need not lead to a restriction of freedom, or conflict with the Rule of Law” ([1979] 2021: 288, see also [1960] 2011: 374, 1967: 175). The fact that this assertion contradicts his ideas about social justice has not gone unnoticed (Kley 1994: 202, Plant 1994: 175-176, Gamble 1996: 49, Lukes 2003: 124).

³⁴ However, for Hayek, pace Wainwright, knowledge is a social product (Sciabarra 1995: 113) not only because it is embodied in social rules of conduct - the “accumulated stock of knowledge” - but also because “individual reason is a product of inter-individual relationships” (Hayek [1952] 2010: 153). Moreover, for Hayek, man’s mind “is shaped by the conditions prevailing in the environment in which we live” ([1952] 2017: 279) and “is itself a product of the civilization in which he has grown up” (Hayek [1960] 2011: 75), while “human Reason, with a capital R does not exist in the singular, as given or available to any particular person, as the rationalist approach seems to assume, but must be conceived as an interpersonal process in which anyone’s contribution is tested and corrected by others” (Hayek 1948: 15). Finally, “[t]he growth of reason is a social process... The idea that the human mind ought ‘consciously’ to control its own development confuses individual reason, which alone can ‘consciously control’ anything, with the interpersonal process to which its growth is due. By attempting to control it, we are merely setting bounds to its development and must sooner or later produce a stagnation of thought and a decline of reason” (Hayek [1944] 2007: 179-180). In Gray’s (1998: 14) succinct formulation, “Hayek’s concern is... with the way that knowledge of all sorts, but especially social knowledge, is embodied in rules... [A]ll our knowledge is at the bottom practical or tacit knowledge: it consists ... in skills and dispositions to act in a rule-governed fashion”.

³⁵ Foster (1995: 105) has criticized Wainwright on the grounds that, in her account, “the differences separating left and right may appear to be much more political and epistemological in character than economic. Hence, we find that Hayek, the leading right-wing economist of the last half-century, is opposed in Wainwright’s book not so much because of his economics, but because of his theory of knowledge and its implications for political organization. Yet, Hayek’s ‘epistemology’ is inseparable from his underlying assumptions with regard to capitalism and the market; it is therefore impossible to critique the former effectively without also providing a critique of the latter”. This point is valid but one-sided since a) it does not challenge Hayek and Wainwright on the philosophical plane they have pitched their argument or on the grounds that they have pitched their argument on a philosophical plane; b) is confined to criticizing Wainwright’s view that “markets can be socialized and used as the main technical means of organizing and implementing socialist reforms, provided that new economic networks (including worker-managed public enterprises) replace private corporations in setting the parameters of the price mechanism” (ibid) and c) despite focusing on her view of the market, he fails to criticize her assertion that “Hayek’s model assumes that a favourable economic equilibrium can be reached through the price mechanism alone” (Wainwright 1994: 270). However, as early as 1937, Hayek ([1937] 1948: 33-56) had broken away from the equilibrium concept of neo-classical economics (Fleetwood 1995: 141, Caldwell 2004: 409-22, Vaughn 2013: 477-8, Lewis 2014: 196-202), which “presupposes that the facts have already all been discovered and competition therefore has ceased” (Hayek [1968] 2014: 308), because, under the assumption of perfect knowledge, the possibility of “central planning” and “socialism” could not be refuted (Lavoie 1981, Donzelli 1993, Keizer 1994, Caldwell 1997, Hunt 2007). As a result of this politically-driven theoretical choice, Hayek was professionally marginalized and “cast aside by the rising new orthodoxy of Keynesianism and Walrasian general equilibrium” until he was “rediscovered in the 1970s following the demise of Keynesianism and the emergence of a more favourable political and ideological environment” (Milonakis and Fine 2009: 267).

Chapter 2

2. Taking Hayek seriously

2.1 Something like a literature review

In what follows I will not side with Whyte (2019b: 176) who is critical of the assumption that the “Hayekian account of...disseminated knowledge can be recuperated for a left or progressive politics that aims to open up spaces for collective political participation” on the grounds that his epistemological argument was designed to “depoliticize social life”, “cordon off market relations from political challenge” and “disqualify any collective political action that aims to establish and work towards collectively determined ends”³⁶. This reminder may be necessary but not sufficient. Instead, I will pick up the glove and, by means of “immanent criticism” (cf. Hayek [1973] 2021: 149), question the social ontology that sustains Hayek’s argument, namely that people are tacitly knowledgeable rule followers (Pleasants 1999, Gaus 2006, Lewis 2014)³⁷.

To this end, a) I will not, primarily, resort to scholarship which is explicitly opposed to Hayek’s political project nor will I take refuge in philosophical traditions – be they “critical” or “deconstructive” – other than the analytical tradition that Hayek endorses (Lindemans 2011: 165, fn. 14); and b) I will not spend much effort on belaboring points that have occupied much of the secondary literature. In particular, I will not question Hayek’s view that his “critical rationalism” ([1965] 2014: 52) leads to “epistemological pessimism” (Gissurarson 1987: 23, Kukathas 1989: 206, Caldwell 2004: 359, Gamble 2006: 118) regarding the power of human reason and is compatible with liberalism³⁸, nor

³⁶ Narotzky (2016: 268) goes as far as to argue that the appropriation of this assumption “by present-day anti-capitalist and social justice mobilizations...may be at the source of their incapacity to produce a coherent and robust counter-hegemony”.

³⁷ For Hayek ([1973] 2021: 28), “[m]an is as much a rule-following animal as a purpose-seeking one. And he is successful not because he knows why he ought to observe the rules which he does observe, or is even capable of stating all these rules in words, but because his thinking and acting are governed by rules which have by a process of selection been evolved in the society in which he lives, and which are thus the product of the experience of generations”.

³⁸ Popper ([1963] 1994: 7), the critical rationalist par excellence, with whom Hayek “agree[d]...more than with anybody else on philosophical matters” (Hayek 1994: 51), is quite explicit: “Man can know: thus he can be free. This is the formula which explains the link between epistemological optimism and the ideas of

whether he has actually managed to establish the limits of our reason (Petsoulas 2001: 61). Moreover, I will not ask whether his “evolutionary rationalism” ([1973] 2021: 51) is self-contradictory (Paul 1988: 260, Voight 1992: 466, Kerstenetzky 2000: 181³⁹), if not outright “constructivist rational” (Flanagan 1984, Rowland 1988: 222⁴⁰, Kukathas 1989: 189, Oakeshott 1991: 26⁴¹, Caldwell 2004: 358-9, Gamble 2006: 131⁴², Shearmur 2006: 156, Cheung 2014: 4⁴³, Callahan 2018, Singh 2019: 213⁴⁴)⁴⁵. Nor would I raise the issue of

liberalism. This link is paralleled by the opposite link. Disbelief in the power of human reason, in man’s power to discern truth, is almost invariably linked with distrust of man. Thus, epistemological pessimism is linked, historically, with a doctrine of human depravity, and it tends to lead to the demand for the establishment of powerful traditions and the entrenchment of a powerful authority which would save man from his folly and his wickedness”.

³⁹ “The evolutionary fact of limited predictability cannot allow for an evolutionist condemnation of design on account of its predicable failure”.

⁴⁰ “The most glaring inconsistency in Hayek’s thought is that which occurs when he advocates non-interference with surviving cultural traditions and institutions as products of social evolution and at the same time apparently ventures into ‘constructivist rationalism’ by supplying a ‘model’ constitution [see Hayek [1979] 2021: 462-483] for democratic government. On the one hand, Hayek appears to evaluate institutions according to whether they are the products of spontaneous evolution; liberty and order, he suggests, are a product of such evolutionary processes. On the other hand, his development of a model constitution appears to demonstrate his willingness to engage in rational design, exactly the process his traditionalism argues against”. For a defense of Hayek’s “critical utopian” attempt to “compose recipes for future cookshops”, see Steele (1992: 553-590) and Sciabarra (1995: 117-121).

⁴¹ “This is, perhaps, the main significance of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*—not the cogency of his doctrine, but the fact that it is a doctrine. A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics”.

⁴² Hayek “remained trapped in the rationalism he was so keen to reject. If our reason is so feeble, and if knowledge is necessarily imperfect and dispersed, how do we know this to be true? To make that claim Hayek has to take up the privileged status of observer that he is so critical of in constructivist rationalism. If he were not prepared to do so he could not justify his project of social and economic theory at all. Despite his denunciation of the ills of scientism and constructivism, Hayek is closer to the rationalism he criticizes than he might like to acknowledge”.

⁴³ “Hayek in some important respect is still following the rationalist style of politics precisely because he is employing an ideology (liberalism or libertarianism) or a doctrine derived from abstract political principles to defend individual freedom and the western civilization”.

⁴⁴ “Hayek’s work does tend to speak in the language of a blueprint, and here, it betrays its rationalist roots. A Hayekian worldview ends up celebrating a certain kind of ordering of economic activities without leaving a space for different contextual judgments about the same...Hayek’s critique of central planning is limited as a critique of doctrinal rationalist thinking, for it ends up becoming a doctrine itself”.

⁴⁵ In fact, Hayek ([1973] 2021: 67) admits this much: “[W]hile the rules on which a spontaneous order rests, may also be of spontaneous origin, this need not always be the case...it is at least conceivable that the formation of a spontaneous order relies entirely on rules that were deliberately made...it is possible that an order which would still have to be described as spontaneous rests on rules which are entirely the result of deliberate design”. Or even more explicitly: “it is true that most utopias aim at radically redesigning society and suffer from internal contradictions which make their realization impossible. But an ideal picture of a society which may not be wholly achievable, or a guiding conception of the overall order to be aimed at, is nevertheless not only the indispensable precondition of any rational policy, but also the chief contribution that science can make to the solution of the problems of practical policy” (ibid: 89). In fact, as van Horn and Mirowski (2010: 196, see also Piasentier 2025: 674) remarked, “[t]he starting point of neoliberalism is the admission, contrary to classical liberalism, that their political program will triumph only if it becomes reconciled to the fact that the conditions for its success must be constructed, and will not come about

whether Hayek's "anti-rationalism" is as "Cartesian rationalist" as Descartes's since Hayek not only a) "accepted Descartes's fact-value dichotomy and assumed from it that political programs can be judged by knowable facts alone" (Lynch 1997: 116) but also b) endorsed Cartesian dualism⁴⁶ (Miller 1976: 389⁴⁷) and derived law-like generalizations from explicit premises (Pleasants 1999: 91; cf. Hayek [1973] 2021: 25-6, [1967] 2014: 42). Nor would I emphasize the "secularized providentialism" that runs like a red thread throughout Hayek's work (Cornelissen 2017, Christiaens 2018, Whyte 2019b), nor his "evolutionary functionalism" (Gray 1989: 98, Hodgson 1993: 168, Vanberg 1994: 88, Kley 1994: 161-3, De Vlieghe 1994: 294, Gedeon 2015: 5)⁴⁸, Darwinianism (Arnhart 2007) and Panglossianism (Antonio 1987, Schweickart 1996, Denis 2002), nor the fact that his liberalism is practically indistinguishable from the paternalistic elitism⁴⁹ of Burke's

'naturally' in the absence of concerted effort". Foucault (2008: 131) must be credited for being the first to have identified this characteristic of neoliberal rationality.

⁴⁶ "We shall never be able to bridge the gap between physical and mental phenomena; and for practical purposes, including in this the procedure appropriate to the different sciences, we shall permanently have to be content with a dualistic view of the world" (Hayek [1952] 2017: 291).

⁴⁷ "Despite his unqualified condemnation of Descartes' philosophy, Hayek's own distinction between the phenomena, or the things as they appear to us, and the things as they subsist in the world external to the mind is a reflection of the Cartesian dualism between mind and world that has permeated modern thought".

⁴⁸ Actually, Hayek is absolutely clear: "No institution will continue to survive unless it performs some useful function" (Hayek [1960] 2011: 115, fn. 23). Or, as he put it in more words, there is "a sort of inversion of the relation between cause and effect in the sense that the structures possessing a kind of order will exist because the elements do what is necessary to secure the persistence of that order. The 'final cause' or 'purpose', i.e., the adaptation of the parts to the requirements of the whole, becomes a necessary part of the explanation of why structures of the kind exist: we are bound to explain the fact that the elements behave in a certain way by the circumstance that this sort of conduct is most likely to preserve the whole - on the preservation of which depends the preservation of the individuals, which would therefore not exist if they did not behave in this manner. A 'teleological' explanation is thus entirely in order so long as it does not imply design by a maker but merely the recognition that the kind of structure would not have perpetuated itself if it did not act in a manner likely to produce certain effects, and that it has evolved through those prevailing at each stage who did" (Hayek 1967: 77).

⁴⁹ "Unless some people know more than the rest and are in a better position to convince the rest, there would be little progress in opinion. It is because we normally do not know who knows best that we leave the decision to a process which we do not control. But it is always from a minority acting in ways different from what the majority would prescribe that the majority in the end learns to do better" (Hayek [1960] 2011: 176). Or with particular reference to education: "It also seems probable that a society that wishes to get a maximum economic return from a limited expenditure on education should concentrate on the higher education of a comparatively small elite, which today would mean increasing that part of the population getting the most advanced type of education rather than prolonging education for large numbers" (ibid: 504-5). For Polanyi, who "was enamored of the tradition of British conservative thought from Edmund Burke to Michael Oakeshott" (Thorpe 2009: 82, see also Askew 2013: 43) and was a "libertarian conservative" (Fischer and Mandell 2009: 27), "[t]he...transmission of ...intellectual artefacts from one generation to another takes place by a process of communication which flows from adults to young people. This kind of communication can be received only when one person places an exceptional degree of confidence in another, the apprentice in the master, the student in the teacher, and popular audiences in distinguished speakers or famous writers. This assimilation of great systems of articulate lore by novices of various grades is made possible only by a

conservatism (Pirie 1987, Cliteur 1990, Shearmur 1996: 43, Raeder 1997: 70⁵⁰, Feser 2003, Scruton 2006, Hunt 2007: 56, Ciolli 2023)⁵¹. Nor I will spend much ink criticizing Hayek's

previous act of affiliation, by which the novice accepts apprenticeship to a community which cultivates this lore, appreciates its values and strives to act by its standards. This affiliation begins with the fact that a child submits to education within a community, and it is confirmed throughout life to the extent to which the adult continues to place exceptional confidence in the intellectual leaders of the same community. Just as children learn to speak by assuming that the words used in their presence mean something, so throughout the whole range of cultural apprenticeship the intellectual junior's craving to understand the doings and sayings of his intellectual superiors assumes that what they are doing and saying has a hidden meaning which, when discovered, will be found satisfying to some extent" ([1958] 2005: 220-1).

⁵⁰ "Burke's implicit political creed is, in all essential respects, the doctrine articulated by the twentieth-century social philosopher F. A. Hayek".

⁵¹ In fact, Hayek (1994:125) explicitly called himself a "Burkean Whig" and traced "true" liberalism to the "ideals of the English Whigs" (Hayek [1960] 2011: 530). Some, like Barry (1979), Kukathas (1989), Kley (1994), Gamble (1996) and Hunt (2007), have detected a tension or inconsistency between Hayek's economic liberalism and his political conservatism that drew its inspiration from Burke. And yet it needs to be reminded not only that a) "Burkean conservatism and Scottish liberalism were of the same cloth" (Sciabarra 1995: 14); b) "[i]n the old Whig tradition 'liberal' and 'conservative' ideas did not merely co-exist. They formed, rather, an organic whole" (Nyiri 1986: 104) and c) that Burke "adopted a more dogmatic and extreme form of laissez faire than [Adam] Smith himself" (Himmelfarb 1985: 72, see also Kirk 1985: 21) but, even more broadly, that economic liberals are "quite often ready and willing to throw overboard the excess baggage of liberal political institutions and ideals" when they "hamper the capitalist economy and the bourgeois social order" (Landa 2010: 13, 115). It is not without good reason that Hayek's (neo)liberalism has been labelled "conservative (Gissurason 1987, Dyson 2021) or "authoritarian" (Cristi 1984, Scheurman 1997, Bonefeld 2016, Wilkinson 2021), for, as Whyte (2019a: 9) has argued, "[r]ather than an external supplement, or a pragmatic partner, social conservatism, including explicit appeals to family values, Christianity and "Western civilisation", was foundational to the consolidation of organised neoliberalism in the mid twentieth century'. Burke, on the other hand, ([1795] 1991: 137) not only a) insisted that we must "resist the very...idea...that it is within the competence of government, taken as government, or even of the rich, as rich, to supply to the poor, those necessities which it has pleased the Divine Providence for a while to withhold from them. We, the people, ought to be made sensible, that it is not in breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God, that we are to place our hope of softening the Divine displeasure to remove any calamity under which we suffer, or which hangs over us"; but also b) appeared eager to abandon his traditionalism when tradition stood in the way of economic liberalism. Thus, in 1772, as a Whig Member of Parliament, he led the liberal legislation that discarded ancient laws and customs which regulated markets against middlemen and profiteering in food. As a result, "[t]he legitimacy of many popular customs and claims, most of them rooted in ancient law and practice, came to be redefined in elite discourse as usurpation, archaic ignorance, immorality, even criminality" (Hay and Rogers 1997: 97). Polanyi, on his part, was equally explicit. Having rhetorically asked, "Can we face the fact that, no matter how liberal a free society may be, it is also profoundly conservative?", he continues: "For this is the fact. The recognition granted in a free society to the independent growth of science, art and morality, involves a dedication of society to the fostering of a specific tradition of thought, transmitted and cultivated by a particular group of authoritative specialists, perpetuating themselves by co-option. To uphold the independence of thought implemented by such a society is to subscribe to a kind of orthodoxy which, though it specifies no fixed articles of faith, is virtually unassailable within the limits imposed on the process of innovation by the cultural leadership of a free society...And we must face also the fact that this orthodoxy, and the cultural authorities which we respect, are backed by the coercive power of the state and financed by the beneficiaries of office and property. The institutions by which their authority is exercised, the schools, universities, churches, academies, law courts, newspapers and political parties, are under the protection of the same policemen and soldiers who guard the wealth of the landowners and capitalists" ([1958] 2005: 260).

causal, empiricist and physicalist theory of mind (Feser 2011, Birner 2014, Ivanova 2016)⁵² – the cognitive basis of his thought⁵³ – which not only a) fails to explain intentionality (Feser 2006, Birner 2009) and to account for higher mental process such as the descriptive and argumentative function of language – its “ability to make true and false statements, and to produce valid and invalid arguments ... – [which] make us blind to the difference between propaganda, verbal intimidation, and rational argument” (Popper and Eccles [1977] 1985: 59); b) to deal “with deliberate, conscious thinking (with reasoning as a logical process)” and it “leaves no apparent room for planning, for self-control and for the deliberate self-shaping of the conscious subject (no room, indeed, for any self or ego or for the unity of consciousness” (Smith 1997: 22-3, see also Weimer 1982: 283, Forsyth 1988, Kelly 2011⁵⁴); c) offers a “wholly mechanistic picture of social life, in which there is no place for individual autonomy...and for a critical evaluation of existing institutional arrangements and systems of rules” (Kley 1994: 48) on the grounds that our “intellectual capacity is determined by them” (Petsoulas 2001: 61, cf. Gray 1998: 40); but also d) is contradictory as it simultaneously argues, against historicism, that the mind operates on invariable and universal categories (Hayek [1952] 2010: 139-140) and, on the other, in line with historicism, that pre-sensory categories, by which the mind classifies sensory stimuli, are not “permanent or invariable” but subject to phylogenetic evolution and ontogenetic developments (Hayek [1952] 2017: 186-8)⁵⁵. In its turn, this has severe implications for

⁵² For Hayek [1952] 2017: 301) “in some ultimate sense mental phenomena are ‘nothing but’ physical processes”.

⁵³ “[*The Sensory Order*] has helped me greatly to clear my mind on much that is very relevant to social theory. My conception of evolution, of a spontaneous order and of the methods and limits of our endeavours to explain complex phenomena have been formed largely in the course of the work on that book” (Hayek [1979] 2021: 515, n. 26).

⁵⁴ For the contrary view, see Cheung (2011); see also Tebble (2016) whose reconstruction of Hayek’s “culturally embedded self” is ultimately traditionalist.

⁵⁵ The theoretical psychology expounded in *The Sensory Order* constitutes the basis of Hayek’s epistemological argument against “constructivist rationalism” and “central planning” (Hunt 2007: 54, Marsh 2011: xi). For Hayek, the mind is a spontaneously emergent “apparatus of classification” ([1952] 2017: 182) which a) consists of a hierarchically organized system of (higher/supra-conscious and lower/conscious) rules (Hayek [1962] 2014: 250-1) and b) “is embedded in a traditional impersonal structure of learnt rules, and its capacity to order experience is an acquired replica of cultural patterns which every individual mind finds given. The brain is an organ enabling us to absorb, but not to design culture” Hayek ([1979] 2021: 514). The key philosophical conclusion of the *TSO* is that, since the mind is a rule-governed classificatory system it cannot explain its own operation. Thus, there is an absolute limitation on human knowledge which makes central planning impossible (Tuerck 1995: 284, Lewis 2014: 207-8). In his own words, since “any apparatus of classification must possess a structure of a higher degree of complexity than is possessed by the objects which it classifies...the capacity of any explaining agent must be limited to objects with a structure

Hayek's scientific rebuttal of "constructivist rationalism" and "central planning" as it uncomfortably oscillates between dogmatic objectivism and relativist subjectivism (Lynch 1997)⁵⁶.

Rather, I will remain content with challenging Hayek's central thesis, namely that we are tacitly knowledgeable rule followers.

2.2. A (meta-)critical comment

But before that a (meta-)critical comment that, building on these points, seeks to challenge Hayek's overall project to devise an epistemologically sceptical argument against his opponents and to defend his liberal utopia (Hayek [1949] 1997: 237) on these grounds, is

possessing a degree of complexity lower than its own. If this is correct, it means that no explaining agent can ever explain objects of its own kind, or of its own degree of complexity, and, therefore, that the human brain can never fully explain its own operations" (Hayek [1952] 2017: 296). Thus, "[a]part from these practical limits to explanation, which we may hope continuously to push further back, there also exists, however, an absolute limit to what the human brain can ever accomplish by way of explanation - a limit which is determined by the nature of the instrument of explanation itself" (ibid). And yet, one may ask, why is this limit absolute given that the classification of external events "depend[s] on the given structure of the organism as it has been shaped by the process of evolution" (ibid: 229)? Can Hayek predict the process of evolution? (Connin 1990, Kerstenetzky 2000, Beck 2018). Moreover, how can the claim that the human mind cannot provide an explanation of itself be squared with Hayek's assertion ([1952] 2017: 299) that this does not preclude it from designing "a machine fully reproducing the action of the brain and capable of predicting how the brain will act in different circumstances"?

⁵⁶ In Miller's (1979: 262) formulation: "On the one hand, Hayek wants to retain the idea that science can give a reliable explanation of regularities in the objective physical world. Indeed, his account of human cognition presupposes the validity of his physiological explanation of the principles that underlie the cognitive processes. On the other hand, his general conclusions about the character of human cognition seem to undermine the very possibility of objective knowledge and to concede the basic premises of extreme historicism. He argues that all perception and reasoning are predetermined by a classificatory system or "map" that varies from one individual and group to another and changes over time. The categories of this classificatory system cannot be confirmed or falsified, because as the presuppositions of all cognition they give to sense perception and conceptual thinking their distinctive shape". Hayek ([1952] 2017: 281) writes: "A certain part at least of what we know at any moment about the external world is therefore not learnt by sensory experience, but is rather implicit in the means through which we can obtain such experience; it is determined by the order of the apparatus of classification which has been built up by pre-sensory linkages. What we experience consciously as qualitative attributes of the external events is determined by relations of which we are not consciously aware but which are implicit in these qualitative distinctions, in the sense that they affect all that we do in response to these experiences". This line of reasoning reappears in the 1960's with the difference that now Hayek speaks not of a physiological mechanism of classification that underlies and determines all conscious mental operations, but in terms of implicit and unspecifiable rules (cf. Polanyi [1958] 2009: 84) that govern our perceptions and actions and operate upon the contents of consciousness, but cannot themselves be made conscious or tested. Being the presuppositions of thought, they lie "outside the range of what we can either state or reflect upon." This framework of rules determines the "meaning" of conscious thought, but the framework itself is essentially meaningless: "If 'to have meaning' is to have a place in an order which we share with other people, this order itself cannot have meaning because it cannot have a place in itself" (Hayek [1962] 2014: 251-2).

in order, as this strategy is far from unproblematic. For one, Hayek's project is self-contradictory since, in Diamond's (1980: 363) formulation, "[h]e is an intellectual skeptic who wants to give political philosophy a secure intellectual foundation" (cf. Gray 1980, Barry 1982, Vaughn 1984, Antonio 1987). More analytically, Hayek, in this attempt to refute his opponents and establish the superiority of his liberal utopia by scientific means, has sought to restore the priority of the epistemic over the normative on the grounds that "[e]pistemic burdens are logically prior to other (moral/ethical, prudential, pecuniary, etc.) normative considerations" (Scheall 2020: 20). In plain English, under conditions of radical ignorance and ubiquitous uncertainty, what we, qua policymakers and/or decision makers, ought to do is conditioned upon us knowing enough to do it; for, the argument goes, to consider what we ought to do without first asking whether we know (or can learn) enough to do it and, thus, "to place the normative cart before the epistemic horse", is a recipe for inefficiency and ineffectiveness: "Attempts to theorize how the world should be that fail to acknowledge that there only so many ways that it can be deliberately made to be tend toward the impracticable" (ibid: 91). And yet, truistic as this may sound, it is not straightforward; for, pace Scheall, and by extension Hayek whose argument he reconstructs, this distinction is not value-free and/or descriptive but normative and prescriptive and not only separates "normative ends" from "epistemic means" and prioritizes "formal" over "substantive rationality", but also presupposes that epistemological issues, such as our radical ignorance, are amenable to epistemic and thus empirical solutions.

In fact, as Boettke (2018: xviii) argues, Hayek's research program is an exercise in "epistemic institutionalism" according to which "the central question of economics becomes one about the institutional prerequisites required for learning and error correction among individuals in society" (ibid: xiv), a project that has a negative and a positive aspect. The former is apparent in his critique of "central planning" and the latter in the epistemic functions he attributed to markets and tacit rules of social conduct (Kukathas 1989: 53-4, Kley 1994: 49-57, Gray 1998: 39, Lewis 2014: 208-9, Beck 2018: 71-2). Still, to attribute empirical phenomena the function of solving an epistemological problem is to commit a category mistake, namely to present "facts belonging to one category in the idioms appropriate to another" (Ryle [1949] 2009: ix). In other words, Hayek, by conflating

epistemological and empirical propositions, and by proposing empirical means to address epistemological issues, is driven to a paradoxical and self-defeating situation. If his thesis on the limits of human reason and our constitutional ignorance is an epistemological one it loses its practical/political relevance, since an institution cannot solve an epistemological problem (for example, consider the problem of the (un)knowability of the “thing-in-itself” and the possible institutional means to solve it). If it is an empirical statement, then a) it must be as relative, incomplete and fallible as all empirical judgements and b) in order not to be self-defeating, it must suggest, as it does, that social coordination cannot be reached through “conscious, rational deliberation” but through following evolutionary grown rules of conduct we are unaware of. In this case, however, the content of the tacit knowledge thesis, which prohibits deliberate construction and constitutes the backbone of his argument, is not tacit and unconscious but articulate and conscious and can form the basis for a goal-directed political project, which, on Hayek’s own account, would be constructivist (Lundstrom 1992: 244-5).

Actually, Hayek is quite explicit and articulate regarding the rules constitutive of the “extended order of human cooperation...known as capitalism”⁵⁷ (Hayek 1988: 6) which is predicated on the formal “rules of the law of property, tort and contract” (Hayek [1979] 2021: 310) and the informal norms of honesty and promise-keeping: “wherever a Great Society has arisen, it has been made possible by a system of rules of just conduct which included what David Hume called ‘the three fundamental laws of nature, that of stability of possession, of its transference by consent, and of the performance of promises’” (Hayek [1976] 2021: 230). In fact, Hayek is not only able to state these, allegedly inarticulate and implicit, rules but also is confident enough to argue that we must refrain from tampering with them if we are not to jeopardize our civilization:

[t]here can be little doubt that man owes some of his greatest successes in the past to the fact that he has not been able to control social life. His continued advance may well depend on his deliberately refraining from exercising controls which are now in his power...We are not far from the point where the deliberately organized forces of society may destroy those spontaneous forces which have made advance possible

⁵⁷ The fact that Hayek endorsed the “standpoint [of] liberal political economy...which treats capitalism primarily as a system of simple commodity production” (Gamble 1979: 16) has been highlighted by Ιωαννίδης (1993: 256-257).

(Hayek [1960] 2011: 89-90)⁵⁸.

Thus, in Birner's words (2001: 21),

According to Hayek, the rules which govern the functioning of society are mostly implicit. If we know them, we may be tempted to change them, which is dangerous. If we do not know them, we run the risk of destroying the grown order by not observing the underlying implicit rules. Either way, we have to recognize and accept that we must not change the institutions which have developed spontaneously. This is the main conclusion to which Hayek's work in social science leads.

And, as a host of scholars (Miller 1976, Galeotti 1987, Paul 1988, Kukathas 1989, Miller 1989, Connin 1990, Kley 1994, Vanberg 1994, Hunt 2007, Kelly 2011, Beck 2018) has persuasively suggested, this conclusion cannot support Hayek's defense of liberalism, at least on liberal grounds⁵⁹.

2.3 The context of discovery

In fact, his invocation of "tacit knowledge" can give credit to such a reading not only because this concept has traditionally been employed to defend established hierarchies and status-based privileges⁶⁰ but also because, in the context of the Cold War, it sought to

⁵⁸ Or as he put it elsewhere, "[a spontaneous order] is therefore an order which we cannot improve upon but only disturb by attempting to change by deliberate arrangement any one part of it. The only way in which we can effectively improve it is by improving the abstract rules which guide the individuals. This, however, is of necessity a slow and difficult task, because most of the rules which do govern existing society are not the result of our deliberate making, and in consequence we often understand only very imperfectly what depends on them...they are the product of a slow process of evolution in the course of which much more experience and knowledge has been precipitated in them than any one person can fully know...all we can hope for will be a slow experimental process of gradual improvement rather than any opportunity for drastic change" (Hayek [1967] 2014: 50).

⁵⁹ Hayek is not the only one who has sought to defend liberalism on non-liberal grounds. Polanyi ([1966] 2009: 62-3), for example, writes: "I will not resist in any way the momentum of the French Revolution. I accept its dynamism. But I believe that the new self-determination of man can be saved from destroying itself only by recognizing its own limits in an authoritative traditional framework which upholds it. Tom Paine could proclaim the right of each generation to determine its institutions anew, since the range of his demands was in fact very modest. He unquestioningly accepted the continuity of culture and of the order of private property as the framework of self-determination. Today the ideas of Tom Paine can be saved from self-destruction only by a conscious reaffirmation of traditional continuity. Paine's ideal of unlimited gradual progress can be saved from destruction by revolution only by the kind of traditionalism taught by Paine's opponent, Edmund Burke".

⁶⁰ For example, Lawrence's (1985) study of the medical field, in late 19th century England, points out that the "gentleman-physicians" resisted new diagnostic technologies on the grounds that "scientific medicine" could not replace traditional and inarticulate skills since they were the necessary and sufficient basis for effective medical practice which, in turn, was grounded in the gentlemanly way of life and cultivated throughout a lifetime. Anderson (1992: 656-7), in his study of the medical profession in 1960's Australia,

mystify and naturalize scientific practice and to foreclose debate among practitioners, and between practitioners and the general public, over the role, scope and function of science. For Polanyi, whose philosophical and political trajectory was punctuated by “the specters of planned science” (Fuller 1992a: 271, see also Nye 2011: 181⁶¹), not to mention his opposition to the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 (Congdon 1992: 101) or his encounter with Bukharin in 1935 (Polanyi [1966] 2009: 3-4⁶²),

[t]he whole activity of scientists is based on a set of surmises of different grades. Some are held as implicit, quite unconscious beliefs, others as more or less definite assumptions, others again entertained as personal hunches... Little or nothing of these beliefs of science is codified. They are not taught as such in textbooks, it is impossible to formulate them in explicit terms. They are impalpable, like the rules of an art. They are, in fact, rules of an art. They are transmitted personally from master to pupil by the imitation of the practice of discovery and of the practice of verification ([1947] 1997: 220-1).

It follows that

[t]he tradition of science as an art can be handed on only by those practicing that art. There can be therefore no question of another authority replacing scientific opinion for the purposes of this function and any attempt to do so can result only in a clumsy distortion and – if persistently applied – in the more or less complete destruction of the tradition of science (Polanyi 1951: 57).

According to Mirowski (1997: 131),

For Polanyi, tacit knowledge was not something inbred or picked up in passing, since that could not then account for the special progressive character of the scientific enterprise. Instead, the continuity of science should be traced to the transmission of

similarly found out that traditional physicians, to defend their privileged status, opposed the introduction of computer-based diagnostics, and the concomitant codification of their practice, arguing that clinical experience – “the practical knowledge gained on the ward from apprenticeship and from discussion with peers” – was inarticulable in principle and practice.

⁶¹ “Like Hayek’s and Popper’s publications, Polanyi’s writings on economics, politics, and science during the 1940’s constituted his own personal contribution to the war effort and to the struggle against totalitarianism which, for Polanyi, meant both Fascism and Marxism”.

⁶² “I first met questions of philosophy when I came up against the Soviet ideology under Stalin which denied justification to the pursuit of science. I remember a conversation I had with Bukharin in Moscow in 1935... It seemed to me then that our whole civilization was pervaded by the dissonance of an extreme critical lucidity and an intense moral conscience, and that this combination had generated both our tight-lipped modern revolutions and the tormented self-doubt of modern man outside revolutionary movements. So I resolved to inquire into the roots of this condition”.

tacit knowledge across the generations. This conveyance of something which by definition could not be adequately codified and transmitted might seem an oxymoron, but Polanyi sought to turn this objection into a centerpiece of his definition of the scientific enterprise by associating it with the master/apprentice relationship through which the neophyte becomes initiated into membership in the scientific community. Far from being an “open society” which revels in unrestrained criticism, the politics of tacit knowledge dictates that criticism be muted and restrained by the very process whereby one comes to understand how science is done. Hence this conception of tacit knowledge became the lynchpin of the argument that scientific research could not be centrally planned: Since tacit knowledge was intrinsically dispersed throughout the community, and could only be passed along piecemeal through a socialization process inculcating a particular personal commitment, there could never be any effective rationalization or codification of the process of research.

Steve Fuller concurs and adds that both Marxism and Logical Positivism – Polanyi’s explicit targets (Nye 2011: 256, Hull 2006: 146) – advocated a systematic study of science as an organized process which could pave the way for “the democratization of scientific authority” (1992b: 394). And as Schmidt (2012: 184) puts it, “Polanyi saw clearly that if the scientific knowledge creation process could be investigated and understood systematically, then outsiders [would be] in a position to judge and hence also plan scientific work. This is the key to understanding Polanyi’s concerns and the notion of ‘tacit knowledge’”. Nilsen, on his part, makes a more general comment suggesting that, despite his alleged anti-positivism (i.e. Nye 2011) and anti-scientism (i.e. Lowney 2020), Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge not only “tends to transform power relations into questions of knowledge and epistemology” but also it “does not make professional practice more accessible to the participants. On the contrary, by legitimating practice as an epistemological matter, professional practice becomes mysterious and reified and, consequently, more inaccessible to the participants...[while] politics, ethics and values [are] marginalized in favor of discussions about knowing the world” (2002: 5, 10)⁶³.

⁶³ Polanyi’s philosophy of science has also been criticized, on methodological and substantive grounds, by his rationalist peers: Popper ([1959] 2002: xxvi) denounced the “obscurantist faith in the expert’s special skill, and in his personal knowledge and authority; a faith that so well fits our ‘post-rationalist’ and ‘post-critical’ age, proudly dedicated to the destruction of the tradition of rational philosophy, and of rational thought itself”. Lakatos (1970: 163, fn. 2), on his part, characterized Polanyi’s “post-critical” philosophy of science as “mystical”. Finally, Laudan (1986: 352) was even more relentless: “Michael Polanyi’s claim that

2.4 The context of justification

2.4.1 Hayek and Polanyi vs Wittgenstein and Ryle

After this long detour in the context of discovery, it is high time to return to the context of justification and interrogate the logical coherence and explanatory potential of Hayek's (and Polanyi's) ontological picture. According to it, social coordination is achieved, and social order is generated, not by specific commands or direct orders issued from a central authority that is radically ignorant and, in order to impose its preconceived plan, would necessarily resort to coercion (Hayek [1944] 2007: 110, [1960] 2011:123)⁶⁴, but when people are free to pursue their own plans by skillfully drawing upon inarticulate, implicit, unconscious rules of conduct that have emerged spontaneously and have survived the test of an evolutionary trial and error process⁶⁵. To challenge such a view, that supposedly provides a scientific explanation of social order and skillful practices, I turn to Wittgenstein and Ryle, whose shared views (Tanney 2009b: xi)⁶⁶ are often, albeit

the methods which scientists use in their research cannot ever be made fully explicit and thus that there will always remain an ineliminable tacit dimension to theory evaluation and testing...appears to be unargued hogwash. If there are methods or standards which scientists use (and Polanyi does not deny this much), then there is always the in-principle possibility of describing those methods in linguistic form. To deny this, as Polanyi is committed to, is equivalent to asserting that certain facts of the matter will forever elude linguistic characterization. Since Polanyi does not hold that there are generally matters of fact about the natural world which can never in principle be described, why should we accept without further ado his claim that our methodological actions fall in this category? Methodologies, recall, are nothing but theories, and it is a bit unseemly to hold that our theories about the world can be made explicit, whereas our theories about how to interact with that world defy all verbal description”.

⁶⁴ Or alternatively, “If there were omniscient men, if we could know not only all that affects the attainment of our present wishes but also our future wants and desires, there would be little case for liberty” (Hayek [1960] 2011: 81).

⁶⁵ “These rules of conduct have thus not developed as the recognized conditions for the achievement of a known purpose, but have evolved because the groups who practised them were more successful and displaced others. They were rules which, given the kind of environment in which man lived, secured that a greater number of the groups or individuals would survive. The problem of conducting himself successfully in a world only partially known to man was thus solved by adhering to rules which had served him well but which he did not and could not know to be true in the Cartesian sense” (Hayek [1973] 2021: 36). Or, more succinctly, “What reconciles the individuals and knits them into a common and enduring pattern of a society is that they respond in accordance with the same abstract rules” (Hayek [1976] 2021: 192).

⁶⁶ In fact, for Wittgenstein, Ryle was one of the two philosophers who understood his philosophy (Monk 1991: 436).

mistakenly, identified with Hayek's⁶⁷ and/or Polanyi's⁶⁸ (Barry 1979: 79, Bhaskar 1981: 410, Gray 1982: 27-30, Lavoie 1985: 62, Gray 1988b: 250-2, Nyiri 1988: 22, Kukathas 1989: 53, Janik 1989: 211-224, Johannessen 1992, Sciabarra 1995: 106, McDonough 2014, Festré and Østbye 2025: 576) while, in reality, they offer vastly different interpretations of the very notion of unformulated rules (Le Du 2011: 175, cf. Tanney 2009a) and knowledge (Read 2019).

As far as the first is concerned, Hayek ([1973] 2021: 65, emphasis added) writes:
The rules which govern the actions of the elements of such spontaneous orders need not be rules which are 'known' to these elements; it is sufficient that the elements actually behave in a manner which can be *described by such rules*. The concept of rules as we use it in this context therefore does not imply that such rules exist in articulated ('verbalized') forms, but only that *it is possible to discover rules which the actions of the individuals in fact follow*. To emphasize this, we have occasionally spoken of 'regularity' rather than of rules, but regularity, of course, means simply that the elements behave *according to rules*. That rules in this sense exist and operate without being explicitly known to those who obey them applies also to many of the rules which govern the actions of men and thereby determine a spontaneous social order. Man certainly does not know *all* the rules which guide his actions in the sense that he is able to state them in words.

Contrawise Wittgenstein not only did not consider either language ([1953] 2009: § 84, see also Cavell 1962: 71, Affeldt 2014: 317) or knowledge (Nielsen 2002: 8) as activities always bounded by rules but actually distinguished "between what one might call 'a process being in accordance with a rule' and 'a process involving a rule'" and, thus, it is rule-governed (Wittgenstein 1958:13). In the latter case, the rule implicated is an explicit, discursively-formulable rule wherein "the symbol of the rule *forms part* of the calculation" and, thus, a rule "which we *actually make use* of in understanding" (emphasis added). In short, Wittgenstein distinguished between actions that come about when we actually follow

⁶⁷ Indeed, Hayek himself contrasted his views with those of Wittgenstein (Hayek [1962] 2014: 234). While, for the former, we "follow rules which we do not know in the sense that we can state them" the latter suggests that "Knowing' it only means: being able to describe it" (Wittgenstein [1953] 2009: §57). Ryle, on his part, would oppose the idea that the grasping of rules is "logically prior to, and thus may be used to explain, the use of expressions" (Tanney 2009b: xi).

⁶⁸ Incidentally, Wittgenstein advised us not to say more than we know: "the difficulty in philosophy is to say no more than we know" (Wittgenstein 1958:45).

explicit, discursively-formulable rules from actions which are merely “in accordance with a rule” and wherein “no rule is involved” (ibid). In its turn, this suggests that when, if at all, rules are actually involved in the generation of an action we cannot follow rules or act on principles “implicitly”, “tacitly” or “unconsciously” (Baker 1981: 42-3, Staten 1984: 14, Pleasants 1999, ch. 4, Schmidt 2012). What I take all this to mean is that a) we rarely act on rules, as opposed to retrospectively describing an action as being in accordance with or in conformity with them, and, in this case, these cannot be other than explicit and discursively-formulable representations⁶⁹ and b) while, for Wittgenstein, the relation between an agent’s action and a rule, as well as the relation between following it and expressing it, is an internal or logical one, for Hayek the relation between an agent and the rules guiding her action is causal, cognitive and external in the sense that she must have (somehow) come into cognitive contact with these unexpressed and independently existing rules in order for her actions to be guided by and her ability to act to be explained (Fleetwood 1995: 108, Le Du 2011: 184, Pleasants 1997: 239). It follows that Hayek a) overgeneralizes and, extrapolating from the limited cases where rules are actually followed, assumes that all action is necessarily rule-governed⁷⁰; b) conflates rules with which people’s actions might be said to be in accordance with “rules” that people (somehow) follow tacitly and c) eschews the possibility that the former usage of rules depends on the explanatory work of an observing theorist and may be irrelevant in explaining action (Kelly 2011: 25, Tanney 2009a: 500-3)⁷¹. This implies that the “tacit rule-following” thesis is either explanatory empty or it serves a theorist’s intention to smuggle a normative judgment into a scientific fact (Antonio 1987, Connin 1990, Pleasants 1999).

⁶⁹ This point should be taken with a bit of salt. In fact, how explanatory would it actually be to argue that, say, Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky, while playing each other in the 1972 World Chess Championship, actually followed the rules of chess? Would not it be simpler, and dare I claim more reasonable, to say that “[a]t a certain level of competence, even the ‘explicit’, formulated rules of a practice will not (usually) actually be followed by the practitioner - though his actions will be in accordance with the explicit rules” (Pleasants 1999: 70, see also Zerilli 2016: 20)?

⁷⁰ Cf. compare with Wittgenstein’s (1958: 17) remark that “[t]his craving for generality”, namely “[t]he tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term” leads to “particular philosophical confusions”.

⁷¹ Cf. Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: §54): “One learns the game by watching how others play. But we say that it is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game—like a natural law governing the play”. Moreover, as Tanney (2009a: 503) put it, for Wittgenstein “if the only rules that are candidates for genuine consultation by participants in the practice (and not merely read off from it by a theorist) are representations such as recipes, signposts, maps, formulae, tables, samples, etc. then these representations may or may not guide those participating in the activity”.

As far as knowledge is concerned, for Ryle ([1949] 2009), the concept of tacit knowledge is a category mistake. Typical of this category mistake, which can be traced to Cartesian dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, is philosophers' assumption that conceptual matters really exist the way physical matter does. The same argument can be extended in relation to tacit knowledge. Having observed a practitioner performing a series of specialized actions we may tend to explain them as manifestations of tacit knowledge. However, once we have identified tacit knowledge as an actually existing and distinct kind of knowledge, we commit a category mistake by assuming that tacit knowledge really exists while it may actually be a theoretical construct. Thus, as a result of this linguistically induced conflation of categories, the concept of tacit knowledge becomes a new ghost in the machine (Nielsen 2002: 11-12). On the other hand, as Read (2019: 416-8), writing from a Wittgensteinian perspective, puts it, Polanyi construes expertise as a "tacit set of propositions" and models our "practical abilities to do things" after standard accounts of "explicit knowledge" (see also Turner 2012)⁷². Thus, the concept loses its distinctiveness and becomes "self-contradictory" or "a gateway to confusion" as it seeks "to cast something as simultaneously truth-like or fact-like and unstateable". But then, Read wonders, "[i]f it is really *knowledge* in the ordinary sense of that word, how could it be truly *tacit*? And if it is truly tacit, how could it really be *knowledge* (in the ordinary sense of that word)?" (ibid: 425, original emphasis)⁷³.

2.4.2 Hayek and Kant

However, this view is not widely held. On the contrary, the intellectual pedigree of the

⁷² Similarly, for Hayek, "[tacit] rules are best understood as theories adopted by us to understand, explain and predict the socially or intersubjectively constituted regularities we observe in our own conduct and in that of others" (Tebble 2016: 40). See also Weimer (1979: 76) who argues that for both Hayek and Polanyi "theories in practice are tacit knowledge structures within the scientist".

⁷³ Cf. Hutchinson and Read's (2011: 944) remark: "The... notion of tacit knowledge is sometimes invoked ... [to refer to] [t]hings one allegedly knows without being aware that one knows them. The central paradox or irony of this version of tacit knowledge is, ironically, that it (tacitly) figures tacit knowledge as exactly the same as ordinary knowledge except that it is tacit. (In this way, it is reminiscent of problematic models of 'the unconscious' which simply assume the unconscious to be a kind of unconscious conscious [cf. Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: § 149)]. Tacit knowledge is in effect then said to be exactly the same in every way as standard cases of knowledge - except that it is ineffable, or inaccessible, tacit".

idea that people are tacitly knowledgeable rule followers can be traced back to one of the most influential philosophers of all time – Kant – as Hayek (implicitly) and Polanyi (explicitly) admit (see below). And yet this idea has not been adequately thematized in the relevant literature. In fact, Hayek himself is partly responsible of this neglect for, instead of stressing his overall indebtedness to Kant, he highlighted the “obvious relation” between his epistemology and “Kant’s conception of the categories that govern our thinking” ([1969] 2014: 323). As a result, Hayek’s account is widely accepted in the secondary literature (Barry 1979: 135-7, Kukathas 1989: 52-3, Connin 1990: 301, Gamble 1996: 11-12, Horwitz 2000: 25, Ebenstein 2003: 127-131, Aarons 2009: 176-8, Marsh 2010: 136) mainly on the grounds that a) they both distinguish between a phenomenal and a noumenal world, to which we have no access; consequently, “we can never attain a transcendental standpoint from which to develop a real conception of the world as it is, free from our human experience and preconceptions” (Petsoulas 2001: 24) or to “step out of our human point of view as to attain a presuppositionless perspective on the world as a whole and as it is in itself” (Gray 1998: 5); and b) Hayek’s “pre-sensory experience” resembles Kant’s “a priori concepts” in the sense that they constitute “an open ended set of Kant’s categories neurologically specified” (Agonito 1975: 165, n.16) or, alternatively put, that “the pre-sensory linkages” [which are] hardwired into our nervous system” are “reminiscent of Immanuel Kant’s postulation of inherent mental categories which impress order upon the objects of our sensory experience” (Tebble 2010: 18). And yet this reading, by taking Hayek’s word at face value, elides the differences between Kant’s rationalism and Hayek’s radical empiricism (Hayek [1952] 2017: 285). Actually, Hayek (1994: 62-3) rejected Mises’s rationalistic apriorism on the grounds that his critique of socialism was not effective:

Mises’ postulate – if we are strictly rational and decide all the bases, we can see that socialism is wrong – is a mistake...Mises never could free himself from that fundamental philosophy, in which we have all grown up, that reason can do everything better than mere habit...In this respect, although I accept nearly everything of his criticism of socialism, I now understand why it has not been fully effective, because in his case it’s still based on the fundamental mistake of rationalism and socialism, that we have the intellectual power to arrange everything rationally.

As Scheall (2020: 13, original emphasis) explicates:

If reason is permitted as a possible source of knowledge, then political-epistemological arguments will be interminable *in principle*, as every party to such a debate can then assert privileged rationalistic access to whatever knowledge might be required to surmount the epistemic burdens associated with their preferred policies. An empiricist epistemology, according to which knowledge is acquired only in virtue of contact with the world of experience, makes such debates resolvable, at least in principle (if perhaps nevertheless practically difficult to resolve). Hayek's empiricist epistemology fits the required bill quite nicely...Mises, on the other hand, insisted on the possibility of rationalistic *a priori* knowledge, that is, knowledge that the organism somehow possesses in advance of its first encounters with the environment, prior to its first experiences, and can discover via reflection on its own nature.

Hayek himself has contributed to much of the confusion between his view and Kant's when, for instance, he writes:

Conscious experience thus presupposes the existence of an order that is indeed created by a sort of pre-conscious or pre-perceptive experience, but which itself is not accessible by conscious experience. Every experience thus implies an inclusion into an existing system that must be considered as given and that is incapable of being falsified by experience. Kant's categories are here resurrected as ordering principles that the organism does indeed acquire via the kind of impact of the outside world that I call pre-perceptive experience, but which themselves then become a condition of any conscious experience and cannot on their part be verified thereby ([1949] 2017: 357).

However, a) “[i]n a Kantian framework, it is impossible to conceive of reason as animal-like” (Lindemans 2011: 156) or the mind as “machine-like (Tuerck 1995: 287) as Hayek does, b) the *a priori* concepts that constitute the “order of the apparatus of classification” in Hayek's epistemology are not fixed, universal and eternal (Nishiyama 1984: xl-xlii, Horwitz 2000: 25, Hunt 2007: 52-4) as in Kant but are continuously adapting both phylogenetically and ontogenetically (Hayek [1952] 201: 188, contrast with Hayek [1952] 2010: 139-40); and c) Hayek's assumption that “experience is not a function of mind or consciousness, but...mind and consciousness are rather products of experience” (Hayek [1952] 2017: 280) sits uneasily with Kant's postulation of “fully *a priori*” concepts and categories, that is categories that are independent of any empirical content and “in

which no experience or sensation at all is mixed in” (Kant [1781] 2025: 132, b 24 / a 11)⁷⁴.

Still, the point I wish to raise, by bringing up Kant’s relation to Hayek, is rather different, as neither of them ever questioned the idea that social action is rule-governed nor the idea that understanding it requires its subsumption under rules we may be unaware of. For Kant ([1800] 1963: 1), [e]verything in nature, whether in the animate or inanimate world, takes place according to rules, although we do not always know these rules...just as the sensibility is the faculty of intuitions, so the understanding is the faculty of thinking, that is, of bringing the ideas of sense under rules”. And, as Vanberg (2017: 51) put it,

At the core of [Hayek’s] account is his argument that “understanding” and rule-following are closely connected. In Hayek’s account, intuitive understanding of other people’s actions is possible because— respectively, to the extent that— we are guided in our own behavior by the same rules. We “understand” another person’s action because we can subsume it under a rule⁷⁵.

Moreover, Kant, in the opening page of his *Introduction to logic*, writes: “one may speak...without knowing grammar, and he who speaks without knowing it has really a grammar, and he speaks according to rules of which, however, he is not aware” ([1800] 1963:1). And Hayek ([1965] 2014: 44), on his part, fully concurs with this idea:

As we learn as children to use our language according to rules which we do not explicitly know, so we learn with language not only to act according to the rules of language, but according to many other rules of interpreting the world and of acting appropriately, rules which will guide us though we have never explicitly formulated them. This phenomenon of implicit learning is clearly one of the most important parts of cultural transmission, but one which we as yet only imperfectly understand.

But what does all this mean? How exactly do people follow or draw upon grammatical rules given that they do not know how, or that, they do so and they are unaware of their existence?⁷⁶ How can the postulation of “implicit learning” or “tacit knowledge” explain

⁷⁴ See also the very informative discussion of Hayek’s naturalistic and evolutionary interpretation of Kant’s a priori categories by Vanberg (2017: 41-43).

⁷⁵ In his own formulation, (Hayek [1969] 2014: 325), “[o]ur capacity to recognize other people’s actions as meaningful...must be based on the possession of highly abstract rules governing our actions, although we are not aware of their existence and even less capable of articulating them in words”.

⁷⁶ Hayek could possibly reply that, despite the fact that we cannot verbalize these rules, we are somehow aware of them. And yet, if we are even vaguely aware of their existence, these abstract rules cannot be as “supra-conscious” as he claims them to be (Hayek [1962] 2014: 251). Thus, as Petsoulas (2001: 61, original

our linguistic abilities? Can it be sensibly said that we know the rules of grammar when, in fact, we do not know (most of) them (Lynch 2001: 149)? Worse still. How can we tacitly follow a rule or follow a tacit rule? And how can mistakes be accounted for? Have we selected the wrong tacit rule or have we misapplied the correct tacit rule? (Pleasants 1999: 70, Tanney 2009b: 1, cf. Tanney 2000).

These apparently simple questions do not seem to have concerned a series of eminent scholars who work in the Kantian tradition⁷⁷. Consider an extract from Dieter Schönecker and Allen Wood's (2015: 102-3) *Immanuel Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals. A Commentary* that I need to quote in full because it contains all the thorny issues:

Naturally it would be quite misleading to think that someone who acts in accordance with a maxim must in fact at the same time be conscious of this maxim in every particular action; and indeed, it is not the case that the underlying maxim would have to receive a clear and invariant formulation. Human beings can act in accordance with principles (rules) without actually being conscious of these rules (in the performance of the action), indeed even without ever consciously having learned these rules or 'incorporated' them in this sense. The way we learn a language is a good example of this: we do not learn our mother tongue by grasping, practicing, or memorizing grammatical rules in a conscious way. On the contrary, it all transpires unconsciously. We follow these rules although we do not do so consciously and would probably be incapable of articulating the rules we follow if we were asked to do so (and most certainly not those encoded in 'deep grammar')⁷⁸.

emphasis) argues, "these meta-conscious rules, which are the *sine qua non* of our intellectual capacity, are taken by Hayek as axiomatic. Their existence and function are simply postulated rather than demonstrated".

⁷⁷ For Habermas (1979: 12, emphasis added), "[t]he interpreter attempts to explicate the meaning of a symbolic formation in terms of the rules according to which its author *must* have brought it forth...He attempts...to peer through the surface, as it were, and into the symbolic formation to discover the rules according to which the latter was produced". Compare with Wittgenstein's (1993: 375) remark: "'Must': that means we are going to apply this picture come what may" and his reminder: "The difficult thing here is not to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognise the ground that lies before us as the ground. For the ground keeps on giving us the illusory image of a greater depth, and when we seek to reach this, we keep on finding ourselves on the old level" (Wittgenstein 1978, vi 31:333).

⁷⁸ In fact, the idea that "we always act on maxims" is quite widespread in Kantian scholarship. For example, Guyer (2000: 293) argues that, for Kant, "an agent never acts without some maxim or other" while Ameriks introduces an important qualification when he writes that, according to Kant's reasoning, "every human action *implicitly* involves some maxim" (2005: 220, emphasis added). O'Neill (1989: 151) goes a step further writing that "(mere reflex apart) we always act on some maxim. Even unplanned and negligent action, for example, is performed on some maxim". Finally, Gressis, reviewing the relevant literature, found "a significant agreement about several features of maxims", the first of which was that "[e]veryone always acts

And yet, how explanatory can all this be? Are they not simply redescribing the problem to be explained, namely that people are capable of skillful performances? How can one be guided by rules one is unconscious of? Can we, from the premise that “we do not learn our mother tongue by grasping, practicing, or memorizing grammatical rules in a conscious way”, derive the conclusion that we both learn and follow the rules of language unconsciously? Would we say of a cyclist, who does not fall off her bike, that she has unconsciously mastered the laws of physics? (Cheung 2014: 6) In what sense can we attribute the linguistic competence of native speakers to an inarticulable or unconscious knowledge of the rules of their language? Undoubtedly, these skillful performances can be described as being “in accordance with the rules” but does this necessarily mean that cyclists and native speakers actually “follow the rules”? For example, would it be reasonable to argue that a competent speaker, when conjugating, unconsciously or implicitly, draws upon the rules of conjugation?⁷⁹

2.4.3 Hayek vs Ryle

It could be possibly retorted that native speakers implicitly *know how* to conjugate a verb but, not being philologists, do not, and need not, explicitly *know that* to conjugate means to “alter verbs to tell who is doing the action and when the action takes place”. Hayek makes much of this distinction ([1952] 2017: 152, 170, [1960] 2011: 76, [1962] 2014: 233, [1969] 2014: 317, [1973] 2021: 99, 1988: 78), coined by Ryle (1945), and not only treats

on maxims” (2010: 235). This agreement seems to be so established that, try hard as I might, I found only one paper that explicitly challenges this thesis (Nyholm 2017; see also Albrecht 2009). Kant himself appears to be ambivalent on this issue, for only did he state that “to act according to firm principles...is...something rare” (Kant [1798] 2006: 192) but also argued that “Maxims do not come from nature; they must be thought through. One must make oneself familiar with them in time in order to have them ready” (Kant [1776-1784] 2005: 528). These statements sit uneasily with Kant’s assertion that we act according to rules we are unaware of, particularly given the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of “thought through: “to think about all the different parts or effects of (something) for a period of time especially in an effort to understand or make a decision about it” and the qualification that we must be “familiar with them”. Be that as it may, Antonio’s assertion (1987: 61) that “Hayek goes far beyond the familiar neo-Kantian limits to knowledge by arguing that the most fundamental ordering principles of social life cannot be articulated and are not accessible to conscious awareness. In his view, social practices follow ‘meta-conscious rules’ and contain tacit forms of knowledge which exceed by far the limited capacities of the rational intellect” is problematic.

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: §82) picked up on this issue and asked rhetorically: “what do I call “the rule by which he proceeds””, when the individual in question is unable to state any rule? And he continues: “how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself. —Or, to ask a better question: What meaning is the expression ‘the rule by which he proceeds’ supposed to have left here?”

knowing-how and tacit knowing indiscriminately (Oguz 2010: 161) but he also mistakenly conflates Ryle's critique of intellectualism with his attack on constructivist rationalism (Hayek [1952] 2010: 156, 291, 300, 1967: 107, [1960] 2011: 75). Ryle ([1949] 2009: 18) writes:

Champions of this [intellectualist] legend...[argue]...that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria. It follows that the operation which is characterised as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria; that is, the agent must first go through the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done.

And he concludes:

The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this. The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle... According to the legend, whenever an agent does anything intelligently, his act is preceded and steered by another internal act of considering a regulative proposition appropriate to his practical problem. But what makes him consider the one maxim which is appropriate rather than any of the thousands which are not?⁸⁰...The endlessness of this implied regress shows that the application of the criterion of appropriateness does not entail the occurrence of a process of considering this criterion (ibid: 19-20)⁸¹.

Hayek, on his part, not only construes mental phenomena as inner causal events ([1952] 2017: 326) but also wrongly assumes ([1969] 2014: 317-20, [1962] 2014: 251) that Ryle's reference to the "observance of rules" and the "application of criteria" is confined to a conscious, mental, interpretive activity that must precede any action and conflates

⁸⁰ In the same vein, Wittgenstein remarked that, in the case of an action which is said to be "in accordance with a rule", the action in question will be "also in accordance with any number of other rules; and amongst these it is not more in accordance with one than with another" (1958: 13).

⁸¹ Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: §85-86), similarly argued that, at some point, we have to go without rules and just know what we are doing as part of a way of life, since otherwise we succumb to an infinite regress of rules: meta-rules to tell us how to follow the first-level rules, and meta-meta-rules to tell us how to follow these meta-rules.

intelligence with an explicit and internal process of deliberation (cf. Tanney 2009b: xlv)⁸². Still, Ryle (1945: 8-9), is unequivocal:

There is a not unfashionable shuffle which...say[s] that the intelligent reasoner who has not been taught logic knows the logicians' formulae "implicitly" but not "explicitly"; or that the ordinary virtuous person has "implicit" but not "explicit" knowledge of the rules of right conduct; the skilful but untheoretical chess-player "implicitly" acknowledges a lot of strategic and tactical maxims, though he never formulates them and might not recognise them if they were imparted to him by some Clausewitz of the game...All this intellectualist legend must be rejected, not merely because it tells psychological myths but because the myths are not of the right type to account for the facts which they are invented to explain.

Ryle's concluding suggestion implies that the invocation of "unconscious", "tacit" or "implicit" (knowledge of) rules is not an actual discovery that can account for our practices but merely a theoretical invention devised by (political) philosophers and/or (social) scientists in their attempt to explain these performances, an attempt which is as intellectualist as of those who, allegedly, postulate explicitly stated and consciously deliberated rules as a condition of possibility of action⁸³. In short, the postulation of a tacit rule book, upon which we draw to skillfully perform certain practices, is as intellectualist a picture as the one that postulates an explicit rule book as a condition of possibility of action (Turner 2001). As Tanney (2009b: xlii) puts it, in her introduction to the 60th anniversary edition of Ryle's *The Conception of Mind*,

Colloquially, the point is put by saying that an action is intelligent because the agent is thinking about what she is doing. But the intellectualist interprets this 'because' to mean that whenever the agent acts intelligently a mental process of the relevant kind generates her action. Today, the intellectualist still flourishes: though conceding that there may be no overt act of deliberation or theorizing, she is none the less tempted to

⁸² Cf. Pleasants (1997: 242): "That Wittgenstein's sceptical attack on the explanatory power of mental processes extends to all mental processes, be they conscious, unconscious, or non-conscious (tacit), is what makes his position radically anti-individualistic, anti-Cartesian, and anti-Kantian".

⁸³ Compare with Wittgenstein's (1958: 18) remark: "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness".

suppose that a corresponding (presumably, at bottom, physical) process occurs covertly or tacitly⁸⁴.

2.4.4 Polanyi, Ryle and Kant

After this long detour it is time to return to Polanyi and his “post-critical” philosophy to see whether he has managed to escape either the “intellectualist legend” or the “category mistake”. Although it would probably suffice to quote him saying “[b]ut what actually follows from the fact that mind and body do not interact explicitly is that they interact according to the logic of tacit knowing” (Polanyi 1969: 223) a more comprehensive exposition is necessary. The reason is that Polanyi not only reproached Ryle for his inability to offer an alternative to the “intellectual interpretation” and found his proposition that “most intelligent performance are not clues to mind; they are those workings” absurd (ibid: 222)⁸⁵, but also because he made the following assertion: “As Ryle’s powerful argument [against Cartesian dualism] leads him to fallacious conclusions, it offers a compelling demonstration of the troubles arising from the absence of the cognitive and ontological principles outlined in the present paper” (ibid: 223).

Polanyi starts his *Personal: Knowledge towards a post-critical philosophy* with “the well-known fact that the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them” (Polanyi [1958] 2005: 51, original emphasis). And he continues:

For example, the decisive factor by which the swimmer keeps himself afloat is the manner by which he regulates his respiration; he keeps his buoyancy at an increased

⁸⁴ In fact, for Hayek [1952] 2017: 171), the neural order and the mental or phenomenal order “are not merely isomorphous but identical and...to postulate a separate set of terms for the mental order would be redundant”. According to the theoretical psychology expounded in *TSO*, external stimuli trigger physiological impulses which are converted into sensations as the new sensory data interact with pre-existing cognitive structures embedded in the physiological memory. New experience is classified by the mind based on its relation to previous experience. Thus, “[w]e do not first have sensations which are then preserved by memory, but it is a result of physiological memory that the physiological impulses are converted into sensations. Connexions between the physiological elements are the primary phenomenon which create the mental phenomena” (ibid: 326). As a result, “[e]very sensation, even the ‘purest’, must therefore be regarded as an interpretation of an event in the light of the past experience of the individual or the species” (ibid: 280).

⁸⁵ However, it seems to me that the absurdity lies with Polanyi (1969: 169) when he writes: “Ryle’s conclusion that the workings of the mind are the mind, is like saying that the word ‘table’ is a table”.

level by refraining from emptying his lungs when breathing out and by inflating them more than usual when breathing in: yet this is not generally known to swimmers (ibid). This sounds rather familiar and is subject to similar problems: does the swimmer “observe” “a set of rules” when he “keeps his buoyancy at an increased level by refraining from emptying his lungs”? And what is the meaning of the suggestion that the “rules...are not known as such” to the swimmer? What does this “as such” mean? As formulated “rules”? Did Polanyi, who not only knew the “rules” but was able to formulate them, cease to know them while swimming? Is this not another instance of a category mistake in the sense that it conflates the normative category of observance of rules with the descriptive category of mere regularity (Schmidt 2012: 187, cf. Hayek [1973] 2021: 65, quoted above)⁸⁶? And, once again, how logically coherent can the idea that one observes rules without knowing them be?

In the same page Polanyi’s ([1958] 2005: 51-2) offers another example:

I have come to the conclusion that the principle by which the cyclist keeps his balance is not generally known. The rule observed by the cyclist is this. When he starts falling to the right he turns the handle bars to the right, so that the course of the bicycle is deflected along a curve towards the right. This results in a centrifugal force pushing the cyclist to the left and offsets the gravitational force dragging him down to the right. This manoeuvre presently throws the cyclist out of balance to the left, which he counteracts by turning the handlebars to the left; and so he continues to keep himself in balance by winding along a series of appropriate curvatures. A simple analysis shows that for a given angle of unbalance the curvature of each winding is inversely proportional to the square of the speed at which the cyclist is proceeding. But does this tell us exactly how to ride a bicycle? No. You obviously cannot adjust the curvature of your bicycle’s path in proportion to the ratio of your unbalance over the square of your speed; and if you could you would fall off the machine, for *there are a number of other factors to be taken into account in practice which are left out in the formulation of this rule. Rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they*

⁸⁶ For Hayek ([1967] 2014: 278) “The term ‘rule’ is used for a statement by which a regularity of the conduct of individuals can be described, irrespective of whether such a rule is ‘known’ to the individual in any other sense than that they normally act in accordance with it”.

can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace this knowledge (emphasis added).

It seems that Polanyi has changed his view(s) within the span of a page. From the first example, that swimmers “observe rules” they do not “know as such”, that is explicitly but only implicitly, we have moved to the suggestion that these rules are not sufficient and they need to be supplemented by something else so as to be “integrated into the practical knowledge of the art”. In this case, “tacit knowledge” does not consist in “the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them” but rather it is contingent upon “a number of other factors to be taken into account in practice which are left out in the formulation of this rule”. Polanyi falls short of telling us what this something else might be. However, when he returns to the same issue, he writes:

An art which cannot be *specified in detail* cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice...By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice *unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another...*In effect, to the extent to which our intelligence falls short of the ideal of precise formalization, *we act and see by the light of unspecifiable knowledge and must acknowledge that we accept the verdict of our personal appraisal, be it at first hand by relying on our own judgment, or at second hand by submitting to the authority of a personal example as carrier of a tradition* ([1958] 2005: 55, emphasis added).

It follows that “this something else” is either “personal judgement” or “hidden rules” that embody some “unspecifiable knowledge” and “are not explicitly known to the master” – the “carrier of a tradition”. The way I read things, Polanyi has not overcome the “critical” philosophy of Kant, with his allegedly “post-critical” one, but, in essence, replicates the Kantian problematic. Kant ([1781] 2025: 232, a 133/b 172) writes:

If the understanding in general is explained as the faculty of rules, then the power of judgment is the faculty of subsuming under rules, i.e., of determining whether something stands under a given rule...General logic contains no precepts at all for the power of judgment, and moreover cannot contain them...Now if it wanted to show generally how one ought to subsume under these rules, i.e., distinguish whether

something stands under them or not, this could not happen except once again through a rule. But just because this is a rule, it would demand another instruction for the power of judgment, and so it becomes clear that although the understanding is certainly capable of being instructed and equipped through rules, the power of judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced.

Polanyi (1969: 105), on his part, acknowledges his indebtedness to Kant:

even a writer like Kant, so powerfully bent on strictly determining the rules of pure reason, occasionally admitted that into all acts of judgment there enters, and must enter, a personal decision which cannot be accounted for by any rules. Kant says that no system of rules can prescribe the procedure by which the rules themselves are to be applied. There is an ultimate agency which, unfettered by any explicit rules, decides on the subsumption of a particular instance under any general rule or a general concept.

Or, even more explicitly,

Kant wrote of the process of subsuming particular instances under a general term that it was ‘a skill so deeply hidden in the human soul that we shall hardly guess the secret that Nature here employs’⁸⁷. The secret was indeed inaccessible so long as one looked for an explicit procedure to account for the subsumption of particulars under a general term, but the secret can be found in a tacit operation of the mind (ibid: 191).

Thus, Polanyi felt totally justified to argue that “personal judgment [is] unguided by any explicit rules” ([1958] 2005: 267) or, alternatively, that judgement is tacit (ibid: 219⁸⁸) but, to avert the danger of relativism and nihilistic self-doubt (1969: 3, cf. [1958] 2005: 285), made an important addition: “personal judgment” consists in the uncritical acceptance of a tradition:

To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyse and account in detail

⁸⁷ The actual passage reads: “This schematism of our understanding...is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty” (Kant [1789] 2025: 237 / b 181).

⁸⁸ “All arts are learned by intelligently imitating the way they are practised by other persons in whom the learner places his confidence. To know a language is an art, carried on by tacit judgments and the practice of unspecifiable skills. The child’s way of learning to speak from his adult guardians is therefore akin to the young mammal’s and young bird’s mimetic responses to its nurturing, protecting and guiding seniors. The tacit coefficients of speech are transmitted by inarticulate communications, passing from an authoritative person to a trusting pupil, and the power of speech to convey communication depends on the effectiveness of this mimetic transmission”.

for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another. A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition (Polanyi [1958] 2005: 55)⁸⁹.

To wind up, Polanyi started by offering a redescription of the practice as an explanation of a skillful performance but consequently realized that the rules he had formulated and ascribed to the practitioners were not sufficient to account for their performances and, to compensate for this inadequacy, he introduced an additional set of rules, hidden ones. In short, having realized that his formulation of the rules is insufficiently “specified in detail”, he shifted from the first view to the second: there are more rules, which, when explicated, call for the invocation of more hidden rules, ad infinitum. In other words, Polanyi, to set the stage for tacit knowledge, argued that “in all applications of a formalism [rules, instructions, protocols] to experience *there is an indeterminacy involved, which must be resolved by the observer on the ground of unspecifiable criteria*” (Polanyi, [1958] 2005: 84, emphasis added). Thus, he started out by telling us that formalisms do not provide sufficiently detailed criteria to determine their application and then proposed that “unspecifiable criteria” are adequate for this task. But, as Turner (1994), Michael Lynch (1997: 339), and Baker and Hacker (2005: 358-9) have suggested, if explicit/formalized/articulate rules cannot account for skilled practical applications, postulating inexplicit/unspecifiable/inarticulate rules – made explicit by the observing analyst – only shift the locus of the initial explanatory insufficiency to a higher level⁹⁰. It

⁸⁹ For Hayek ([1978] 2014: 359), “Much that is learned certainly is not rational or conscious, but, in the loose and incorrect use of these terms, ‘intuitive’ or even ‘instinctive.’ Neither the individual who provides the example nor the imitator will be able to state what is merely ‘knowledge how’, or know what depends on his acting in this particular manner. Much of what we can do rests on skills or aptitudes or propensities acquired by following examples, and selected because they proved successful, but not deliberately chosen for a purpose”.

⁹⁰ As Lynch (2001: 149) put it, “Polanyi’s reference to hidden, unconsciously mastered rules is a clear instance of an analytic tendency often found in the cognitive sciences. This is the tendency to use the language of formal methodology (and especially experimental methodology) to describe or comparatively analyze nonscientific, unconscious, heuristic, and nonrational modes of reasoning and practice. Accordingly, the human...practice in question is made out in the image of a scientific method, and the agent is endowed with theories, models, hypotheses, heuristics, protocols, and decision rules... Once again, there is a gap between the analyst’s formulation of ‘hidden’ or ‘unconscious’ versions of protocols, models, and rules of method and the practices those protocols, models, and rules allegedly describe or determine”.

follows that Polanyi has not managed to free himself from the intellectualist assumption that skillful practices are, always and necessarily, predicated on the “observance of rules or the application of criteria”, albeit hidden and unspecifiable ones, and thus he has not escaped the problem of infinite regress.

2.4.5 Hayek vs Ryle

Hayek, on other hand, underplayed, to say the least, Polanyi’s talk of “personal judgement” (cf. Kley 1994: 151)⁹¹ and emphasized the role of inarticulate or unconscious rules that govern all conscious and rational processes (Oguz 2010: 157). He writes:

If everything we can express (state, communicate) is intelligible to others only because their mental structure is governed by the same rules as ours, it would seem that these rules themselves can never be communicated. This seems to imply that in one sense we always know not only more than we can deliberately state but also more than we can be aware of or deliberately test; and that much that we successfully do depends on presuppositions which are outside the range of what we can either state or reflect upon. *This application to all conscious thought of what seems obviously true of verbal statements seems to follow from the fact that such thought must, if we are not to be led into an infinite regress, be assumed to be directed by rules which in turn cannot be conscious –by a supra-conscious mechanism which operates upon the contents of consciousness but which cannot itself be conscious* (Hayek [1962] 2014: 251).

This is a remarkable passage for it reveals how intellectualist is Hayek’s critique of “central planning” and “constructivist rationalism”. Remember that Hayek’s argument against both was predicated on the tacit and thus inarticulate nature of knowledge which cannot be made conscious, explicit or questioned: “we always know not only more than we can deliberately state but also more than we can be aware of or deliberately test”. As a result, we have to

⁹¹ For Hayek even judges – the centerpiece of his model constitution – are deprived of the exercise of any judgement: “The efforts of the judge are thus part of that process of adaptation of society to circumstances by which the spontaneous order grows. He assists in the process of selection by upholding those rules which, like those which have worked well in the past, make it more likely that expectations will match and not conflict. He thus becomes an organ of that order. But even when in the performance of this function he creates new rules, he is not a creator of a new order but a servant endeavouring to maintain and improve the functioning of an existing order. And the outcome of his efforts will be a characteristic instance of those ‘products of human action but not of human design’ in which the experience gained by the experimentation of generations embodies more knowledge than was possessed by anyone” (Hayek [1973] 2021: 150).

rely on supra-conscious rules that guide both our perception and action (Hayek [1962] 2014: 232-253 and [1969] 314-337), a “mechanism which operates upon the contents of consciousness but which cannot itself be conscious”. In fact, for Hayek central planning is informationally inefficient “not only because of the limited capacity of the planners to receive and digest the information communicated to them, but also because of the inability of individual economic agents to communicate all of the information that they have. This inability stems from our more general inability to state or communicate all the various rules that govern our actions and perceptions” (Tuerck 1995: 285, cf. Antonio 1987: 61). We are also told that this must be so because otherwise we will be “led into an infinite regress”. And yet the postulation of transcendently deduced supra-conscious rules, according to which we act and which cannot be deliberated, communicated or tested, falls short of being explanatory simply because “tacit rules” are still rules and, assuming that these rules do not apply themselves, a (“tacit” and/or “unconscious”) mental interpretive processes must be involved whenever a rule is applied. In fact, according to Hayek himself ([1952] 2017: 280), “every sensation, even the ‘purest’, must therefore be regarded as an interpretation of an event in the light of the past experience of the individual or the species”⁹². But, as Petsoulas (2001: 25) has argued, if “all sensations involve conceptual interpretations...[his] argument leads naturally to an infinite regress”⁹³. Thus, even with the invocation of tacit rules, the infinite regress cannot be avoided. Actually, Hayek, in the very next page of the long passage quoted above, argues that the mind cannot know its own operations (cf. Hayek [1952] 2017: 296), and thus “central planning” is impossible⁹⁴, because infinite regress is unavoidable (ibid: 299):

there will always be some rules governing a mind which that mind in its then prevailing state cannot communicate, and that, if it ever were to acquire the capacity of communicating these rules, this would presuppose that *it had acquired further higher rules which make the communication of the former possible but which*

⁹² In the words of Hayek’s editor, Bruce Caldwell (2014: 7), “classifications using abstract categories, and interpretations using those categories or models, play key rôles in our understanding of human action. These ideas would recur in Hayek’s 1952 book on psychology, *The Sensory Order*, as well as in later essays found in this volume [Hayek 2014]”.

⁹³ For Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: §201) an interpretation is the substitution of one expression of a rule for another, or “a rule regulating the application of a rule” (§ 84) and thus not only it cannot determine meaning but also leads to infinite regress.

⁹⁴ See fn. 55.

themselves will still be incommunicable...It would thus appear that Godel's theorem is but a special case of a more general principle, namely the principle that among their determinants there must always be some rules which cannot be stated or even be conscious. At least all we can talk about and probably all we can consciously think about presupposes the existence of a framework which determines its meaning, i.e. a system of rules which operate us but which we can neither state nor form an image of and which we can merely evoke in others in so far as they already possess them ([1962] 2014: 252)⁹⁵.

Within the span of a page, Hayek makes two mutually exclusive and, thus, contradictory claims: a) that central planning is impossible because all conscious knowledge presupposes the existence of inarticulate, supra-conscious rules, whose explication “would presuppose that it [the mind] had acquired further higher rules which make the communication of the former possible but which themselves will still be incommunicable”, thus leading to infinite regress and b) he attributes to these very rules the capacity to prevent infinite regress, on the grounds that they are supra-conscious and thus their application does not involve a conscious, mental, interpretive activity. In short, for Hayek the invocation of these rules – the alleged conditions of possibility of action – serves as an explanation of why infinite regress is both unavoidable and avoidable.

⁹⁵ In passing, it needs to be stressed that the reference to Gödel's theorem, while seeking to give a scientific aura to the argument, it actually does not provide any support for a) the “relationship is of the nature of an analogy, or even merely metaphorical; it is not inferential, nor of a strictly logical character” (Hauwe 2011: 395); b) even assuming that the mind is a formal system, “the applicability of the incompleteness theorem outside mathematics...also means that we learn nothing from the incompleteness theorem about the completeness or incompleteness of formal systems with regard to non-arithmetical or non-mathematical statements” (Franzen 2005: 27) and c) “Gödel's proof should not be construed as an invitation to despair or as an excuse for mystery-mongering. The discovery that there are arithmetical truths which cannot be demonstrated formally does not mean that there are truths which are forever incapable of becoming known, or that a “mystic” intuition (radically different in kind and authority from what is generally operative in intellectual advances) must replace cogent proof. It does not mean, as a recent writer claims, that there are ‘ineluctable limits to human reason’...The theorem does indicate that the structure and power of the human mind are far more complex and subtle than any non-living machine yet envisaged” (Nagel and Newman [1958] 1981:101-2). Hayek ([1962] 2014: 252, fn. 51) is fully aware of Nagel and Newman's “semi-popular exposition” of the Gödel's theorem. And yet not only does he not raise any objections to it but he actually argues that “although...machines cannot yet be described as brains, with regard to purposiveness they differ from a brain merely in degree and not in kind” (Hayek [1952] 2017: 244). This idea, combined with Hayek's assertion ([1952] 2017: 299) that the human brain may design “a machine fully reproducing the action of the brain and capable of predicting how the brain will act in different circumstances”, poses unsurpassable problems to his claim regarding the “logical impossibility” of central planning.

2.4.6 Hayek vs Wittgenstein

But that is not all. As the concluding part of the quotation suggests, Hayek tends to think that “meaning” is determined by a system of inarticulate rules “which we can merely evoke in others in so far as they already possess them”. And yet the equation of meaning with production according to a system of rules, albeit once fashionable, has, since Cavell’s critical intervention, been discredited. In fact, according to Cavell (1962: 74), who was probably the first that disentangled Wittgenstein from the idea that rules are conditions of possibility of meaning, action, understanding etc,

[Wittgenstein] wishes to indicate how inessential the ‘appeal to rules’ is as an explanation of language. For what has to be ‘explained’ is, put flatly and bleakly, this: We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation –all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls ‘forms of life’. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying⁹⁶.

What Cavell suggests is that the appeal to rules seeks to transcendently guarantee the success of our linguistic practices while, in fact, it cannot. Just like the natural scientists who once tended to explain causal processes by appealing to “hidden powers” governing their operation, the philosophers, who appeal to shared “hidden” rules and “inarticulate mental powers” or “tacit intellectual powers” (Polanyi [1958] 2005: 86, 100, 140), seem to

⁹⁶ Commenting on this very passage, and to avert the danger of reading it in a foundationalist manner, Affeldt (2014: 331, original emphasis) writes: “It is not as though we, for the most part, make and understand the same projections of words *because* we share senses of humor, significance, and the like. Our sharing senses of humor and significance, for example, is the same fact as our making and understanding the same projections. Accordingly, shared forms of life are not the foundation for our agreement in language. They are the same fact differently described, and the description of our shared forms of life shows us what is involved in our sharing and agreeing in language”. This point also addresses Polanyi’s critique of Ryle (1969: 222, quoted above).

invoke an equally occult entity to explain our performances and to reassure us about the reliability and systematicity of our systems of social meaning (Ryle [1949] 2009: 37). The appeal to rules is explanatorily empty, Cavell appears to be arguing, for it cannot guarantee the systematic operation of language. For one, the employment of a transcendental argument, that seeks to explain the fact of communication and mutual intelligibility by attributing its conditions of possibility to “shared and tacit rules, mental frameworks, cognitive categories, conceptual premises” etc, is not only circular but also precludes the possibility of alternative explanations (Turner 2003: 57). Moreover, the attribution of meaning to tacit knowledge of rules implies that novel uses of language can be meaningful only within a static framework of shared rules, that competent speakers must already possess, which determines the legitimate use of utterances and sets the limits of meaning (Rosen 2001: 379-80). The conservative implications of this attribution are not hard to see and Polanyi and Hayek are once more rather explicit. For Polanyi ([1966] 2009: 60-1),

to acknowledge tacit thought as an indispensable element of all knowing and as the ultimate mental power by which all explicit knowledge is endowed with meaning, is to deny the possibility that each succeeding generation, let alone each member of it, should critically test all the teachings in which it has been brought up.

Hayek, on his part, generalizing this claim, writes:

Since any established system of rules of conduct will be based on experiences which we only partly know, and will serve an order of action in a manner which we only partly understand, we cannot hope to improve it by reconstructing anew the whole of it. If we are to make full use of all the experience which has been transmitted only in the form of traditional rules, all criticism and efforts at improvement of particular rules must proceed within a framework of given values which for the purpose in hand must be accepted as not requiring justification... When we say that all criticism of rules must be immanent criticism, we mean that the test by which we can judge the appropriateness of a particular rule will always be some other rule which for the purpose in hand we regard as unquestioned. The great body of rules which in this sense is tacitly accepted determines the aim which the rules being questioned must also support; and this aim, as we have seen, is not any particular event but the maintenance or restoration of an order of actions which the rules tend to bring about more or less successfully... particular aspects of a culture can be critically examined only within the context of that culture. We can never reduce a system of rules or all values as a

whole to a purposive construction, but must always stop with our criticism at something that has no better ground for existence than that it is the accepted basis of the particular tradition. Thus we can always examine a part of the whole only in terms of that whole which we cannot entirely reconstruct and the greater part of which we must accept unexamined. As it might also be expressed: we can always only tinker with parts of a given whole but never entirely redesign it ([1976] 2021: 206-8).

And yet this philosophical thesis not only assumes, rather than demonstrates, that the(se) abstract rules of conduct always bring about order (cf. Bogen 1993) but also lacks historical and/or empirical justification as it cannot account for not only world-historical events, such as the French Revolution or the supersession of Newtonian physics, the empirical basis of Kant's metaphysics (Pecere 2014), but not even mundane phenomena such as, say, the linguistic creativity and innovativeness of native speakers. As Smith (1997: 23) puts it, in relation to Hayek's connectionist theory of mind, alluding to the "rules as rails laid to infinity" picture that Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009: §218) sought to deconstruct,

it is not clear how an approach along Hayekian...lines can do justice to the creative open-endedness that seems to be involved even in our day-to-day activities of mental classification...For in the real world, as Wittgenstein, among others, has emphasised, classification is often far from being a neat and tidy affair, yet it is a limitation of standard connectionist systems that they can be made to operate...only if the relevant classificatory space is fixed in advance.

And this is exactly what Hayek's oeuvre is all about. To fix in advance the limits of our philosophical, scientific and political imagination by "pass[ing] off his moral and political values as 'facts' of epistemic reality as such" (Pleasants 1999: 98) and by shutting down rational discourse over his value prescriptions (Antonio 1987: 70).

Instead of a conclusion

By way of conclusion, I will not summarize the argument developed above, hoping that my key points have been successfully established. Suffice to say that the cognitivist account of rules put forward by Hayek, among others to whom I have made passing references in the preceding discussion, and seeks to explain social order in terms of rules which a) operate at an unconscious or tacit level, b) provide normative guidelines for individual agents to follow and c) determine correct behaviour over an infinite range of future applications, has been severely criticized by Wittgenstein on the grounds that by construing rules as “rails laid to infinity” it fails to distinguish between rule-governed action and action in accordance with a rule. In particular, for Wittgenstein, in a minority of cases, such as games, mathematical problems or highly ritualised behaviour, people may be said to be actually following explicit rules, which they are aware of and consciously apply them to the situations they face. However, in most cases, rules are mobilised as ex-post justifications for actions and decisions taken in the past and thus are explanatory empty. And the problem with this picture is not confined to the fact that it attributes to rules the impossible task of determining correct behaviour over an infinite range of possible applications. This apparently abstract and philosophical debate has a practical import. For Hayek and Co., who supposedly emphasized “the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place” of the “man on the spot” (Hayek [1945] 2014: 98), celebrated the “tacit knowledge of the immediate producers” and castigated the “derogation of the lay actor” by the techno-bureaucratic mode of decision making, rules are abstracted from practices and then reconfigured as substantial, generic, and unproblematic features of orderly social activities. Thus, specific activities are presented, in a Platonic fashion, as instantiations of rule-like procedures and idealized plans of action and, as a result, the situated and situating features of practical social life are obliterated as practices are stripped of all specificity, singularity and particularity. What is more, this account has an elitist and thus conservative/liberal ring to it. By that I do not mean only that it is explicitly biased towards the maintenance and/or restoration of a bourgeois order but also that by prioritizing “competence” and “mastery” over “incompetence” and “underperformance” it implicitly sides with the “few” and the “successful” of this world and against the “many”, the

“dispossessed” and the “downtrodden”. This is the natural corollary of the way the problem it initially posed. For, when we seek to account for (the conditions of possibility of) order in terms of rules and thus treat them as foundational to organized, orderly social activities, we are looking not for the necessary and sufficient conditions for “playing the game” poorly or for participating in it at least adequately, but for performing a practice masterfully and competently, something that, by definition, only an elite can do. In its turn, this suggests that Hayek’s (neo)liberal epistemology is predicated upon a conservative worldview, something which is indicative of his theoretical construction and the politics that accrue from it as a whole.

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