So let's get underway. The first speaker is Sean Wilson, who is Associate Professor of Political Science. He teaches courses in Public Law, Judicial and American Politics, in Ludwig Wittgenstein. His first book, "The Flexible Constitution" was published in 2013. His second book, "New Critical Thinking is Forthcoming." His talk is titled "The Problem of Alternate Reality and Politics and How Wittgenstein Got There First." A very timely topic. Sean. Okay it's
really difficult I think to do Wittgenstein in politics in 10 minutes. My head will be a little bit like the Olympics, but what I'm going to do is talk about a portion of a book that I have completed and that I'm shopping to a publisher. The book is called "New Critical Thinking, What Wittgenstein Offered." and the piece that I'm going to talk about today is something called picturing. What is picturing? And by the way when I use the word picturing, I'm referring to
something in Wittgenstein's book about.
What picturing is, is it's a cognitive phenomena. It's actually something that the brain does. For example, suppose I were to say to you I want to say "don't think of an elephant" What happens is

when you hear this command, your mind usually pictures an elephant, you see

you see an elephant. And Lackoff has an explanation for why this is

so. I'll read it to you here. He says
"because most people don't have any

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00:01:41,310 --> 00:01:45,600
actual relationship with elephants, as
they do for example, with dogs, people with

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00:01:45,600 --> 00:01:50,430
lesions in visual regions of the parietal
cortex, we lose the ability to recognize

21
00:01:50,430 --> 00:01:55,470
an elephant since visual imagery is part
of the meaning." Which is basically saying

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00:01:55,470 --> 00:02:00,420
is that you know with other animals like
dogs, you have this to relationship but

23
00:02:00,420 --> 00:02:04,170
most people don't have any relationship
with elephants. They sort of think of

24
00:02:04,170 --> 00:02:09,799
them sort of in the way that you might have unicorn. Now

picturing is an interesting idea. There's lots of things that your brain can see.

You can see for example, an image, it might be able to picture a scenario, for example if you're reading a newspaper, you imagine things, your mind fills in the gap. You also kinda see a metaphor, or a framework, and this is very very important. An example might be Ben Franklin. He was studying electricity and
he began to see it with this concept of being a current, no one had really talked about prior to Ben Franklin you'd only hear this idea of a current in water, it had a water grammar, you know? Water has current. Ben Franklin, studying electricity says you know, he described this in terms of currents, so this is a metaphor or a framework and it also is an example of picturing, that goes on in the brain. Wittgenstein was probably autistic and he had this
pictorial capacity that was very aggressive, and he talked about it often

in his writings. He says "I just took some apples out of a paper bag where they had been lying for a long time I had to cut half off many of them and throw them away. Afterwards when I was copying out a sentence I had written, the second half of which was bad, I had once thought as a half-rotten apple. And that's how everything is with me. Everything that comes my way becomes a
picture for me of what I am thinking about at the time. Is there something feminine about this way of thinking?" He was constantly bombarded with mental pictures of one kind or another and as a result in his philosophy he wanted to make sense of what this picturing is all about. What role does it play in an assertion, and basically he comes up with two ideas. He says on one hand picturing can really be helpful, but in another way, it can be manipulative, and
let me give you an example of how it can be helpful. He talks about the Commutative Law of Multiplication and he says "What this is, is informal learning it's simply a multiplied by b equals b multiplied by a so 5 times 4 is 4 times 5. In his mind when he was thinking about this he says "look, all this is doing is flipping rows for columns" not so of it is actually doing and if when learning this formula you could see that that's all it was doing, flipping rows for columns, then he
called them "scene connections" that there was something about this picture that would pop in the mind that would actually aid very much in comprehension.

But there's another example where this can be actually very bad and he says

"let's say you would imagine that there was a cord stretched around the equator imagine the earth and you're going to stretch a cord around the equator and it's going to be very very very tight." He
says, "How much above the earth would the

60
00:05:23,300 -- 00:05:28,370
cord become if you increase the length
by only one yard but kept it tout and

61
00:05:28,370 -- 00:05:32,750
circular?" So your brain might picture a
yard as being not that much you know

62
00:05:32,750 -- 00:05:40,820
it's in football, fourth and one, no not
that much and so the common answer is to

63
00:05:40,820 -- 00:05:46,940
say "well it's you know,
insignificant" but in truth the actual

64
00:05:46,940 -- 00:05:52,610
distance is the cord would become nearly
six inches off the ground and so this is

65
00:05:52,610 -- 00:05:59,150
an example he says where you've been misled by a picture. A picture came into

your mind and it completely misled you.

Alright, so there's this interesting

dynamic that you have with picturing. Sometimes it's really helpful in an aim

to comprehension and other times it throws you into the wrong track. Okay and

so now what we want to do is apply this to politics. All of that ideology really

is in politics is an effort by others, other people to dominate
what picture emerges in your mind in a social context. That is actually all the

ideology is it's trying to force a picture onto a social onto a situation.

My field presently doesn't understand this. My field sees ideology as something else. It sees it for example as a starting point in the discussion, a set of values. I get to have my points and you get to have your points you know. This is just their values. But in point of fact what really happens is all the ideology
is it's a cognitive and neurological phenomena. It's an effort to take in a social context, try to manipulate you to see the picture that I want, I see and

that I want validated in that context, and a good example might be for example abortion. You know suppose I say to you two things I say to you I'm pro-life. Well

I could also save you I could say hey I'm pro-embryo. What is it that comes before your mind in each of these phrases? Now some of you don't

don't like this issue so you're already guarded against it but let's take
someone who doesn't know much about it
and someone is neutral about it if we

could find such a thing. If you
spoke to a person and said you were

pro-life it's very different what might
come to mind then saying you're pro

embryo. This is what an the embryo would
look like after four weeks. It's about the

size of a poppy seed and so if we had a
discussion, we could have a discussion we

could have a discussion, about what the
value of that should be. We could have

that, but that's not really the
discussion we have it kind of gets side

stepped because it's a battle to try to put
certain other kinds of imagery before

your other kinds of pictures in your
mind, right? Now there's a philosopher by the

name of James Garvey, who I went to high
school with, and he has a book out and in

the book he makes an interesting
claim. He's talking about how
crime gets pictured. Now if you describe crime as a wild beast, people

thought we need more policing to control the beast, but if you describe crime as being something else like a plague or a disease people think more

well we need to cure and fix it and heal it, and so whatever picture you put there

or what metaphor you put there for that issue is suggestive for

what people then will get pushed as to what the solution should be. Let's listen
to James. So that story was
told the two separate groups of people

one heard the story about crime being
described as a beast lurking in the city.

Seventy-five percent of them thought
about policing, incarceration, sending in

the army, just twenty five percent
thought about social reform, creating

education opportunities for people in
the city. If you heard a different

version another group pretty different
version that story where crime was
described as a plague virus infecting the city. The number of people who thought about social reform nearly doubled to forty four percent. There's a corresponding drop in the number of people who thought about policing, right?

So this is a framing effect. We don't really understand how framing works. It's thought the authors of this study think that it's when you hear a certain metaphor, hear a certain word that
emphasizes some aspects of concept and not others. So your brain will think of

obstructing inconsistent inferences when you hear about a beast you think about

guns and cages. We have a virus you think about healing the whole thing. This is

unfortunately this is the real power of spin, this works on us. What is the

solution to this? In three minutes I'm going to give a solution but first I

want to hear Garvey's solution and
my conclusion here think Garvey's wrong

but let's listen to a solution. So
this is how spin works, it works and it's

really easy to scale up and change the
opinions of a lot of people just by how

you put language. And this is happening I
think at the

expense of things like reasons and
arguments and careful carefully made

points. If you can think critically and
carefully, wouldn't you undermine things
like that rather than support them and
go along with them? And you have to

00:11:04,650 -- 00:11:09,720
wonder, I have to wonder, if some of this
shift and persuasion is partly what's

00:11:09,720 -- 00:11:14,640
going on in the states with the rise of
Donald Trump. Is this kind of what's

00:11:14,640 -- 00:11:18,270
going on with brexit? There were no
good arguments, there were no good

debates. It was appeals to emotion, appeals
to Authority, outright lies and is this

00:11:18,270 -- 00:11:24,810

00:11:24,810 -- 00:11:29,690
shift to post-truth politics part of
this change in persuasion? All right, now
here's the way a Wittgensteinian would look at this: Garvey's solution actually is not correct. It is not true that the problem is that the information is false and it's not true that the metaphor is tricking you and you have to therefore put it to the side because presumably if Garvey has a solution to crime it too involves a picture. You can't escape the picture, all right? What happened in the study with crime is perfectly natural. This is in fact a natural mode of
understanding. George Lakoff says "pictures structure the whole system of

thought though they rarely show up in the language of the discourse they are

structuring. Where they show up is in the forms of reason used in the coherence of

apparently disparate ideas if you strip away the picture it's not clear how you

could think about communication or what communication is." The real problem that

we have today isn't that there's misinformation. The real problem that I
believe we have today is that as a society, we are reaching a point where:

whatever picture you want to exist for something, there's a market photo, and you can live in this bubble and have only that picture there and that we as a people are now becoming intolerant on both the left and the right whenever someone comes along and tries to show another picture. We don't want to be consumers of pictures we don't like, and this is actually what's happening. It's
not that there's false information out there, it's that what is out there, there are

now markets out there to feed only one way of seeing something, and we get kind

of upset when we're forced to look at something, conceptualize it, think about

it in a way that we don't want to and it's a social phenomena and this is

what I think is happening, all right? The solution to this is threefold. What you

want to do is number one show people that picturing as a phenomenon occurs in
the brain whether it's religion or politics or what have you, there's some

framework some scenario in their mind that they've invested in and you will

to show them that this in fact happens as a phenomenon and the other thing you

want to do is try to capacitate the pictorial imagination, so that when

someone decides what the views are on something that they're able to indulge

other ways of seeing it and it's not
simply other arguments or other facts

its other two ways of seeing it to see it the way someone else sees it when

they see it in their mind, all right you have to you have to become well-rounded

and this gets to the last topic therapy, part of what Wittgensteinian's believe

is that the role of philosophy is actually just to do simply this: mess

with the pictures in people's head. Wittgenstein would come into the class and often imagine for scientific facts and have his
students do that because part of what

00:15:01,419 -- 00:15:07,389

we're supposed to do is force these
pictures, force people to see different

00:15:07,389 -- 00:15:11,799

ways of seeing things because only then
could they become better consumers for

00:15:11,799 -- 00:15:14,650

what
frameworks that they want to choose from.

00:15:14,650 -- 00:15:28,310

Anyway that's what I have for you today.
Thank you very much. So on all your

00:15:28,310 -- 00:15:34,190

announces are all pictures of people or
some pictures more representative than

00:15:34,190 -- 00:15:41,030
others? And if so, which ones? Yeah I didn't have time to get
the quote from Wittgenstein. There's

171
00:15:41,030 --> 00:15:47,380
absolutely no question that pictures are
not equal okay and there was a time in

172
00:15:47,380 --> 00:15:53,240
the social configuration of life, the
form of life when for example a flat

173
00:15:53,240 --> 00:15:58,150
earth picture fit better than the
picture we have of the earth now and

174
00:15:58,150 --> 00:16:05,210
there's no question that some pictures
are better than it is and which ones

175
00:16:05,210 --> 00:16:10,490
actually fit better is I think something
that would belong to aesthetics

176
connoisseur judgment Wittgensteinian's approach aesthetics the way

analytic philosophers do morality with
basic foundations in aesthetics some

choices are better than others. So I
consider myself a post analytic thinker

not a post modern thinker. I'm not a
skeptic, I don't think all choices are equal. Go Ahead.

Well I mean I think it's probably a
probably good question. Wittgenstein

wanted would ask his students to
imagine false scientific facts, not say
that they were false. He wanted them to see if they have the capacity to imagine

concepts as they existed if certain facts weren't true and so what this was

for was to encourage the way that they would conceive and think of things

because he wanted to show them that what they currently think is only a way

of thinking an orchestration of social construction in some way and you can
give a gift of sort of God's eye view where you can see yourself in this
construction then you presumably would know better it's also

unsettling because it means that foundations become something a little different. So it's negative in one sense but it is trying to get a God's eye perspective on where your beliefs come from so it's meant to be it's meant to be used instrumentally to make someone think better. Sean, getting back to what novel is saying about different pictures and whether they're equal or not in your
answer, from a psychological viewpoint though wouldn't there be certain pictures that
would elicit stronger emotional responses and therefore opinions in
people's minds? Yes and I think the first thing that a Wittgensteinian want to
show the person is that effect is occurring. I mean I don't quite know
how to answer the question other than to say that you know you want to
be as sensitive as possible in education you know normally they are we
look at very controversial things and we want to do that in the most sensitive way possible but it is definitely true that picture it can cause great emotion you know it's very can be very very manipulative, pictures can be.

You know, you have this you have these things that come to your mind. Prejudice is a very good example of it I mean think of what pictures are in the mind of someone who might be
you know a prejudice individual and so

00:18:57,660 --> 00:19:05,310
you know stereotypes and what people what you imagine for people this is

00:19:05,310 --> 00:19:10,950
quite it's quite a difficult thing it's
quite a difficult thing pictures can be

00:19:10,950 --> 00:19:17,370
and very very very harmful and this is
why I ultimately think that the way to

00:19:17,370 --> 00:19:22,920
make someone smarter is not so much to
get them to have control over their

00:19:22,920 --> 00:19:27,730
emotions,
but to get them to have greater curatorial

00:19:27,730 --> 00:19:33,899
capacity. Greater ways of imagining
things. Greater ways of seeing things and

00:19:33,899 --> 00:19:38,940
you know Richard Rorty talks about
sensitivity training to teach people

00:19:38,940 --> 00:19:43,419
first-person experiences. What is it like
to walk in this person's shoes? How does

00:19:43,419 --> 00:19:48,970
this person you know see life? And really
what I'm trying to argue for is being

00:19:48,970 --> 00:19:54,070
well-rounded and seeing other ways of
seeing a subject and I think it's kind

00:19:54,070 --> 00:19:57,370
of getting difficult to do in the age
that we live in, because I think we're

00:19:57,370 --> 00:20:03,129
reaching a point where we don't want how we see things messed with and I think

218
00:20:03,129 --&gt; 00:20:08,110
that's I think it's very important in education that we make that commitment

219
00:20:08,110 --&gt; 00:20:12,850
that you may not like this picture or way of seeing it but I'm going to

220
00:20:12,850 --&gt; 00:20:20,279
show this to you you know it's very important to let me do that.

221
00:20:35,620 --&gt; 00:20:37,680
Thank you.