

Wittgenstein in Exile, by James C. Klagge. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011. Pp. X + 237. H/b
£25.95

The headline claim of this engaging but frustrating book is that important insight is available both into Wittgenstein's work and into its difficulty for us by viewing Wittgenstein as a species of exile. Wittgenstein lived much of his life away from Austria, but this is not what Klagge wants to emphasise. His proposal is that Wittgenstein may fruitfully be considered as having lived in exile not from a homeland but from a 'hometown' – specifically, from a period that ended with the death of Schumann. The possibility of this perspective is provided in the first instance by Wittgenstein's reaction to Spengler's philosophy of history. Spengler found in history a repeated pattern of growth, maturity and decline. The maturity of an era was termed 'culture' and is associated by Spengler with 'organism'; an era's decline is termed 'civilisation' and associated with 'mechanism'. Instantiating this pattern is the Western Era, which moved from culture to decline over the course of the nineteenth century. To an extent, as Klagge shows, Wittgenstein appears to have accepted this narrative. And crucially for Klagge's purposes, Wittgenstein sometimes conceived of himself and of his work as belonging not to his own time of western civilisation but to its preceding period of culture.

The details, at least, of Spengler's story are somewhat dubious. When considering Wittgenstein's thought as opposed to his self-conception Klagge therefore soft pedals much of its historical specifics and focuses instead on the story's atemporal characterisations of culture and civilisation. The intellectual spirit of civilisation, exemplified centrally by Socrates, is one

which looks everywhere for scientific precision of a certain kind, one which insists on a mechanistic picture of causation, and one which presses for deeper and deeper explanation. A cultural spirit, by contrast, ceases asking for explanation sooner rather than later, finds precision without mimicking science, and doesn't need to understand causation mechanistically. What Klagge wants then to endorse is the idea that Wittgenstein's 'cultured' thought contrasts in these ways with the 'civilised' currents dominant both in his times and in ours. Disappointingly little effort is expended, however, either on explaining the individual strands of this contrast or on tying them together as strands of a single contrast. Klagge does not substantially address, for example, the question arising of what Socrates' quests for necessary and sufficient conditions have to do with being in thrall of science.

The broadest of Klagge's proposals for putting his idea of Wittgenstein as an exile to work is introduced in chapter 2 with a list of what is said in the *Investigations* to cause philosophical problems to arise and/or remain. This includes: what holds us captive, what we are tempted by, what suggests itself to us, how things look to us, what we find sensible, our expectations, what we fail to see, what we would like, what we allow and how we look at things. Klagge suggests that 'the sum of such tendencies could be said to constitute a temperament – a spirit of the [civilised] times' (pp. 25-6). It is the civilised intellectual spirit, alien to Wittgenstein himself, that is responsible for the philosophical problems examined in his later writings – writings which thus 'address a reader who is imagined not to share the proper temperament' (p. 80). This same idea is pressed in chapter 6 where Klagge takes Wittgenstein's status as an exile to suit him to the role of philosopher: Wittgenstein can see more clearly the mistakes which give rise to the philosophical problems with which he deals, for they are not

also his mistakes. Whilst some local insights may be available here, as a broad key this proposal seems to me to be considerably implausible. Wittgenstein's work, more than that of any other philosopher I can think of, is in general work not only *for* himself but also *on* himself. So Wittgenstein writes not only: 'The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to' (*Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, §133), but also: 'Working on philosophy is ... really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's own way of seeing things' (*Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 24). What is more, the cause of philosophical problems – including those with which he is himself concerned – is standardly identified by Wittgenstein with something more permanent than a Spenglerian spirit of civilisation. Wittgenstein does at one point pose himself the question: 'Are we dealing with errors...that are as old as language?...or are they of a special nature, characteristic of our civilization?' (MS 132,7; cited by Klagge at p168), but his familiar – at least – answer is the first of these two:

People say ... that the same philosophical problems which were already preoccupying the Greeks are still troubling us today. ... The reason is that our language has stayed the same and tempts us again and again towards the same questions. For as long as there will be a verb 'to be', which seems to work like 'to eat' and 'to drink', ... for as long as there will be adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false' and 'possible', for as long as there will be talk of a flow of time and of an expanse of space etc., etc., then people will run up against the same puzzling difficulties again and again. (*The Big Typescript*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 424; c.f., e.g., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge, 1922 §3.323)

Perhaps the most substantial part of Klagge's book, chapters 7-9, investigates how science might be of interest to, or an influence on, philosophy. With this question in view, Klagge distinguishes between a philosophical resolution and a conceptual resolution of a philosophical problem. A philosophical resolution is provided, according to Klagge's Wittgenstein, by a synoptic view of our use of words, and there is here no role for science. It is consistent with Wittgenstein's views, however, that science can provide material for a conceptual resolution of a philosophical problem – a resolution, that is, in which the problem disappears in consequence of an evolution of our concepts. As the criteria for flu changed under medical advances from various forms of suffering to an internal state causally responsible for such suffering, so advances in neuroscience might lead our criteria for mental states to change over time from behaviour to internal states – and if this were to happen then 'the problem of the inverted spectrum will be resolved by direct inspection of people's brains' (p. 89). Klagge does not discuss what is meant by 'concept', 'criterion' or 'behaviour', but that to one side, the obvious concern with his idea of a conceptual resolution is that if, e.g., brain states were to become criterial for mental states this wouldn't resolve philosophical problems of mentality so much as shift the meaning of words in such a way that those problems become hidden from view. Klagge considers something like this objection (p. 92) and appears to reply to it that Wittgenstein did not take concepts to be immune from revision or even rejection (the examples are given of 'force' and 'wound shock' (p. 94)) – but it is unclear how this reply is intended to be effective.

Some sense of Klagge's perspective here may be had by considering that, as he understands it, identity theory in the philosophy of mind claims that 'ordinary [psychological] concepts can become, ... or turn out to be, ... *technical concepts*. The eliminative materialist, on the other hand, proposes that ordinary concepts be replaced with technical concepts' (p. 88). Wittgenstein, Klagge subsequently presses, 'has no principled opposition to eliminativism' (p. 152). This latter, highly surprising remark, and also the very odd claim regarding identity theory (an identity theorist of lightning does not, I take it, think the concept 'lightning' will become/turn out to be a technical/scientific concept), are both accounted for by the fact that Klagge takes his two characterisations more or less as definitions. Identity theory and eliminativism are theses not about the nature or existence of mental states, theses which might lead to predictions or recommendations about the development of our mental concepts: they are rather those predictions or recommendations themselves.

A focus on human concepts is also found in chapter 8's related discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on 'non-mediative causality'. Famously, Wittgenstein imagines a situation in which seeds from two different types of plant are internally indistinguishable, each seed nonetheless growing into a plant of the same type as that by which it was produced. It is in the spirit of our civilised, science-dominated times, Klagge suggests, to insist that if seeds grow into different kinds of plants there must be an internal difference between them; a cultured spirit by contrast might happily drop that insistence. Rather than ask which party would be correct, however, – could there be 'unmediated causality'? – Klagge discusses at length a range of scientific, sociological and psychological circumstances in which we might be prepared to 'give up the urge to look for, ... or at least believe in the existence of, mediating differences

where there are different effects' (p. 107). Now such discussion as to how our causal – or mental – concepts might develop in certain circumstances is of course just fine. (So too is Klagge's discussion of whether we might want to hold back on neuroscience because of the harm of the conceptual changes which its advances might provoke (pp. 120-122).) But its relevance to philosophy is unclear. In the future, 'science might [indeed] have a different role in society' (p. 108, a section heading) such that its insistence on mediated causality does not dominate our thinking – but what has this to do with causation? It may indeed be that advances in neuroscience will prompt us to change or even abandon our folk psychological concepts, but – returning to our initial concern – it is easy to think that in itself this matter is irrelevant to philosophical problems surrounding the idea of an inverted spectrum.

Failures to connect adduced psychological and sociological considerations with substantive philosophy are evident also in discussions where science is not a primary concern. In chapter 10, for example, Klagge discusses various cases of people differing in their willingness to stop asking for moral, religious or philosophical explanation, and he makes it clear that Wittgenstein's sympathies are in each case with those who stop sooner. But here where you might think the discussion would begin, it in fact ends. The implicit suggestion is that the non-Wittgensteinians are wrong to carry on asking, that they go 'too far' (p. 141), but no philosophical account is attempted of why or in what sense this is so. For a general characterisation both of this complaint and of the previous discussion, we can note that the basic tool of Klagge's book appears on review neither as the headline idea of an exile, nor as the twin notions of culture and civilisation, but rather as a recurrent, underlying idea of 'differences of temperament'. Such a tool may be useful where what is sought is a psychological

explanation of, say, Wittgenstein's taking the views he did, of his writing as he did, or of our finding it difficult to understand or to agree with him. Where one is after, rather, an explication or assessment of philosophical content, the tool is less obviously appropriate for the job. At times, Klagge's text appears to acknowledge an inappropriateness by leaving matters of content unaddressed – and here one is left frustrated. At others, the text appears to do the opposite, to assume without explanation that discussion of psychological temperament is relevant to philosophical content – and one is left confused.

As these comments indicate, I found Klagge's book unconvincing in the large. This said, the book is surprisingly enjoyable, and even, in the small, highly engaging. Klagge writes extremely well and shows an unusually high level of scholarship. Citations from both obscure and well known texts are brought into contact with obscure and well known episodes from Wittgenstein's life, and the resulting explorations are at the very least always interesting. A wide variety of case studies – for instance of divergent attitudes towards the explanation of misfortune in *The Brothers Karamazov* – are thoughtfully and often convincingly presented and discussed. It is a shame that this rich but largely pre-philosophical groundwork does not lead to more philosophical penetration.

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