On Language, Art, And Intuitions: The Need To Expand Our Methods Of Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

This paper uses a neo-Wittgensteinian lens to explore the effect that language has on our conceptual intuitions, highlighting the fact that certain artworks, in so far as they are logically possible, provide special insight with regard to our conceptual concerns. Through an in-depth analysis of the comedic television series *Rick and Morty,* this paper will argue that our conceptual intuitions are often unable to be understood through the traditional analytic practice of explicating precise definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Rather, to understand our concepts and the intuitions behind them we must expand our methods of analysis to include, at the least, things like artistic and cultural critique.

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§1 Introduction

Language is the primary tool of the philosopher, and though it may be the case that the philosopher has other tools, these tools are all confined to the degree that she is able to articulate them in language. A philosopher that does not write, speak, nor communicate, yet all the while lays claim to understanding, will likely be condemned as a mystic, and this seems to be fair. That is, language is one of humanity's greatest tools for learning, understanding, and teaching, and it is hard to even imagine what our conceptual framework, what our complicated and diverse knowledge and organization of the world, would look like if it were somehow stripped of all language. Indeed, it would be very alien, if it were able to exist at all. Hence, if epistemology is of interest to philosophers in the sense that it establishes how we are able to know anything at all, and thus plays the vital role of the foundation, or of a strong point of coherence, for the structure of our understanding, so too, is the philosophy of language of interest to us in so far as language *is* the very structure, the very matter, of which philosophy is made. Of course, language is not just used by the philosopher. The scientist, the mathematician, and the artist[1] all engage in practices that are deeply involved, if not inherently connected, with language. It is in this way that one must turn language upon itself, one must look to the philosophy of language, if one is to gain further insight into the connections that permeate throughout our diverse conceptual framework, i.e. if one wishes to attain a better understanding of *our* understanding, through seeing how philosophy, science, and the arts all find connection in language.

One of the strongest influences language holds is through the effect it has on our intuitions. Indeed, intuitions are bewildering upon initial consideration, and they even hold somewhat of a mystical connotation. Nonetheless, they are an inherent part of our understanding of the world, and without them we would likely lack the ability to know much of anything. As Michael Huemer defines them, intuitions are initial rational appearances, "an intuition *that p* is a state of its seeming to one *that p,* [which] is not dependent on inference from other beliefs and that results from thinking about *p,* as opposed to perceiving, remembering, or introspecting" (my emphasis, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 102). Using this understanding of intuitions has led Huemer to hold the principle of *phenomenal conservatism,* which essentially states that we have reason to believe that things are the way that they appear to be, unless we have reason to believe otherwise (which, could only come through another appearance). In other words, it is rational to go with what appears to be the case, in the absence of defeaters. I am inclined to believe that something like this must be held if we are to make any epistemic progress at all. How are we to justify the rules of logic, of fundamental mathematics, or of the reliability of sense perceptions if not through appealing to rational appearances? Whether or not these appearances establish apodictic certainty is still able to be held with a skeptical eye, though one cannot deny that completely refuting intuitions as a method of justified belief leaves one with very little room to avoid universal skepticism, and is also, as Huemer argues, self-defeating. Hence, if intuitions are seen as essential to our understanding of the world as we

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[1] I use the term 'artist' broadly, in so far as it means one who creates art. Hence, the term 'art' will also be used broadly, and I will use it to refer to anything from painting, film, music, and literature, or anything else that uses human creative power in ways typically understood as *art.*

know it, and if language can affect our intuitions, then it follows that an investigation into language and its effects on intuitions will give us deeper insight into our overall understanding of the world.[2]

This paper will investigate just this, turning to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, specifically his *Philosophical Investigations* and his idea of language games. In doing so, it will be shown how the traditional practice of conceptual analysis, one that attempts to define concepts precisely in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions through the creation of thought experiments, is unable to explicate or justify all of our intuitions regarding certain concepts. As I interpret Wittgenstein, language gains much of its meaning through its usage, and this meaning is synonymous, or at least correlated with, various conceptual intuitions we find ourselves having. Given that language usage can directly affect, or even make up, certain conceptual intuitions, it becomes clear that there is a need in analytic philosophy, in so far as it is concerned with the analysis of philosophically interesting concepts, to expand its methods of analysis to encapsulate a greater area of language than it currently does. In this expansion we will better be able to clarify the source and nature of certain conceptual intuitions that we hold, and this in turn will help us learn more about the nature of certain philosophically interesting concepts. Essentially, language is an incredibly nuanced and diverse set of practices, and if analytic philosophy continues to only look into thought experiments developed within the classroom, the office, or the arm chair, then traditional conceptual analysis will lose insight into certain contexts of language, and hence into certain nuances of our intuitions.

One area of language that traditional conceptual analysis (and analytic philosophy in general) has largely ignored is art. This is not to say that contemporary philosophers have not tried to provide necessary and sufficient conditions to analyze the concept of 'art'. This has certainly been done. Rather, this is to say that art has not been held in proper esteem by the contemporary analytic community with regard to its ability to provide insight into our conceptual intuitions. In art, language is given the chance to explore itself in ways that are not seen in many other areas of human thought. Art subjects language to the full flexed strength of the imagination, and often this can result in strange, yet understandable, narratives. These narratives, in turn, can reveal potent thought experiments that shed light on certain intuitions that we hold.

Of course, to fully realize this argument this paper must engage in an in depth analysis of an artwork, and show how it manipulates our conceptual intuitions in a way that a traditional thought experiment might not, and hence also why it is necessary to expand our methods of analysis to include explications of our intuitions that are not based upon necessary and sufficient conditions. This paper will analyze the animated television show *Rick and Morty,* with regard to the concept of personal identity and persistence at play within its narrative, in order to provide evidence for, and respond to objections against, the neo-Wittgensteinian outlook that language can influence our conceptual intuitions. In doing so, it will be shown why art, and artistic critique, is an inescapable alley

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[2] If one is still skeptical about the role intuition plays in our understanding of the world, I would advise them to read more of Huemer's work referenced at the end of this paper. He goes much deeper into the subject than I can in this paper. However, I will touch more on this subject in the next section, through an investigation of how intuitions have played a role in contemporary philosophy and in conceptual analysis.

that a philosopher must wander through if they wish to understand the full diversity of the intuitions that play a vital role in our most sophisticated belief systems.

With regard to formatting, the following and second section of this paper will provide a short summary of conceptual analysis as it has been traditionally practiced, elaborating on the value of intuitions to our understanding of the world. This section will also argue that a neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts can help us explain the lack of consensus and differing intuitions that were a part of the traditional practice of conceptual analysis. Concluding that one must, if one is to fully understand our conceptual intuitions and overcome the traditional shortfalls, expand one's methods of analysis past the formulation of precise definitions through necessary and sufficient conditions, and look into the nature of many different regions of language that avert such precision. In the third section, parts of the narrative of the television show *Rick and Morty* will be thoroughly analyzed as a logically possible thought experiment in order to show how our intuitions with regard to certain concepts avoid being explicated in the form of necessary and sufficient conditions, and how an analysis that looks to explain the source of our intuitions in language can give us more insight into the concept of personal persistence and identity at play within the show's narrative. This, in turn, will enhance the explanatory power and comprehension of the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and intuitions presented. Lastly, the fourth section of this paper will discuss conclusions and implications, reflecting on the relevance of the humanities to the natural sciences due to the insight they provide into conceptual intuitions that we use in various areas of sophisticated thought. Also, this section will reiterate art's ability to create unique contexts of language that provide a useful source of knowledge for analytic philosophers concerned with a better understanding of certain concepts.

§2 Traditional Conceptual Analysis, a Neo-Wittgensteinian Theory, and the Need to Diversify Our Methods

Conceptual analysis, as it is understood in much of contemporary analytic philosophy, is the practice of providing precise definitions of concepts. These definitions are supposed to clarify and expound the meaning that is contained within a given concept, and it has been thought that this is best done through the provision of necessary and sufficient conditions.

A necessary condition for any given concept is a premise, clause, or state that must be fulfilled if something is to fall under said concept. For example, consider the concept 'bachelor'. A bachelor is an unmarried male. Thus, for the concept 'bachelor', 'unmarried' is a necessary condition, because if anything is a bachelor, then it must also be unmarried.

A sufficient condition for a given concept is a premise, clause, or state that, if fulfilled, entails that whatever fulfilled it must fall under said concept. In other words, a sufficient condition is such that if any given entity has said sufficient condition, then it must fall under said concept. With regard to the bachelor example, being unmarried is not a sufficient condition for being a bachelor, because one can be an unmarried woman. A sufficient condition for being a bachelor is the conjunctive state of being both unmarried and male, if one is an unmarried male, then one must be a bachelor. Thus, given the nature of necessary and sufficient conditions, one can formally define the concept 'bachelor' as:

X is a bachelor if and only if: (1) X is a male; and, (2) X is unmarried.[3]

Philosophers love the concept 'bachelor' because it is a concept that can be analyzed *precisely*, which means that it can be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; and furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, it seems that philosophers love the concept 'bachelor' because it is a concept that has a precise definition that is agreed upon by the majority of philosophers.[4] There are other concepts as well, most of which lie outside the realm of philosophical concepts, that share the trait of having precise definitions that are agreed upon with strong consensus. These are often, but not always, mathematical, physical, or logical concepts. However, something interesting occurs with the majority of philosophically interesting concepts, concepts like 'knowledge', 'causation', 'personal identity', and 'morality', and with many other concepts that have been the subject of investigation throughout the history of philosophical thought. What is interesting is that many of the concepts that have received philosophical scrutiny over the years have obtained little consensus amongst philosophers with regard to the precise definitions that have been formulated to define them. In other words, philosophers do not agree much on the necessary and sufficient conditions for various concepts that have been of interest to the discipline.

How could this be? Well, perhaps one thinks that every philosophically interesting concept can be precisely defined, however it is just the case that we have not yet formulated the correct definitions. Philosophers just need more time and resources, and eventually the proper definitions will be discovered. This thought seems possible *prima facie,* however, once one has a better understanding of the process of conceptual analysis as it has been done in the past one hundred or so years, it seems unlikely. To understand why this is so, it is necessary to do an analysis *of* conceptual analysis. In other words, one must understand how the process of conceptual analysis is typically done, and once this process is understood, it can be better judged whether or not it is capable of completing its goals, e.g. providing precise definitions for philosophically interesting concepts. Hence, let us look to an example of conceptual analysis as it has been traditionally practiced.

Consider the concept of knowledge. It was thought, for a very long time, that knowledge was a justified and true belief.[5] To state this formally, in a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, one can write:

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[3] 'If and only if', used in the formal definition above, is a logical term used by philosophers to signify that the list of conditions are necessary and sufficient for the concept being defined.

[4] It is the opinion of this author that the reason 'bachelor' has a precise definition agreed upon by the majority of philosophers is because of the lack of in-depth conceptual analysis that this concept has received. Is a man, engaged to be married, a bachelor? Is a widowed man a bachelor? Is an unmarried demi-man, a female by sex who is trans-masculine and identifies as a male, yet skeptical of binary conceptions of gender, a bachelor? How about a man who has been separated from his wife for three years, yet is still not legally divorced, is he a bachelor? Does it matter if this man lives in a studio apartment and dates other women, or is this irrelevant information? Also, Professor Heathwood introduced me to this question: is the Pope a bachelor? These are questions that seemingly problematize the definition of 'bachelor' above, and it seems likely that the reason there is much consensus over the definition of 'bachelor' is because not many philosophers are willing to devote their time to a lengthy analysis of the concept.

[5] The idea of knowledge as justified true belief goes back to Plato, in his dialogue *Theaetetus.*

> X knows Y if and only if: (1) X believes Y, (2) Y is true, and (3) X is justified in believing Y.

It is thanks to the philosopher Edmund Gettier and his famous paper *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* that the definition of knowledge above is widely rejected in the present day philosophical community. Gettier took the definition above, which will now be referred to as the *traditional* definition of knowledge, and he subjected it to two different counterexamples. Both of these counterexamples exemplified clear cases of a *lack* of knowledge, even though both counterexamples fulfilled the necessary and sufficient conditions stated by the traditional definition. Thus, since the counterexamples fulfilled the traditional definition of knowledge, yet clearly exemplified non-knowledge, the traditional definition of knowledge was to be rejected on Gettier's account.

Let us consider the first counterexample Gettier provides. It concerns Smith and Jones, both of whom have applied for a certain job. Smith, in this scenario, has strong evidence that the following proposition is true:

> (a) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (a) is strong, perhaps the president of the company assured Smith that Jones would get the job, and perhaps ten minutes ago Smith counted all of the items in Jones's pocket and came up with ten coins. A consequence of Smith's justified belief in (a) would be that Smith would be justified in believing any proposition that is logically entailed by (a). Hence, Smith accepts the following proposition on the basis that it is logically entailed by a proposition he is already justified in believing:

> (b) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Now, let us suppose that, unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. Perhaps, because the president changed his mind on a whim, or perhaps because the president is not actually in charge of who gets hired in certain sectors of the company. Furthermore, suppose that Smith himself also had ten coins in his pocket, which he had put there after he had bought lunch and that he had not counted, so he did not know there were ten coins in his pocket.

In this thought experiment the following are true: (b) is true, Smith believes (b) to be true, and Smith is justified in believing (b) to be true. However, it is clearly the case that Smith does not know (b) to be true, because Smith's belief in (b) is not justified in virtue of Smith's knowledge that he himself will get the job, or even that he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Rather, Smith's belief in (b) was justified from a logical inference from (a), which Smith was justified in believing given his conversation with the company's president, despite (a)'s actual falsity. Thus, this scenario acts as a counterexample to the traditional definition of knowledge, because it satisfies all the necessary and sufficient conditions of the definition, yet is still a clear case of non-knowledge.

When Gettier presented this counterexample to the philosophical community, many philosophers attempted to revise the traditional definition of knowledge, or propose entirely new definitions. Many of these new or amended definitions were then subjected to

further thought experiments and counterexamples, and it is still the case that there is not a universally accepted, nor a strong consensus supporting, a precise definition of our concept of knowledge.[6]

It might seem strange to one how the thought experiment above is a *clear* case of non-knowledge, despite its fulfilling the traditional definition of the concept. The reason for this is that the thought experiment captured the majority of philosopher's *intuitions* regarding knowledge. That is to say, when the majority of philosophers considered Gettier's thought experiment, it seemed to them to be a blatant case of non-knowledge, and certainly not a case of knowledge. However, one may still wonder how these intuitions came to be? Why did it seem to them to be a case of non-knowledge rather than of knowledge? And perhaps more importantly, why are these intuitions to be trusted? Are intuitions not often wrong?

These concerns highlight an important nuance with the process of conceptual analysis. Namely, that intuition is the guiding light. Consider the process of conceptual analysis, as it occurred with the concept of knowledge above: First, a precise definition of knowledge was formulated; then, the definition was subjected to various thought experiments, and if these thought experiments were logically possible and captured the intuitions of philosophers with regard to the concept, but did not fulfill the definition, or, if they did not capture the intuitions of philosophers with regard to the concept, but did fulfill the definition, then the thought experiments were deemed counterexamples and the definition was rejected; then, a new definition would be formulated, and subjected to new thought experiments. It was seemingly never the case that philosophers would preserve a definition over a strong intuition. If the intuition and the definition were in conflict, then the definition was often thought incorrect and the intuition preserved.

The intuitions of philosophers thus become a point of interest for anyone who is skeptical that the process of traditional conceptual analysis will always yield precise definitions for certain concepts, and in an investigation into the intuitions of philosophers, it seems fruitful to look into the sources of such intuitions. Thus, we turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein and his philosophy of language, specifically, his concept of language games. In considering how language comes to get its meaning, we find insight into a source of the philosopher's intuition.

For Wittgenstein, our language is like "an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, [...] houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and

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[6] My reasoning for saying that there is no precise definition of the concept of knowledge that is accepted by the majority of philosophers is based on the fact that such a definition has not come to my attention; and that, and this is perhaps the more important point, epistemology books, which tend to collect the most important and influential writings on the subject, do not hold one definition as the true or correct formulation of the concept. Rather, they present various writings and definitions on the concept, and seemingly ask the reader to decide, or to investigate the matter further. Nonetheless, I have not conducted a study asking practicing philosophers if they accept a precise definition of knowledge as true, and thus I have not seen, through an organized investigation into the matter, whether or not there is a precise definition that is accepted by the majority, or even a plurality, of existing philosophers. Of course, even if there were a consensus amongst philosophers regarding a precise definition of knowledge, this does not entail that said definition would be correct. It might just be that philosophers in a hundred years find a compelling reason to reject this consensus, in the same way that Gettier convinced us to reject Plato's definition.

uniform houses" (Wittgenstein, 11ᵉ). This is to say, that our language is a very nuanced and complex entity, with a variety of diverse influences. To try and understand what a region of our language means, what a word or phrase signifies, expresses, or can be defined as, one must look to where that word or phrase naturally occurs. One must, to return to Wittgenstein's metaphor, go to the region(s) of the city in which the word is found, and walk around the alleyways, houses, or blocks of which it is a part. In order to understand something about a part of a language, one must look to where that part of language is at home, and analyze the structures that make up and surround that home.

To speak less metaphorically, Wittgenstein thinks that language gets its meaning from its usage, and this idea is representative of what the concept 'language game' signifies. As Wittgenstein writes, "[the] word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 15ᵉ). Since attempting to understand the meanings of words and phrases is an attempt to understand aspects of language, and language is characterized by various forms of life, like speaking, writing, formulating hypotheses, thanking, cursing, and performing a play; it follows, then, that to understand words and phrases one must look to the forms of life that use said word or phrase, and it is in that usage that one will become familiar with the meaning of a piece of language.

To connect the concept of language games to conceptual analysis and the intuitions of philosophers, consider what a concept is. A concept, to put it simply, is an idea or a notion. However, concepts are deeply connected with language, and most of the time, a concept is signified by a word. Thus, the meaning of a concept often becomes inherently intertwined, if not equivalent to, the usage of the word that signifies it. This means that to understand a concept one must understand the language that is a part of it, and in understanding the language one must look to the way in which the language is used.

Going back to the concept of knowledge, philosophers had various intuitions with regard to what the concept meant, and they used these intuitions in judging whether or not various definitions were appropriate to the concept. What was the source of these intuitions? Well, if we follow a Wittgensteinian model of language, then it was the usage of words like 'knowledge', 'know', 'knew', 'knowing', and perhaps other words like 'certainty', 'justification', 'belief', and 'doubt'. The way these words are used in ordinary language likely influenced the intuitions of philosophers. Hence, if a thought experiment described a scenario that was alike enough to instances in philosophers' actual lives in which they would use a phrase like 'she did not know …', then the thought experiment captured an instance of non-knowledge. Hence, Gettier's counterexamples described scenarios that were like actual scenarios in which it would be appropriate to say 'Smith did not know …'.

If we accept the reasoning above, then philosophers engaged in the process of conceptual analysis were following their intuitions regarding the concept they were analyzing; and, these intuitions were rooted, at least partially, in the usage of the language that makes up the concept, language that the philosophers had been exposed to throughout their lives. In looking at why philosophers have been unable to find consensus with regard to various concepts, one must turn to the usage of the language that various philosophers have been exposed to. This leads to questions like whether or not these philosophers differ in their mother tongue, and how much do philosophers who grew up speaking different languages disagree with regard to their intuitions on certain concepts? Furthermore, even if certain philosophers hold the same first language, how much does their cultural identity,

parental or personal psychology, schooling, or any other unique circumstance that might affect the linguistic usage surrounding them determine or affect their intuitions with regard to certain concepts? Indeed, the lack of consensus in the philosophical community with regard to various concepts is perhaps rooted in the diverse forms of life that various philosophers come from, which is exactly what one would expect given a Wittgensteinian theory of language.

To return to Wittgenstein's city metaphor, it seems as if philosophers engaged in conceptual analysis through the formulation of precise definitions have attempted to take very old concepts, structures of the old city of language with winding alleys and narrow roads, and attempted to rebuild them in the form of contemporary suburbs, structures built on a grid and each building following a specific regulated mold. However, in their attempts to restructure the old city of language, they change the very nature of the language, and thus are unable to appease their conceptual intuitions with the newly structured suburbs, for their conceptual intuitions have their roots in the old city of language.

Nonetheless, one can still turn to an objection hinted at earlier in this paper. Namely, that a lack of consensus in the philosophical community with regard to the precise definitions of concepts does not entail that such definitions do not exist. Perhaps, the lack of consensus is due to a difference in linguistic usage that various philosophers are exposed to, however, perhaps certain philosophers have been exposed to more imperfect uses of language. This is to say, that maybe there is a perfect language, that our intuitions are perhaps rooted in an apodictic logic that can be universally translated. Perhaps, the languages of today, having evolved from various ancient and dead languages, have inherited and developed many bad habits. All philosophers have to do is develop a new language, which does not subject itself to usages that conflict one another with regard to certain concepts. Perhaps, the next great step in human thought is the construction of languages that are more precise in their uses of certain words and phrases that are essential to our sophisticated beliefs. Maybe it is time we burn down all of our old cities, and start building new ones.

However, it is unclear how one would go about creating a 'perfect' language. According to whose intuitions would we start to build the use of the words and phrases that would make up the concepts we consider indispensible? One might think that maybe a perfect language could be derived, somehow, from logic. However, this seems implausible. How could a concept like 'causation', or 'morality', be derived from formal logical axioms? And, perhaps more importantly, a new question arises: are our intuitions with regard to formal logic founded, or at least influenced, by cultural, linguistic, and psychological phenomena? And, if so, doesn't this seemingly erase the possibility of a perfect logic, from which a perfect language could be derived? Wittgenstein, on the idea of a perfect language, had the following to say:

> [In] philosophy we often *compare* the use of words with games, calculi with fixed rules, but cannot say that someone who is using language *must* be playing such a game.— But if someone says that our languages only *approximate* to such calculi, he is standing on the very brink of a misunderstanding. For then it may look as if what we were talking about in logic were an *ideal* language. As if our logic were, so to speak, a logic for a vacuum. [...] But here the word "ideal" is liable to mislead, for it sounds as if these languages were better, more perfect, than our everyday language; and as if it took a logician to show people at last what a proper sentence looks like.

> All this, however, can appear in the right light only when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning something, and thinking. For it will then also become clear what may mislead us (and did mislead me) into thinking that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it, he is thereby operating a calculus according to definite rules. (Wittgenstein, 43[e])

Wittgenstein touches here on the heart of our concerns, stating that it is through a misunderstanding of the use of words that one encounters the idea of an ideal or perfect language. This misunderstanding is that the use of words is, or is at least close to and possible of becoming, a fixed calculi.

The question then becomes, if the use of words and phrases are not fixed calculi, or a calculus, then what is it/are they? The answer to this is incredibly nuanced, and differs greatly depending on the words and phrases one is interested in, but speaking simply, it is best stated by the quote mentioned earlier, "speaking a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 15[e]). Language games are forms of life, like performing a play, watching a film, cheering, writing a letter, writing a philosophy paper, signing a command, and winking one's eye. Furthermore, these things are not fixed calculi, and thus the idea that some kind of fixed calculus runs through them all, from which an ideal language could be derived, misinterprets the informal and diverse nature of language.

The next section of this paper will discuss this point more thoroughly. Arguing that if one holds, despite the vast diversity of forms of life that make up our various languages, that one can find a thread of logic, a fixed calculus from which a perfect language could perhaps be derived, between all of the usages of various concepts we consider to be philosophically interesting; then, it would seem that one would also have to hold that this thread should be able to be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. This of course entails that there should be no possible thought experiment that captures our intuitions with regard to a certain concept, and yet is unable to be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. However, this is exactly what occurs within the television series *Rick and Morty,* which will be analyzed in the following section.

It may seem strange that this paper, arguing for a philosophical thesis, would turn to the analysis of an animated comedy, to a cartoon television show. However, this is exactly what one should expect given the arguments presented above. Animated comedy is a form of life, in fact it is a form of life that is quite unique and somewhat of a recent phenomenon, yet one that is still derivative of many old traditions of human storytelling. Thus, it represents an important region of our language, and an analysis of how it uses language provides unique insights into our conceptual intuitions.

If we as philosophers are no longer solely concerned with precise definitions of concepts, if we as philosophers turn to the usage of language to better understand philosophically intriguing ideas, then there becomes a new importance on looking to forms of life, and to paying attention to the diversity of these forms. Furthermore, art, which refers to a wide range of unique and intriguing forms of life, becomes a focal point for those interested in philosophical concepts. Art explores concepts in ways that many other forms of life do not; it is a place where we play with language. Thus, as philosophers it is not just in curiosity or pleasure that we should analyze the way artworks use language and concepts, as if they were some extracurricular philosophical activity. Rather, it is imperative that philosophers turn to artworks in order to understand, to the highest

degree possible, the very concepts that are essential to the discipline of philosophy, and also, in order to understand the very nature of a 'concept' itself. In the diverse uses of language that occur within artworks, one can become aware of various nuances that are an integral part of philosophical concepts. One can gain insight into the world and the language we use to understand it, and in this the philosophical value of art is reborn within *analytic* philosophy.

This should make it apparent that the aims of this paper are, by no means, attempting to do away with the practice of conceptual analysis, even as a practice of formulating precise definitions. Rather, it is arguing that our concepts are more than precise definitions, they are understood through intuitions influenced by the usage of language and other forms of life, and thus precise definitions will not always be able to dictate their meaning. However, precise definitions certainly may still be helpful in illuminating what the concept is *not* necessarily implying, and there is still value to this traditional practice. Of course, as will be shown, traditional conceptual analysis will not always be able to suit our needs, and there is a need to diversify our methods in order to better understand our intuitions and concepts.

§3 Conceptual Analysis in Absurd Fictions: *Rick and Morty* as Evidence for a Neo-Wittgensteinian Theory of Language and Concepts

As stated earlier, this second section aims to provide evidence for the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language, and on the idea of the nature of conceptual analysis as a process that needs diverse methods to match the diverse forms of life that influence our conceptual intuitions. This section aims to provide this evidence through an analysis of the television show *Rick and Morty*.

This evidence will come in two ways. The first of which, detailed explicitly in the following subsection, is a response to the objection mentioned in the previous section, which stated that precise definitions for all philosophically interesting concepts could be formulated through the creation or derivation of an ideal language. This refutation will come through an analysis of how *Rick and Morty* employs the concept of personal identity and the persistence of persons within its logically possible narrative. To be more specific, *Rick and Morty* employs this concept in a way that captures our intuitions, which is to say, that when one watches the show one is led to believe that the characters Rick and Morty are persisting persons, i.e. that the Rick at the beginning of the episode is the same Rick as the Rick at the end of the episode, or at the end of the season, for that matter. However, despite this fact that *Rick and Morty* captures our intuitions with regard to the concept of personal identity and persistence, the series contains many events that are counterexamples to the conventional precise definitions of personal identity and the persistence of persons.

This plethora of counterexamples to various definitions of the concept of personal identity and persistence found within the *Rick and Morty* series emphasizes the point that our intuitions with regard to said concept are founded on factors other than those that can be defined by a precise definition; which, in turn, goes to show the frugal nature of attempting to derive or create an ideal language. If our intuitions with regard to

philosophically important concepts can be captured by thought experiments that are unable to appease a precise definition, then these intuitions would not be useful in attempting to dictate the usage of certain concepts within an ideal language. That is, if by 'ideal language' one means a language that only contains concepts that can be precisely defined. These conceptual intuitions would be inherently imperfect, so to speak, and any constructor of an ideal language would have to abandon the use of said concepts in the new language.

Two objections seem to immediately present themselves: 1) that perhaps the concept of personal identity within *Rick and Morty* is grounded on a definition that has not yet been formulated, perhaps an unconventional definition; and, 2) that even if *Rick and Morty* refutes the idea that the concept of personal identity is not grounded on a precise definition but rather on the use of language, this does not entail that all philosophically interesting concepts are founded on the use of language; *Rick and Morty* acts as evidence for the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of concepts only with regard to the concept of personal identity and the persistence of persons. These objections are formidable, and they will be reasoned against in the second subsection.

The second way this evidence will come is through an explication of the factors that do affect our intuitions of personal persistence and identity within the series, and thus also are insightful with regard to the nuances contained in said concept. One of these factors is the use of language within the series, especially the way in which the character Rick speaks of himself and constructs his character. Another factor is the way in which the show conforms to a paradigm of comedic television, which can be understood as a kind of language game itself.

Before jumping into this analysis of *Rick and Morty,* it should first be reiterated that a fictitious narrative[7], as long as it is logically possible,[8] could be, if it has the right properties, a counterexample to any given precise definition of any given concept. That is, counterexamples created by philosophers of the analytical tradition are seemingly always fictional narratives created with an intended purpose to illuminate an intuition and to refute a definition; thus, as long as a logically possible fictional narrative illuminates an intuition while also refuting a definition, it is a counterexample, regardless of the original intention the author had in creating the narrative.

Hence, it is appropriate to look to works of art referencing logical possibilities, especially those employing narrative, in order to find counterexamples and thought experiments for our philosophical investigations. In this way, the entire series *Rick and Morty* itself appears to be a counterexample to the idea that the traditional practice of conceptual analysis is capable of helping us understand and justify our intuitions with regard to every philosophically interesting concept. It emphasizes the nuanced nature of

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[7] A 'fictitious narrative', or perhaps more colloquially a 'fiction', is understood by this paper as a non-referential narrative. That is to say, as a narrative (a series of causally related events and entities) that do not refer to happenings of the actual world in which we live. This definition is in debt to the work of Dorrit Cohn. It is to my understanding that this paper uses 'fiction', 'fictional narrative', and other synonymous phrases in this manner consistently.

[8] An event or entity is 'logically possible' so long as it does not contain any formal contradictions (e.g. of the form: *A both has property P and does not have property P*). Furthermore, this formal contradiction may not be explicitly stated by a description of the entity/event, but often is derived as an implication from said stated description.

many of our concepts, and leads us to the idea that one must look to the use of language, to paradigmatic or culturally prevalent narratives, and to other forms of life that influence our intuitions.

§3.1 'Rick and Morty', the Concept of Personal Identity, and a Response to the Ideal Language Objection

To provide a bit of background information, *Rick and Morty* (2013-Present) is an animated science-fiction television series created by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland. Throughout the various episodes of the series Rick Sanchez, an amoral scientific genius, finds himself engaged in various different activities throughout the universe, and in his endeavors he always brings along his timid, and less brilliant, grandson Morty. The majority of episodes involve Rick and Morty going on outlandish adventures throughout the universe.

Like many television shows, it is an implied truth within the series *Rick and Morty* that the character Rick and the character Morty, as well as all the other side characters, persist throughout the series and have a unique identity. In other words, the Rick and Morty from the first episode of the first season are the same Rick and Morty as the Rick and Morty in the final episode of the last season. The characters persist throughout the television series and throughout the various episodes.

It is important to note here the distinction between characters and persons. Certainly, Rick and Morty are characters in a fictional narrative, and not actual persons. However, it seems that even if fictional characters are not real persons, persons in the actual world, it is perfectly appropriate to conceive of them as *fictional* persons. Though 'character' and 'person' are not synonyms, and it could be the case that certain fictional characters are not fictional persons, it is the case that the characters Rick and Morty *are* fictional persons. This is to say that if Rick and Morty actually existed, then we would conceive of them as actual persons, given their capacity for self-awareness, emotions, empathy, complex thought, and seemingly all the other conditions one normally lumps into the criteria of personhood.

Given that it is appropriate to conceive Rick and Morty as fictional persons, we can analyze the identity and persistence conditions for their characters in the same way as we would analyze the identity and persistence conditions of actual persons. Even if, the persistence and identity conditions of *persons* might not apply to all possible *characters* that one might encounter in a fictional work of art.[9]

The different formulations of the concept of personal identity and persistence that this section will focus on are the ones most present in the philosophical literature: the psychological view, the biological view, the narrative view, and the anthropological view. Though the psychological view might be the most popular amongst many thinkers, the

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[9] What comes to mind are possible non-person characters like animals, plants, etc. However, neither the character Rick nor Morty fall into the category of non-person characters. Furthermore, now that it has been established that the persistence and identity conditions of certain characters can be the same as persons, this paper will often refer to the persistence and identity conditions of Rick and Morty as 'characters' and 'persons' interchangeably, since both Rick and Morty are characters and fictional persons.

biological view will be considered first. This is because it is normally an easy way to think about animated fiction.

In animated fictions, different characters are usually distinguished through different animations and different voice actors. A character will be drawn a certain way, and will be voiced by a certain actor or actress doing a certain voice, and this character will be the only character drawn and voiced in this manner. In this way, through a unique artistic representation, the animation and voice acting can be seen as referencing or signifying a single fictional biological organism.

Consider what the biological view on the identity and persistence of persons claims, which has been defended by thinkers like Eric Olson and Paul Snowdon. This view argues that what constitutes a person is that they are a rational organism, and what makes the person persist is the continued existence of said person's organism. Thus, our intuition that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons throughout the *Rick and Morty* television series, if it is to be founded on a precisely defined concept of personal identity in terms of the biological view of personal identity and persistence, should be formally stated as the following:

> Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons if and only if: 1) Rick and Morty are distinct rational organisms at t_1, 2) There are rational organisms at t_2 that are biologically continuous with Rick and Morty's respectively distinct organisms.

These two conditions are necessary and sufficient for Rick and Morty to persist as fictional persons on the biological conception. Furthermore, since Rick and Morty are characters within an animated television series, the viewer of the series should be able to know that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons because there are unique representations, created by animations and vocalizations, that symbolize the persistence of the organisms that are Rick and Morty respectively. Thus, if it is true that Rick and Morty persist as fictional persons in the animated narrative, and if the viewer of the series is *to know* that these characters persist throughout the series; then, it would seem on the biological view, that it must also be true that there are unique representations of Rick and Morty that are presented at various times throughout said narrative, which indubitably refer to the continuous organisms that are Rick and Morty.

Figure 1. Rick (left), Morty (right)

This latter truth, however, is not found within the television series. Consider the cartoon animation of Rick and Morty in Figure 1. This is how Rick and Morty are drawn, and though this paper does not have the resources to exemplify how they are voiced, it will be stated that they each are represented as having distinct voices in the series, Rick, with a raspy older voice, and Morty, with a shaky younger voice. Furthermore, as the biological view of personal persistence requires, within the majority of episodes in the *Rick and Morty* series it is true that that there are unique representations of Rick and Morty that are presented at various times throughout the narrative, which indubitably refer to the continuous organisms that are Rick and Morty. However, there are certain episodes that do

not hold such a truth, there are certain episodes that use the same animations and voice acting to refer to various different characters. In *Rick and Morty* these various characters are spoken of as 'alternate' Ricks and Mortys. This will be explicated more specifically below, however it is important here to note that when this paper is referring to the main Rick and Morty of the series, the Rick and Morty to which the title '*Rick and Morty'* refers and that are the characters that persist throughout the various episodes, this paper will simply use the referring expressions 'Rick' and 'Morty'. When this paper is referring to other characters within the *Rick and Morty* narrative that share the same name, animation, and voice acting as the original Rick and Morty characters, yet are still distinct characters in themselves, this paper will use the referring expressions '$Rick_n$' and '$Morty_n$', where 'n' can be any value used to distinguish between qualitatively similar yet numerically distinct characters.

   To understand these alternate Ricks and Mortys in the series, consider the tenth episode of the first season, entitled, *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind.* The plot of this episode begins with two characters, $Rick_1$ and $Morty_1$, and their family eating breakfast together. However, a couple of seconds into the narrative, two other characters, $Rick_2$ and $Morty_2$, enter the dining room through a portal and kill the first shown $Rick_1$ and kidnap the first shown $Morty_1$. In other words, two characters that are drawn and voiced in the same style that Rick and Morty are usually drawn and voiced in are shown eating breakfast with their family, and then two characters that are drawn differently than how Rick and Morty are usually drawn (the Rick-ish character has a scar drawn on

Figure 2. $Rick_1$ and $Morty_1$ being murdered by $Rick_2$ and $Morty_2$, none of these characters, despite their appearance, are the Rick and Morty that persist throughout the series.

his face while the Morty-ish character is drawn with an eye patch) enter the room through a portal and kill the character $Rick_1$ and kidnap the character $Morty_1$. Essentially, this intro scene depicts several characters all with similar characteristics to the characters Rick and Morty, yet all of the characters are numerically and biologically distinct from the original characters Rick and Morty, despite the initial appearance that the viewer of the show has that $Rick_1$ and $Morty_1$ are the characters that the show is about, and that have persisted throughout the series.

   After this intro scene, the show plays its title sequence with a few introductory credits, and then the rest of the episode begins. The narrative continues onto another scene where Rick and Morty are eating breakfast; however, this time it depicts the *real* Rick and Morty, the two characters that have persisted throughout the television series.

   The rest of the plot, which is important to the concerns of this section, will be outlined more below. However, as of now there is already enough information to explain how the biological concept cannot support or explicate our intuitions that the characters Rick and Morty persist throughout the television series. As mentioned earlier, fictional biological organisms in animated fictions are referred to by specific animations and voices. Yet, in the first minutes of the episode *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind,* there are two distinct characters, Rick and $Rick_1$, that are referred to with the same animations and

voices, and these are known to refer to different characters because $Rick_1$ is killed while Rick is not. Thus, even if there were one fictional biological organism that is the fictional person Rick, the viewer of the show has no idea what that organism is. The viewer lacks the epistemic capabilities to know that the same animation refers to the same fictional organism, and thus is not justified in believing that the fictional person of Rick is a fictional organism because multiple fictional organisms are referred to by the same animation in Figure 1.

In other words, if one were to believe that the character Rick, or the character Morty for that matter, persisted throughout the television series *Rick and Morty* by means of a persisting organism, then they would only be justified in believing this if they can, through referencing the narrative of the series, show the persistence of this organism. In most animated narratives, one can be justified in believing that a fictional organism persists through the narrative by referencing multiple instances in which the unique animation and voice of the character appear; since, in most animated narratives, this unique animation references only one fictional organism, and thus multiple appearances of this animation entail multiple instances of said organism. Of course, in the *Rick and Morty* series, the character Rick does not have a unique animation or voice. The same animation is used for multiple characters, and thus it is not clear that the character Rick is, or is even inhabiting, a biologically persisting organism, because such an organism does not have a clear reference in the narrative of the series.

Figure 3. Various animations of Rick are displayed in the same shot, all referencing various Rick-like characters.

A proponent of the biological concept of personhood and personal persistence might respond and say that even though the viewer of the television series does not know that Rick is a biologically persisting organism, the viewer can still conceive of him as such. However, this response fails. Even if it is possible to conceive of this, to conceive of a possible world in which all of the events in the series *Rick and Morty* are true and Rick is a persisting organism, it is also possible to conceive of a world in which all the events in the series of *Rick and Morty* are true even though Rick is not, nor inhabits, a persisting organism. Thus, given the events in the *Rick and Morty* series, the biological concept of personhood and personal persistence does not explain our intuitions that Rick is a persisting person, because the events in the narrative of the series do not entail that there is a persisting organism.

Furthermore, *Rick and Morty* contains numerous characters referenced with the same animation and voice acting that the main characters Rick and Morty are, and this creates a saturated effect on the viewer, forcing them to abandon all use of the animation of Rick in figure 1 as justification for the belief that Rick is a persisting organism. As the plot of *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind* continues, Rick and Morty are arrested by the council of Ricks, a society of Rick-like individuals with the collective goal of protecting Rick-like individuals from various galactic threats. This society believes that the Rick and Morty they arrested, the ones that the show is about, are responsible for killing $Rick_1$ and $Morty_1$ shown at the beginning of the episode, as well as various other Rick-like and Morty-like

characters. After they are arrested they are brought to the headquarters of the society, where they encounter various Rick-like and Morty-like individuals (see Figure 3).

Now, perhaps the proponent of the biological definition of personal identity and persistence might claim that it is not our intuition that Rick and Morty persist throughout the narrative of the series. However, here an important point must be reiterated, namely, that in most of the Rick and Morty series, the animations of Rick and Morty are unique. In other words, the animations in Figure 1 are used solely to reference Rick and Morty in most of the episodes throughout the narrative, and no other characters. Thus, throughout the series, and throughout the beginning of season 1, the viewer does have the intuition that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons, and perhaps this is because the narrative is not over-saturated with various Rick-like and Morty-like characters. Nonetheless, Episode 10 of Season 1 stands out as a glaring counterexample to the idea that the precisely defined biological concept of personal identity and persistence explicates our intuitions in the show. This episode is saturated with various Rick-like and Morty-like characters, which seem to deny the viewer the capabilities to know that Rick and Morty are, or inhabit, persisting fictional organisms throughout the series.

Furthermore, even if one were to ignore the episode *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind,* one still would encounter other counterexamples to the idea that the biological definition of personal identity and persistence is at play within the *Rick and Morty* series. In Episode 7 of Season 2, *Big Trouble in Little Sanchez,* Rick implants his mind into another body. More specifically, for reasons irrelevant to this paper, Rick clones his body and ages it to adolescence, and then transfers his mind out of his old body and into this newly cloned and younger body. While Rick is in this younger clone body, his old body lies in a vat, presumably with the organs still functioning and the mind completely inactive.

This latter episode presents another counterexample to the idea that the reason why the viewer believes Rick is a persisting fictional person throughout the *Rick and Morty* television series is because Rick is a persisting organism. In this episode Rick persists as a person though he transfers bodies. Even as his old body persists in a vat, his character seemingly persists through his mental activities in a new cloned body, and thus Rick's personal persistence is not reliant on the persistence of a distinct organism.

The presence of multiple counterexamples to the biological definition of personal persistence and identity entails that this definition cannot explicate our intuitions with regard to Rick's and Morty's personal persistence. Though the biological definition may help us understand how we have these intuitions with regard to certain moments in the show, it is incapable of justifying these intuitions with regard to the show in its entirety, i.e. when all episodes are considered. Given this, it is now appropriate to turn to other theories of personal persistence and identity in order to see if they can explicate and/or justify our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons.

Consider the psychological conception of personal persistence, which was most famously introduced by John Locke, but also has been supported by contemporary philosophers such as Sydney Shoemaker and Derek Parfit. This, in its basic form, states that any given person persists if there exists another person at a later, or previous, time that is psychologically continuous with the original person. When expressed formally, and applied to the *Rick and Morty* narrative, the psychological definition of personal persistence can be stated as such:

Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons if and only if: 1) Rick and Morty are persons at some point t_1 in the narrative of the series, 2) there exists another two persons at t_2 in the series that are psychologically continuous with the Rick and Morty at t_1 respectively.

Here, 'psychologically continuous' means that the person at t_1 and t_2 is connected by various psychological states, which is often understood as meaning that the person at t_1 and t_2 share the same memories, and the later can remember various psychological states of the former.[10] Furthermore, the idea of a psychological connection can also mean that the psychological states of said person at t_1 were a causal influence on the psychological states of t_2 in a specific internal manner.

From this conception of personal persistence and identity, it follows that if our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting persons are to be explicated or founded on a precise definition, then there should be no counterexamples in the narrative of *Rick and Morty* that undermine the psychological conception of personal persistence and identity. Of course, this is not the case.

A counterexample occurs at the end of *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind,* the episode mentioned at the beginning of this section. To understand this counterexample, the episode's plot should be elaborated. Two Rick-like and Morty-like characters, referenced as $Rick_2$ and $Morty_2$ in this paper, have killed two other Rick-like and Morty-like characters, referenced as $Rick_1$ and $Morty_1$, in the intro of the episode displayed in Figure 2. As it turns out, $Rick_2$ and $Morty_2$ have killed many Rick-like and Morty-like characters, and the council of Ricks, a community of Rick-like individuals concerned with the safety of Rick-like individuals, is investigating Rick, the main persisting character about which the show is based, because they believe he is the culprit. Rick is arrested by the council of Ricks, however he is able to escape, and after he is free he starts an investigation into who the real culprit is, and eventually his detective work leads him to $Rick_2$, the real culprit. $Rick_2$, upon seeing Rick, uses force to capture Rick and then binds him to a table. There he confesses his deeds of killing many Rick-like individuals, and he also confesses his plan to download the contents of Rick's brain. $Rick_2$ does not, however, explicitly specify his intentions for why he plans to download the contents of Rick's brain, but it is implied, through a speech $Rick_2$ gives about how Rick and himself are close to one another on the spectrum of Rick-like individuals, that he believes some kind of tactical advantage can be gained from the download. After the intentions of $Rick_2$ are made clear, $Rick_2$ is seen looking through a

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[10] It should be understood that there is a classic objection in the philosophical literature that argues that memory presupposes identity, and thus memory cannot be the relation of personal persistence over time. In other words, perhaps memory is a sufficient condition for the fact that a human-person persists, for if one human remembers some event then that same human experienced said event, however memory does not then constitute the relation of personal identity that allows the person to persist through various events. This being so, Sydney Shoemaker has rephrased this memory relation of identity in terms of quasi-memory, i.e. when one remembers an experience and this experience is causally related in an appropriate way to the psychological state of the experiencer at the time of the experience. This is a broader concept of memory, of which regular memory, in which one remembers an event that they themselves experienced, is a subset. Though the full explication of this theory is not necessary for the goals of this paper, it was worth mentioning that the idea that psychological connection is what allows a person to persist is a very nuanced discussion, especially when one states that memory, of some kind, is what makes up this psychological connection.

computer at the experiences of Rick, commenting on the various experiences Rick has had. Lastly, Rick$_2$ states his intentions to kill Rick after the download is completed.

The important point to take away from this excerpt of the plot is that for a moment Rick's mental states exist in two spaces, or in two different manners. For one, Rick's mental states still reside with his birth-given body lying trapped in Rick$_2$'s lair; and in another way, Rick's mental states lie in the computer which is in the process of downloading his memories (see Figure 4 for visual reference of this scene). Thus, in this scene of the *Rick and Morty* narrative, there lies an example of personal fission, a thought experiment that problematizes various definitions of personal persistence and identity, including the psychological conception.

Fission, with regard to persons on the psychological definition of the concept, occurs when a person's psychological states exist in two distinct spaces. A person that undergoes some process in which their psychological states diverge into two distinct spaces

Figure 4. Rick bound to a table, while Rick$_2$ views his memories that were just downloaded to a computer.

seemingly implies that the original person has undergone a process resulting in two distinct persons, with the same psychological states. The thought experiment often used in the philosophical literature describes a scenario where one person's brain is cut in half, and transferred to two different organisms. However, the scenario described above in *Rick and Morty* seems to work as well with regards to the fission thought experiment. Rick's mental states exist in two distinct regions, the computer and his body. Thus, it seems as if, on the psychological conception of personal identity, Rick has become two persons, and there is a sense in which this is troubling, because fission does not seem to be possible with regard to our intuitions of personal identity.

This idea that Rick underwent fission and became two separate persons seems to be a counterexample to the psychological state of personal persistence and identity. At the moment Rick's memories are copied and downloaded onto the computer, it is not the case that Rick is now identical to both the organism strapped to the table and the computer bearing the mental states. How could he be? If the Rick lying on the table is not a computer, and the computer is not an organism, how could Rick both be and not be a computer, or be and not be an organism?

Furthermore, there are more examples of fission in the *Rick and Morty* series. For example, another instance of personal fission occurs in the first episode of the second season, entitled *A Rickle in Time.* In this episode, Rick is facing certain physical, or perhaps metaphysical, repercussions for his act of 'pausing time'.[11] These repercussions entail that

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[11] This may sound suspicious to certain philosophers, for those who think that it is perhaps logically impossible to 'pause time', and thus, that this instance of the *Rick and Morty* narrative is not able to be considered as a counterexample in a philosophical discussion. However, the way in which the series employs this concept of 'pausing time' does not seem to be logically impossible. Essentially, the episode implies that

if Rick is uncertain about anything, then he can undergo fission, in which his person splits into two different space times.[12] (This is shown in Figure 5.)

This instance is a clear example of fission on the psychological conception of personal identity. Rick's mental states go into two numerically distinct persons, which are also distinct through their relations to various space-time entities. Thus, here lies another counterexample through fission to the idea that the psychological conception of personal identity explicates our intuitions in the *Rick and Morty* narrative.

There is one objection that the proponent of the psychological conception might still argue, and this is that fission is not a good counterexample to the theory. Perhaps, this objector will claim, persons can undergo fission. Perhaps, there is nothing wrong with thinking that one person can turn into two. A proponent of the psychological definition could argue that Rick is *solely* the mental states, and Rick still exists as one entity that is merely interacting with two physical beings at the moment when there is both a body and a computer experiencing his mental states. However, this response presupposes a dualistic conception of mental and physical entities, which is indeed a controversial stance, and one that is not entirely supported by the events in the series. Rather than diving too deep in a response to this objection, let it just be considered somewhat controversial at the moment, and be dismissed. For even if this objection were granted, the episode *A Rickle in Time* provides yet another counterexample to the psychological definition of personal identity and persistence, that does not rely on fission.
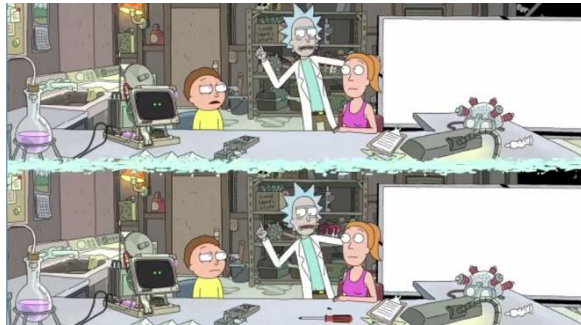
Figure 5. In *A Rickle in Time* the narrative splits into two screens displays two Rick-counterparts, as well as counterparts of other characters, that have undergone personal

This other counterexample is a simple one, and is revealed when Rick, in the episode just mentioned, is hit in the head by Morty and knocked unconscious. He merely lies on the ground, not conscious of anything, yet it still seems as if he persists as a character and fictional person. Despite the fact that Rick is not undergoing any conscious mental processes in these few moments of unconsciousness, that there are no psychological states of Rick that exist in that moment, it is still the intuition of many that he is a persisting person who is merely lying on the ground unconscious. This counterexample is also effective at dismissing many general accounts of the psychological conception of personal identity, because it elucidates how mental states are not necessary for personal persistence.

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through this device Rick has created, he is able to 'freeze' all the objects around him in their relative spatial positions, while he is able to move to new spatial positions.

[12] Again, this might sound *prima facie* logically impossible to some, however this does not appear to be so when one watches the series. Essentially, what happens is that Rick, if he is in a state of cognitive uncertainty, about anything even as trivial as what he is going to eat for lunch, then he undergoes fission. This is represented through the animation of two different stages (shown in Figure 5) that represent the two spacetime Rick counterparts, which have split from the original Rick. Of course, the mechanism for how this is possible is not given in the show, but it is not important for our philosophical concerns.

It seems, given the counterexamples above, that the psychological continuity definition of personal identity and persistence does not explicate our intuitions with regard to how Rick, and other characters, have a unique identity and persist throughout the narrative. However, even if one is inclined to dismiss these two counterexamples just presented, for whatever reason, there lies yet another counterexample; but, before we analyze this new counterexample, the next definition of personal persistence and identity, called *the narrative view,* will be presented. This will be done because the counterexample just spoken refutes both definitions as being capable of explicating our intuitions with regard to the concept of personal identity and persistence.

The narrative view, defended by philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Marya Schechtman, argues that any event, action, or scenario is part of a person's identity so long as it is a part of the true narrative of that person's life. This can be understood, in part, through the *ego* of the subject of experience. Imagine a subject that experiences various things throughout its life, and then unifies all these experiences into a coherent narrative. This coherent narrative, this ego, so to speak, is what our concept of a person is on the narrative view; however, it should be stated that for this narrative to be coherent in the intended sense, it must also be accurate and correct with regards to the person's *actual* experiences. Thus, to state it formally:

> Rick and Morty are persisting persons if and only if there is a coherent narrative unifying their respective experiences into one ego for each respective subject.

There is a sense in which the narrative definition is very similar to the psychological definition. The main difference between the two, however, is that the narrative view does not necessitate that a psychological connection is the mechanism of personal persistence. Certainly, a person's experiences need to be unified into a coherent ego, or narrative, however this unification need not be through some kind of psychological state(s). It could be done through an outside source, which is capable of looking at the person's history and purported experiences and constructing that information into a coherent narrative, which then is what makes up our conception of who that person is; and hence, the mechanism of persistence on this model would be the narrative itself. It would be a kind of retrospective construction of persistence, rather than a property actually had by the person that allows them to persist.

The counterexample that refutes both the psychological and narrative definitions, involves Morty, Rick's grandson, playing a very strange arcade game. Rick takes Morty to an intergalactic arcade, and then puts a helmet on him so that he can play a game called *Roy*. Once Morty is wearing the helmet, the scene cuts to a boy waking up in bed, animated and voiced in a style that is different from how Morty is typically animated and voiced. This boy is named Roy, and upon waking he tells his mother of a dream he had in which he went to a strange place with an old man, i.e. the arcade with Rick. The episode then presents a montage, which displays the narrative of Roy's life: he joins the football team, gets married, has kids, becomes a carpet salesman, gets cancer, survives, and eventually dies after falling from trying to get a carpet off of a high shelf. Upon Roy's death, a giant 'game over' sign appears, and Morty comes to, takes the helmet off, and is confused about his surroundings. Morty yells "where's my wife", as if he is still bearing some of Roy's mental states and believes himself to be Roy. Then, after a short amount of time, Morty realizes he is named

Morty, that the old man next to him is Rick, and that his experiences as Roy were part of an arcade game. Then, Rick jokingly scolds Morty for living a boring life as Roy, after which, Rick puts on the helmet and begins 'living as' Roy.

With regard to the psychological definition, the case of Morty playing the *Roy* game seems to be a counterexample, because said conception implies a contradiction. That is, in the Roy narrative, there is no mention of him sharing any psychological states with Morty, save the first scene when Roy as a child wakes up from bed. Assuming that Roy forgets this dream in his older age, as most do with regard to childhood dreams, then it follows on the psychological definition that Roy *is not* Morty, because Roy does not have a psychological connection with Morty.

However, though Roy has no psychological connection with Morty, it is the case that Morty has a psychological connection with Roy. Morty remembers Roy's life right when he comes out of the game, and there are other instances throughout the episode in which Morty references aspects of Roy's life that he remembers. Even if the *Rick and Morty* series does not explicitly say whether or not Morty remembers Roy's experiences in his older age, we can, for our philosophical concerns, assume that he does to construct a logically possible counterexample to the definition in question.[13] Hence, on the psychological definition, it is also the case that Morty *is* Roy.

As one can see, we have reached contradictory conclusions. Morty both *is* and *is not* Roy. Hence, something must have gone wrong with our reasoning, and this false step is likely that we assumed the psychological definition of personhood to be true. Apply a *reductio ad absurdum,* and we reason the definition to be false.

As stated earlier, the *Roy* game also presents a counterexample to the narrative definition of personal identity and persistence. On the narrative view, it seems to be entirely unclear whether or not Morty is Roy. Consider two narratives, both about Morty and the *Roy* game. One narrative states that Morty is not Roy, rather, Morty merely had experiences of Roy-like life through a computer simulation. The other narrative states that Morty is Roy, even though Morty's experiences of Roy were had through a computer simulation. Since both narratives cannot be true, given the law of non-contradiction, which narrative is the most correct account of Morty's life? The narrative conception of personhood gives us no answer to this question. It seemingly requires that we adopt either a biological or psychological stipulation to the narrative definition; however, this would just make the narrative definition somewhat useless, and signal to us that we should simply adopt whatever stipulation we decided on as the definition of personal identity and persistence. In other words, the narrative definition does not give one any clues with regard to what counts as a true and coherent account of a person's life, and this is what comes into question with regard to personal identity and persistence when strange scenarios are imagined.

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[13] This is to say that we can take the *Rick and Morty* narrative, and add or subtract certain elements from it so that we can construct logically possible thought experiment that captures or refutes the intuitions we are concerned with. The reason we can do this is that, in analytic philosophy, all one needs to do to create a counterexample is create a logically possible narrative that captures our intuitions in the correct manner. How one stumbles upon this counterexample is irrelevant for the purposes of conceptual analysis. Thus, we have stumbled on the counterexample through a television show, and any revisions we make are justified as long as they do not make the counterexample logically impossible.

Furthermore, there is a sense in which the narrative conception seems to be circular with regard to our concerns. If we are analyzing the narrative of the television series *Rick and Morty* with the intention of understanding and explicating our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons, then it seems as if we cannot point to the narrative itself, in terms of its being correctly and coherently told, as the justification. In other words, we cannot justify the claim that the characters Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons throughout the *Rick and Morty* narrative by explicating how the *Rick and Morty* narrative is a coherent and correct unification of the events actually experienced by Rick and Morty. It is circular to claim that Rick and Morty are persisting characters within the narrative of the series *because* of the narrative of the series. There must be something about the narrative, or some concept able to be applied to the narrative, that justifies the claim we are trying to make *about* the narrative.

Hence, given the counterexample to the narrative definition of personal persistence and identity, and its circularity with regard to our concerns, this definition is not able to explicate our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting persons. This, of course, leads us to the last precise conception of personal identity and persistence considered by this paper.

The last view is called *the anthropological* conception of personal identity and persistence, which is also defended by the philosopher Marya Schechtman in her more recent work. For our concerns, it essentially argues that a person is a person because of various paradigmatic properties that are necessary and sufficient for a person to be a person.[14] This means that what makes a person a person might not be the same for all persons, for what are to be considered as paradigmatic properties might change across various cultures, time periods, and even species. Nonetheless, for the majority of human persons, certain paradigmatic properties of persons might be things like: birth, death, the experience of emotions, social interaction, and so on. With regard to how a person persists on this conception, it is not entirely clear, but seemingly the best formulation of it is that one persists as a person through persisting as the locus of a manifold of paradigmatic properties. To state the anthropological view formally:

> Rick and Morty are persisting persons if and only if: 1) They have the necessary and sufficient paradigmatic properties of persons, 2) if they are respective persisting loci for manifolds of these paradigmatic properties, of which they each have their respective unique versions of said properties.

Immediately, it becomes clear that if this analysis is to continue, it must be understood what the necessary and sufficient paradigmatic properties are that Rick and Morty must have in order to be persons, and this is where it begins to become clear that the anthropological conception of personal identity and persistence might not be able to

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[14] It may be the case that one could formulate the anthropological conception of personal identity and persistence without using necessary and sufficient conditions. However, a definition lacking necessary and sufficient conditions would seemingly support the overall argument of this section. A conception of personal identity and persistence formulated without necessary and sufficient conditions can be understood as working within a neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts, as supporting such a theory rather than opposing it. Thus, the anthropological conception considered above will be considered in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, for only through such a formulation can the conception be practical for the concerns of this sub-section.

explicate our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons. Such an explication requires a list of necessary and sufficient paradigmatic properties for persons. Doing this for persons living in the present day United States, or the present day world for that matter, is already a daunting task. However, when one considers the fact that Rick and Morty are fictional persons, living in a fictional universe with many cultural, biological, and physical properties that are quite alien to that of the contemporary actual world, the task of explicating a list of necessary and sufficient paradigmatic properties becomes an even more discouraging pursuit. This, of course, does not entail that there is not a list of necessary and sufficient paradigmatic properties that Rick and Morty can be said to have within their fictional universe that makes them persons; however, it does provide one good reason to look for a simpler explanation of our intuition that Rick and Morty are persisting characters, one that is not the precisely defined anthropological conception of personal persistence and identity.

Furthermore, even if it is accepted that there are such paradigmatic properties of personhood for Rick and Morty in their fictional universe, there is still the problem of personal fission on the anthropological conception of personal identity and persistence. That is, in the actual world we conceive of these two characters as persisting, and in the actual world there is no paradigm that can deal with cases of personal fission; thus, unless such a paradigm is presented in the narrative of *Rick and Morty,* our intuition that they are persisting fictional persons is left unexplained by the precisely defined anthropological view. Perhaps, we can conceive of a paradigm existing in some possible world that Rick and Morty inhabit, though this does not explicate our intuitions with regard to Rick's and Morty's persistence, because we are not allowed access to this paradigm as viewers; and, we can also conceive of possible worlds that Rick and Morty inhabit that do not have such a paradigm. On the precisely defined anthropological view our intuitions come from an entirely unknown source, and as a conjunction of paradigms they cannot be explicated nor understood.

Given the arguments above, it is reasonable to assert that the anthropological conception of personal identity and persistence does not explicate our intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting persons. Furthermore, it seems as if none of the conceptions of personal persistence and identity, defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, were able to explicate our intuitions in the series.

If *Rick and Morty* captures our intuitions with regard to personal identity and persistence, and if it contains counterexamples to all the conventional precise definitions of this concept, then this creates a strong case against the objection to the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts; which stated, that even if much of everyday language can be understood through a neo-Wittgensteinian theory, this does not entail that language must be this way, and thus it is wise for us to create a new ideal language, in which all of our philosophically important concepts can be precisely defined. The reason this objection seems to fail is because, in the light of *Rick and Morty,* we know that our intuitions with regard to certain philosophically important concepts, like personal identity and persistence, can be captured by thought experiments that do not allow for any precise definitions to be formulated with respect to the concept in question. Our intuitions cannot always be explicated nor founded on precise definitions. Hence, in creating an ideal language that would only employ concepts that can be precisely defined, the question

becomes: how would we know how these concepts are to be defined and used in the language?

The answer is, we would not know. Normally we define and use concepts using our intuitions of the concepts as a guiding light, in the case of the definition of knowledge, the traditional definition was abandoned in light of the counterexample because our intuitions told us to do so, they pointed to the fact that the scenario with Jones and Smith was not an example of knowledge. If it is to be the case that we no longer accept our intuitions in the formulation of a new language, then it seems as if we destroy the possibility of even creating a new ideal language that employs such concepts. Intuitions have been one of our most valuable tools in the construction of formal logic, in our analysis of concepts, and even in our daily lives when we are judging whether or not to use a certain word. To abandon them is unwise, but just as well, it is unwise to see them as a purely logical guiding light always capable of being precisely defined. Rather, it seems as if our intuitions are as diverse and nuanced as is their use in human life, both in and out of philosophy. This, in turn, might imply that a next step in understanding our concepts does not come from the construction of a language that only employs precisely defined concepts, but rather from the construction of a taxonomy of human intuitions, capable of explicating the different sources and properties of intuitions that we commonly hold. This would be a partial delegation of the process of understanding concepts and explicating our intuitions with regard to them from philosophy to other areas of thought such as cognitive science, linguistics, and artistic critique. Of course, it would by no means eliminate philosophy as a source of such understanding, in fact, it seems as if phenomenology would be of special interest to this pursuit, and of course traditional conceptual analysis is still an interesting vantage point for this discussion. Nonetheless, any *a priori* analysis of concepts must acknowledge the diversity of intuitions to which it is subject, and this entails the consideration of multiple regions of language, of which artistic critique is particularly useful.

§ 3.2 Objections to the Previous Subsection

As stated earlier, the previous subsection's response to the ideal language objection raises certain objections itself. The first of which is that perhaps the correct formulation of our concept of personal identity and persistence has just not yet been formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. However, it could be, and if it is *Rick and Morty* will not be able to provide a counterexample to it and the definition could then explicate our intuitions with regard to the narrative of the series. This is a reasonable objection, for none of the arguments in this paper entail that it is impossible for our intuitions with regard to personal identity and persistence to be formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. However, it seems as if this objection can be rejected through another appeal to Occam's razor. It is possible that such a precise definition could be formulated to explicate intuitions of personal identity and persistence in a precise manner, but this definition is nowhere in sight. Furthermore, there already exists a theory of language and concepts that explicates our intuitions regarding the concept, e.g. the neo-Wittgensteinian theory (it will be shown, more concretely, how the neo-Wittgensteinian theory applies to *Rick and Morty*

in the following subsection). Hence, it seems as if the latter theory should be adopted because it involves fewer assumptions.

However, there is another objection similar to this last one, yet slightly altered, which seems to be more powerful. Namely, that there already exists a formulated definition of the concept of personal persistence and identity that this paper did not consider, and that *Rick and Morty* does not provide a counterexample to this definition within its narrative. Though, it seems unlikely that this is the case, for in all my research I did not come across such a definition. Though even if it were true, it can still be refuted if we reconsider the notion that we can add or subtract certain elements from the *Rick and Morty* narrative, as long as they leave the narrative logically possible, in order to make the narrative better able to fulfill our philosophical concerns. We can imagine a narrative, perhaps entitled *Rick and Morty 2.0,* in which, the narrative of *Rick and Morty* is present, however a few more episodes exist that contain counterexamples to whatever definitions of personal persistence and identity were left out of this paper's considerations. Thus, the resulting narrative would still support the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of concepts and language. Furthermore, if it is the case that there does not yet exist a counterexample to this mysterious definition, we have inductive grounds for believing that one will eventually come to be, given the history of 20th Century philosophy.

It may be wondered why this section did not start out with this point, that a narrative could be constructed employing every current counterexample to every possible formulation of the concept of personal persistence and identity, and yet still capture our intuitions with regard to the concept. Why did this section need to appeal to *Rick and Morty,* when it could just ask the reader to consider such a thought experiment? The reason is that the reader would likely be skeptical as to whether a narrative, employing every possible counterexample against precise definitions of a concept, would actually be able to capture our intuitions with regard to said concept. *Rick and Morty* needed to be appealed to because it shows that it is possible for a narrative to be saturated in counterexamples of a concept that the narrative itself is employing, without destroying the viewer's intuitions that said concept is being correctly employed. If this paper just asked the reader to imagine a narrative in which it is our intuition that characters persist despite these characters being involved in events that are counterexamples to our leading definitions of personal persistence and identity, the reader would likely respond and say that such a narrative is not possible, for such a narrative would not capture our intuitions of personal persistence and identity. Of course, *Rick and Morty* does capture our intuitions regarding personal persistence and identity, and it does so through language games that need not have a precise pattern.

With regard to the second objection to the previous subsection, there is the idea that *Rick and Morty* merely supports the fact that our conception of personal identity and persistence is best explained by a neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts, and whether or not the majority of philosophically interesting concepts share this trait is still not proven by this paper. Thus, perhaps the concept of personal identity and persistence has no place in the construction of an ideal language, perhaps these conceptual intuitions are not founded in a rational calculus, but this does not mean that the majority of other philosophically intriguing concepts must also be excluded. This objection is sensible, for it does seem that if one wanted to deduce that our intuitions with regard to all philosophically interesting concepts are able to be captured by thought experiments like

Rick and Morty, thought experiments that provide one or multiple counterexamples to all of the conventional precise definitions of said concepts, then one would have to do what the previous subsection did with every philosophically interesting concept.

Of course, deduction is not our only method of reasoning. We can respond to this objection by pointing out that most of our philosophically intriguing concepts, such as causation, goodness, persistence, etc., share a common trait with the concept of personal persistence and identity, namely, that they lack a precise definition that is agreed upon by the majority of philosophers. This lack of consensus, or conflict in the intuitions that various philosophers hold with regard to said concepts, seems to signal that many concepts can also fall victim to a narrative similar to *Rick and Morty,* i.e. one that captures our intuitions with regard to a concept, yet employs all the necessary counterexamples to refute the formulated precise definitions of said concept. Indeed, there are *reasons*, normally in the form of counterexamples, which are why philosophers are not in agreement over definitions for concepts like causation, goodness, and persistence. These reasons are seemingly able to all be incorporated into a narrative, and given *Rick and Morty,* we can argue that this narrative could still capture our intuitions with regard to a certain concept while still employing said reasons that destroy the grounds for precise definitions of our conceptual intuitions.

Nonetheless, this second objection is quite significant. It does seem as if conceptual intuitions differ in their ability to be precisely defined. Perhaps certain concepts are better able to find a consensus for their precise definitions, and hence certain concepts may be more fruitful in the construction of an ideal language due to the fact that they capture the intuitions of philosophers in a coherent and sweeping manner. Nonetheless, even if this is the case, the majority of philosophically intriguing concepts still do not hold a consensus on one precise definition. Hence, this objection relies on an assumption, and indeed a very large one, namely, that our intuitions with regard to the majority of philosophically interesting concepts, concepts that we find integrated in our most sophisticated belief structures, can all be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.[15]

Given this large assumption, it makes sense again to follow Occam's razor, and turn to the explanatory power of the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts. This theory sheds light on why so many concepts still lack philosophical consensus, and, as will be shown in the next subsection, this theory helps explain how a narrative like *Rick and Morty,* one that captures our intuitions yet also provides various counterexamples to conventional definitions of a concept, is even possible.

§3.3 Rick and Morty *and the Neo-Wittgensteinian Theory of Language and Concepts*

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[15] For evidence of this lack of consensus with regard to the precise definitions that have been formulated to define various philosophically interesting concepts, look to the philosophy textbooks referenced at the end of this paper. They provide papers that explicate definitions for various concepts, but most importantly these textbooks do not state that one definition is the correct or most agreed upon. Since these textbooks have been recently printed, it seems as if there is still much disagreement in the philosophical community with regard to the precise definitions of various concepts. This disagreement is telling of the differing intuitions that various philosophers have with regard to various important concepts, and thus also of the size of assumption the second objection listed above is reliant upon.

As has been shown, it is the viewer's intuition in watching the television series *Rick and Morty* that the characters Rick and Morty persist throughout and within the various episodes of the television series. However, a precise definition of the concept of personal identity and persistence has failed to explicate our intuitions regarding the persistence and identity of Rick and Morty, due to the various counterexamples that are presented in the narrative. Nonetheless, there is still philosophizing to be done, despite the lack of help from traditional conceptual analysis. This section is thus an example of our need to diversify our methods of conceptual analysis, in order to better understand our intuitions with regard to certain concepts. We need to find a new method that can explain what our intuitions are with regard to the persistence and identity of Rick and Morty, and reason how these intuitions came to be.

In attempting to diversify our methods of conceptual analysis, let us reconsider the neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts explicated earlier in this paper. This theory argues that our intuitions with regard to certain concepts, like personal identity and persistence, are grounded in the usage of language. If, then, we are to look into the usage of language for insight into our intuitions with regard to certain concepts, we must look into the forms of life that make up the culture and society that actually use the words and phrases that make up the concept with which we are concerned. Hence, this neo-Wittgensteinian theory might explain and justify our intuition that Rick and Morty are persisting fictional persons by appealing to some kind of linguistic, cultural, or social paradigm that *Rick and Morty* is a part of, and in which it is either an explicit or implicit rule that things like Rick and Morty are persisting persons. [16]

In looking into the paradigms that influence the usage of language and into the forms of life that influence our conceptual intuitions with regard to *Rick and Morty,* we must look to paradigms of animated comedy, and of comedic television in general. In this investigation there seems to be a certain assumption, paradigm, or language game, which occurs in comedic television, one that signifies that the characters persist throughout the various episodes and seasons of the series, despite the vast changes that occur to the characters within and across the various episodes of the series.

To understand this, consider the following features that the vast majority of comedic television series share. First, consider how most comedic television series have a core set of characters, characters that are present in every episode and are usually focal points around which the narrative builds itself. In *Rick and Morty,* these characters are Rick and Morty, and perhaps certain members of their family as well. In other comedic television series, such as *South Park* or *Seinfeld,* which have been incredibly influential in both animated comedy and comedic television in general, these characters are Stan, Kyle, Cartman, and Kenny; or Jerry, Elaine, George, and Kramer; respectively.

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[16] This may sound reminiscent of the anthropological conception of personal identity and persistence, and, in many ways, it is. However, it should be reiterated that the anthropological conception was not any help to our analysis of *Rick and Morty* when it was thought of as a definition of personal identity and persistence in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Thus, the anthropological conception can work within the framework of a neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and concepts, as well as within the framework of the theory that all of our concepts can be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In refuting the idea that the latter traditional analysis of concepts is always effective, it was only important to show that the anthropological conception was not helpful in analyzing *Rick and Morty* when it was formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions.

Secondly, it is important to consider the outlandish nature of the adventures that these core set of characters often become involved in. As was discussed, Rick and Morty travel all around the universe going to intergalactic arcades with computer simulated virtual realities, but they also go to planets with strange aliens, visit micro-universes that were designed to exploit the micro-people for free labor, and engage in other strange endeavors. Even *Seinfeld,* which is relatively tame with regard to the events in its narrative when compared to *Rick and Morty,* contains many events that would be considered quite strange, wild, or profound if they occurred in the life of a normal person who actually exists, such as when George's fiancé dies as a result of licking envelopes, or when Jerry and Kramer are watching a surgical operation and accidentally drop a candy into an open cavity.

This paradigm in comedic television of having a core set of characters engage in a series of eccentric events becomes of particular interest to our concerns when one considers how relatively little the characters change throughout the various seasons of the series. In *Rick and Morty,* Rick is used to all of the crazy phenomena that the universe holds, but his naive grandson Morty is not; yet, in the episodes that follow an event in which Morty is unintentionally responsible for the deaths of many innocent persons, we see little, if any, repercussions of this traumatic event that would likely change the course of an ordinary person's life. This is not because Morty is some kind of sociopath, he shows remorse for the event in the episode in which it occurs, but it is because of the comedic nature of the series *Rick and Morty.* If *Rick and Morty* were to actually explore the repercussions of this traumatic event on Morty's character, then the show would lose a lot of its comedic nature. It is not funny to see a young boy overcome by guilt, so the series just moves on. In the episodes that follow, Morty returns to his usual self, as if the event never happened.

This return of a character to their normal self after an eccentric or otherwise life-changing event will be referred to from now on as the *episodic return.* It is when the character, at the end of an episode as a kind of resolution, or at the beginning of a following episode as a habitual prelude, regains their normally displayed personality. The episodic return is found in the vast majority of comedic television. For example, in the *Seinfeld* episode *The Invitations* referenced earlier, in which George's fiancé dies from licking toxic glue on the cheap envelopes that he insisted they buy for their wedding invitations, George is relatively unaffected by his fiancée's death. Furthermore, in the episodes that follow George returns back to his normal self, as if his fiancé did not just die. He is even depicted as enjoying the single life, which is typical of his usual character's personality.

The episodic return is perhaps most blatantly displayed, as well as satirically mocked, in the animated comedy *South Park.* In every single episode of the early seasons of the show, the core character Kenny dies. Kenny appears in every episode and goes along for all of the comedic adventures, then towards the end of the episode he dies. Yet, despite Kenny's death in every episode, he always is present at the beginning of the next episode as if unaffected by the events of the previous episode, and every other character also goes about as if Kenny did not just recently die.

There are many reasons that comedic television series employ the episodic return. One is that the episodic return increases the likelihood that a viewer, who has never seen the show before, will watch an episode at random and enjoy it. Unlike with certain dramas that do not employ the episodic return, where knowledge of a key plot point or the

motivations of various characters are essential to understanding the episode, and an episode picked at random may be too confusing for a viewer who has never seen the program to enjoy. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, a comedic series would not be very funny if it often explored the usual affections and emotions that follow tragic and life-changing events. If George, or the boys from South Park, Colorado, were shown mourning and overcoming the death of their fellow characters, then the show would lose much of its comedic value from employing serious and typically un-comedic narratives. Nonetheless, if they excluded life changing or traumatic events they would likely be boring, or they would be un-relatable. There is something light-hearted, funny, and perhaps even inspiring, about a character that can go through intense events without much change to their person.

This last point is understood further when it is considered that many comedies, inside and outside of television, rely on character comedy, i.e. a method of comedy that employs a specific character or personality as a device for humor. This humorous personality, in turn, is what we refer to as the character's 'usual self' when we speak of the episodic return. If television shows explored the effects of life-changing or traumatic events in their core set of characters in a realistic manner, then they would likely develop the character in a direction that is contrary to the personality employed for humor in the show. Thus, the episodic return is seemingly employed not just as an economical method of writing that allows viewers to enjoy certain episodes at random, but also as a more inherent part of character comedy, as well as a vehicle to preserve the light hearted and relatable nature of comedy in general.

However, with regard to our concerns, the episodic return is of importance because it cultivates the intuition that the core characters of the television series persist throughout the various episodes. It is through character comedy, through the personality of the characters that is returned to at the beginning or end of most episodes, that we grow impressions and intuitions of who each character is, i.e. what their personal identity is; and, when these personalities, these identities, are returned to at the beginning or end of an episode through an episodic return, we feel as if the characters are persisting.

The reason that *Rick and Morty* can present various counterexamples to all of the conventional definitions of personal persistence and identity, yet still capture our intuitions that the characters who endure these events are persisting persons, is largely because *Rick and Morty* employs the episodic return. It partakes in a language game that is characteristic of a lot of comedic television. This is exemplified most clearly at the end of the episode *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind,* the episode described earlier with all of the Rick-like individuals and 'the council of Ricks', an episode that presented various counterexamples to conventional definitions of personal identity and persistence. At the end of this episode, Rick states, "I'm the Rickest Rick there is." This statement makes sense within the comedy, despite its complete ambiguity and seeming meaninglessness if we were solely to understand personal identity through a precise definition. That is, in this latter sense, what necessary and sufficient conditions allow Rick to be the 'Rickest'? It cannot be said. However, the statement does make sense within the comedy, because it is exactly what the reader would expect Rick to say at the end of such an adventure. In other words, it is in-line with his usual character, the character comedy of Rick, to say something smug like "I'm the Rickest Rick". Despite the presentation of many Rick-like individuals in the episode *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind*, the viewer is normally only exposed to one Rick that has the personality, i.e. employs a character comedy that holds the features of

being arrogant, intelligent, witty, an alcoholic, and an a-moral scientist. Hence, when a character is animated and voiced in the style of Rick, and when this character exhibits the personality typically associated with the Rick character, the viewer has the intuition that Rick is present, that he persists. Furthermore, when this character is present at the end of an episode containing a plot that is resolved in some way, i.e. when the character is present in a narrative that is employing an episodic return, the viewer's intuitions are strengthened even further due to the force paradigmatic language games have on our intuitions.

This also goes to show how susceptible our intuitions with regard to personal identity are when they are exposed to certain elements of personality and narrative. Personality is by no means able to be conflated with our concept of personal identity, but there is a sense in which one's personality is often thought of as the defining characteristic of a person. Though a person persists through their sleep, or other moments containing no aspects of personality, people are often thought to be their most *true* selves when they are displaying the characteristics that are a part of their most regular, or perhaps preferred, personality. Furthermore, given the narrative's ability to construct a cyclical nature of personality through language games like the episodic return, narratives can cultivate the intuition of personality persistence, and thus also personal persistence.

However another, seemingly more impressive, conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the concept of personal persistence and identity within *Rick and Morty*, namely, that it is not the case that we need rely on one source, or explicate one meaning, for our intuitions regarding the persistence and identity of Rick and Morty. Rather, we can locate and discuss multiple language games at play within the narrative that affect our intuitions with regard to the concept. We can argue that the concept has a pluralistic nature. Indeed, the episodic return seems to be a large source of our intuitions that Rick and Morty persist, however, these intuitions are likely affected by other language games as well. This implies that our concept of personal identity and persistence is flexible, or perhaps in flux, between various language games cultivating multiple intuitions.

Given the diversity of language, different manners of speaking about persons might cultivate different intuitions of identity or persistence. If one is asleep, with little to no mental activities, another will still speak of them as persisting, and through this language game an intuition is created, one that the biological conception attempted to formally define. Similarly, many other language games speak of personal persistence beyond the death of one's body. We speak of loved ones as persisting in an afterlife, either heaven or through reincarnation, and we also speak of persons persisting through out-of-body experiences, and through these language games we cultivate an intuition that the psychological conception attempts to define. *Rick and Morty* employs characters that speak normal English, and in doing so they partake in many English language games. Hence, when the narrative presents counterexamples to certain intuitions and definitions of personal identity and persistence, the viewer might rely on other intuitions to conceive of Rick and Morty as persisting persons. To return to the city metaphor used earlier, if the concept of personal identity and persistence were to be isolated as a region in the city of language, it would not be a single building, but rather a neighborhood comprised of many buildings, each with various architectural influences. If one of these buildings were to be destroyed, the neighborhood would still remain, in the same way that if one aspect of the concept of personal identity and persistence were to come under question in a scenario (say, the

psychological conception), others might still remain (e.g. the biological conception) as vehicles for our intuitions.

For example, when Rick is knocked unconscious and is lying on the ground in *A Rickle in Time* or is lying bound to a table having his memories downloaded onto a computer in *Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind*, the viewer's intuitions that Rick persists may be more reliant on language games that align themselves with the biological conception than the psychological conception. In turn, this is also true vice versa, when Rick implants his consciousness into a cloned body of himself in *Big Trouble Little Sanchez,* the viewer may base their intuition that Rick persists through relating the scenario to language games in which persons persist in a psychological manner. In short, the viewer's intuitions that Rick and Morty are persisting persons are seemingly flexible between various language games that create this intuition of persistence in different ways, and when one of the ways in which the persistence is perceived comes under question due to a counterexample, the viewer can lean on other language games that are not subject to the counterexample. The concept is able to persist throughout the series through adapting itself to multiple forms of language, through remaining in a state of flux between intuitions.

However, the question still arises of why our concept of personal identity and persistence adapts itself to different language games, to different intuitions, when presented with successive counterexamples in the *Rick and Morty* narrative? Why does our concept not dissipate? The concept does not dissipate because the language remains consistent, and hence the language acts as both a manifold and a vehicle for our intuitions. In what ways does the language remain consistent? Through the use of the episodic return and the alignment to paradigmatic features of comedic television, through the use of animation, and through the use of everyday English. *Rick and Morty* is a comedic television show, and thus the counterexamples can be brushed off with more ease than they would be, say, if they were presented as a traditional thought experiment, i.e. if they were presented through the medium of written word in a textbook.

This might make it seem as if when we are watching television we are allowing ourselves to believe less-sophisticated intuitions than when we practice philosophy in a classroom. If we are, when watching shows like *Rick and Morty*, allowing ourselves to be influenced by language games appealing to a more biological conception of personal identity and persistence, and then, when presented with scenarios that act as counterexamples to the biological conception, allow our intuitions to be cultivated by different language games, are we not acting incoherently? No, we are not acting incoherently. The fact that our concept of personal identity and persistence appears to us to be a reasonable concept is *prima facie* evidence that it is coherent. The idea that a coherent concept, or set of intuitions, must be able to be explicated in the form of a precise definition is inherited from traditional conceptual analysis; and, as the former sections of this paper have hopefully shown, this practice is often inadequate because it is guided by intuitions rooted in language while failing to reflect the diverse forms of life that make up language. It would seem, then, that precise definitions are not a necessary condition for coherent concepts. Is not our concept 'table' coherent? Nonetheless, one can consider how difficult it would be to explicate a precise definition for 'table-ness'.

The more philosophy attempts to isolate itself from forms of everyday life, to isolate itself from conventional forms of language, the more it will lose its grasp of our intuitions regarding certain concepts that have been rooted in conventional forms of language for

hundreds of years. As philosophers concerned with the nature of concepts that apply to our everyday lives, we must concern ourselves with many diverse intuitions, and in concerning ourselves with these intuitions we must include conventional forms of language and the methods of their inspection in our practice of conceptual analysis. Of course, this is not to say that all intuitions are coherent and philosophically valuable, but rather that analytic philosophy will do us no good if it continues to isolate its attention to only those intuitions capable of receiving precise definitions; rather, it must expand its methods of analysis, and explore the true nature of our conceptual intuitions, which is messy, diverse, nuanced, and capable of being adaptable between various language games.

Analyses like the one of *Rick and Morty* above do just this. Television is a daily part of life in the 21st Century, especially of the comedic variety, and hence understanding how they capture our intuitions is an attempt to jump into these daily forms of life, these language games, and try to understand some of the nuances that are a part of our conceptual intuitions. Analyses like the one above are an important step in the development of analytic philosophy because they acknowledge, and reflect upon, the diversity of language.

§4 Concluding Remarks and Implications

One of the most interesting implications of the arguments in this paper is the reinforced importance of artistic and cultural critique within our overall understanding of the concepts that make up our most sophisticated belief systems (the manifold, or interactions, of all the disciplines we consider to be a part of our most advanced understanding of ourselves and the world). However, what is perhaps of most relevance in these times of great scientific progress is the reinforced relevance of the artistic world to the sciences.

It might sound somewhat disagreeable to have to judge the value of art and the humanities through its relation to the sciences, for these things have, for a very long time, given us inherently valuable insight into the human condition. Nonetheless, the arts and the humanities have often been given a reputation as having little worth with regard to our understanding of the world outside of ourselves, a reputation that is at least as old as Plato's condemnation of art as something that is not worthy of being in the ideal republic, and one that has persisted into this day and age with the attitude that studying the humanities is not something worthy of a scientist's time.[17]

Of course, if this neo-Wittgensteinian theory of language and intuitions is accepted, then the humanities and the arts have a new value with regard to their ability to help us understand the concepts that are a part of our most sophisticated belief structures, including those of the natural sciences. To understand this, consider the concepts, mostly

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[17] The idea that the humanities are not a worthwhile pursuit for those curious about the nature of the universe is a view that comes up enough in the daily life of an academic that the *New York Times, Times Higher Education, Scientific American,* as well as many other news and essay sources, find it necessary to publish articles defending the humanities. Of course, these articles are welcome, for countries like Japan have closed many of their humanities and social science departments in order to steer students into disciplines that "serve areas that better meet societies needs" (see *Social sciences and humanities faculties 'to close' in Japan after ministerial intervention,* in references).

metaphysical, which are riddled throughout the majority of scientific disciplines, concepts like causation, persistence, and identity. What would the theory of evolution look like if it were stripped of the use of these concepts? If it had to explain the origin of species without saying that changes in the environment *caused* certain variations in a population to be more advantageous towards surviving and reproducing, and this in turn *caused* an increase of individuals in this population who carried such traits? Or, how would modern physics look, if physicists working with the Standard Model were forced to abandon the idea that certain forces *persist* throughout time? These concepts are necessary to the natural sciences, to science in general, and to our sophisticated belief structures, *as we know them.* This is not to say that we could not, over time, rid certain sciences or disciplines of certain concepts, like causation and persistence. Perhaps it is possible to understand biology without causation, or physics without persistence, however that is an incredibly difficult undertaking, for concepts like these are an essential part of many of our *currently* accepted scientific theories.

In accepting that we use many concepts in developing scientific theories, it follows that a better understanding of these concepts allows us to better understand the scientific theories themselves. Conceptual analysis is an essential part of a complete understanding of our scientific theories; and, as this paper has argued, conceptual analysis cannot limit itself to precise definitions stating necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather must encapsulate a greater area of language that often contains certain features or narratives that are incapable of being precisely defined. In this turn to a wider area of language, one cannot ignore the humanities and the studies of the arts.

To reword this point, the sciences are of value to us in part because they give us great explanatory and predictive power with regard to the natural universe in which we live. Nonetheless, the scientific method is incapable of answering every possible question that we formulate. It cannot tell us why one formulation of a concept is more correct than another, nor can it justify truths of an *a priori* nature. Hence, in searching for a more complete understanding of the world around us, we must ask how the concepts that we employ for this understanding work, and what their natures are. Given the scientific method's inability to answer these questions, we turn to the philosophy of language and to conceptual analysis. This, in turn, leads us to the humanities, and the study of artworks that shed light on our conceptual concerns through providing insight into the boundaries and recesses of our conceptual framework and sophisticated belief structures. In art, and in the humanities in so far as they are the critique and study of art, we encounter narratives and thought experiments that play with our intuitions in strange ways. Ambiguity is something found in many great artworks, and this is perhaps so because these artworks put our concepts in uncanny places, often attempting to stretch the language game to fit new rules, while at the same time employing old ones, as *Rick and Morty* did with personal identity and persistence. In analyzing our conceptual intuitions with regard to certain artworks, one can understand more about our concepts and the borders and origin of their use, and thus gain more insight into our sophisticated belief structures. Hence, for those scientists who are eager for progress, who wish for more explanatory and predictive power, there is perhaps a need not just to turn outward and conduct more experiments, but also to turn inward and analyze the conceptual framework they have developed in creating their theories and hypotheses, and to see if certain artworks might provide insight into the nature and ambiguity of a concept, an insight that can give new life to how they view the

theories of which that concept is a part and thus push the science into a new realm of understanding. Furthermore, if one contends that concepts used in the natural sciences are not as complicated, i.e. contain flexible intuitions, as the concept of personal identity and persistence, I would refer them back to the objections answered in section 3.2. This is not to judge their objection as absolutely false, but to imply that there seems to be room for discussion on the matter.

There is a need to expand our methods of conceptual analysis to contain the study of art, and of other studies that explore the eclectic city that is our contemporary language. Thought experiments have been an essential part of traditional conceptual analysis, and, seemingly, the only constraint on a thought experiment is that it be logically possible, so that it can be applied to our philosophical concerns. In that general and diverse grouping of entities that we call art, especially in fictional narratives, there are a plethora of logically possible thought experiments, like *Rick and Morty,* that play with our conceptual intuitions in interesting ways. Part of the way they do this is their context. *Rick and Morty* can do things, being situated in the paradigm of comedic television, that other narratives cannot. This is important when understanding how our conceptual intuitions originate and persist. It allows us to understand how our intuitions with regard to personal identity and persistence can be static, in that they persist as some kind of coherent grouping of rational appearances that bring us to the same conclusion through various scenarios (i.e. the conclusion that Rick and Morty persist and have an identity), yet how they can also be dynamic, in that they can be articulated in many different definitions or formulations and cultivated through many language games. It seems as if we can use investigations into language and its diverse usage as a bridge from investigating concepts *a priori* to reflecting upon and even changing our understanding of the empirical world.

Ultimately, the philosopher can no longer *solely* sit in the armchair and conjure up thought experiments. If they do, these thought experiments will be limited to the context of the armchair, and hence will be limited to a subsection of language and only insightful for our intuitions with regard to said subsection. In looking for a more complete understanding of our concepts, and the intuitions behind them, the philosopher will have to do more exploration into language, and this entails more exploration into various contexts, narratives, and forms of life. Of course, this does not mean that we should look just to language in order to understand the intuitions that are a fundamental part of our understanding. To bring it back to Wittgenstein's metaphor, if language is a city with many different neighborhoods, streets, and buildings, then these structures are subject to the geography and topography of the mind. Hence, many disciplines will be of value, from computer science to psychology, in our understanding of intuitions. Nonetheless, if this paper has been correct in its reasoning, it is appropriate to say that from time to time the philosopher should move her armchair in front of the television.

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*All other *Rick and Morty* images, used in the figures, are snapshots from Seasons 1 & 2 of the series and the individual episodes cited above.