

that this seems to contradict a crucial premiss of the argument that McGinn and others find in 2.0211–2.0212. On McGinn's gloss, the argument presupposes that if  $aRb$  is false, then  $F(A)$  will lack sense—precisely the opposite of what 3.24 openly declares.

One way to solve this difficulty, put forward by David Pears, is to appeal to what he calls the *Principle of Representation*—the claim that the sense of propositions is ultimately grounded in a more fundamental correlation between names and their referents. This enables Pears to argue that even if the sentence at 3.24 holds for unanalysed propositions, there has to be a level of analysis at which it does not hold—a level at which a proposition would not have sense unless the elements of the proposition were correlated with existing objects. I do not want to assess this move. The only point I want to make is that the move is not available to McGinn. For ascribing to Wittgenstein Pears's Principle of Representation would amount to abandoning her view on the relative priority of the sense of propositions and the reference of names. The move is only available to advocates of the metaphysical reading. But then McGinn needs to provide alternative support for attributing to Wittgenstein the principle that if  $aRb$  were false  $F(A)$  would lack sense, as required by the reading of 2.0211–2.0212 that she endorses, given that, as he makes clear at 3.24, Wittgenstein does not think that the principle follows from our understanding of propositions about complexes.

Overall, this is a highly rewarding book, and a welcome addition to the literature on the early Wittgenstein. It fills an important gap by providing a systematic presentation and defence of an influential interpretative line that had not received this level of attention before. Many aspects of this reading receive strong support from McGinn's book, even if, perhaps inevitably, some of its weaknesses are exposed in the process.

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***Wittgenstein's Private Language: Grammar, Nonsense, and Imagination in Philosophical Investigations, §§ 243–315***, by Stephen Mulhall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 148. H/b £19.99.

Stephen Mulhall's new book presents the first sustained attempt at offering a 'resolute' reading of Wittgenstein's *opus magnum*, the *Philosophical Investigations*. In this respect the focal points of Mulhall's work are both the mature Wittgenstein's philosophical method and practice generally conceived as well as the sections of the *Investigations* commonly referred to as 'the private language argument', which Mulhall regards as an 'illuminating test-case' (p. 11) for

his kind of interpretative strategy. To date, 'resolute readings' have mainly been the province of early Wittgenstein scholarship: Cora Diamond and James Conant first pressed such readings into service in an attempt to save the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* from ending in self-contradiction. By thus widening the field of application, Mulhall has broken new ground for this sort of interpretation. Inevitably, he has also imported, along with the virtues, some of this strategy's inherent problems.

It is characteristic of 'resolute' readers that they ascribe to early Wittgenstein, and themselves accept, nonsense monism: 'from the point of view of logic, mere nonsense is the only kind of nonsense there is' (p. 2), where 'mere nonsense' just means plain gibberish. If a string of signs turns out to be nonsensical, this is solely due to the fact that we have not assigned meaning to it; it is not the result of a violation of the rules of logical syntax (p. 5) or of a 'clash' between intelligible components put together in an unintelligible way (p. 9). Hence, there is nothing we 'cannot do' in the *Tractatus*: 'the limits of sense are not limitations' (p. 8) fencing us off from the ineffable. Consequently, according to resolute readers, Wittgenstein's 'ladder' must be thrown away, not because it has provided us insight into unstateable metaphysical truths, but simply because the 'perspective' we thought we could occupy is shown to be no more than the projection of an 'illusion of sense'—the work's putative 'substantial claims' reveal themselves to be *plain*, not 'illuminating', nonsense, once Wittgenstein's therapy has worked its magic on us.

The interpretative challenge of Mulhall's book is to motivate the idea that in the *Investigations*, too, it is possible to distinguish between 'substantial' and 'resolute' readings of it. *Prima facie* this is not an easy task, as the later Wittgenstein does not present his reader with a *Tractatus*-type exegetical conundrum: the *Investigations* does not declare itself, like the *Tractatus*, to be nonsensical. But if not, what are the merits of reading Wittgenstein's later work in 'resolute' fashion?

Mulhall (p. 9) takes his interpretative cues for promoting a 'resolute reading' of the *Investigations* from two sections.

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one *couldn't* do. (§374)

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation. (§500)

If we do not heed Wittgenstein's warnings here, Mulhall argues, while at the same time regarding his notion of 'grammar' as a 'way of recalling us to the distinction between sense and nonsense' (*ibid.*), then we might be tempted to give this a 'substantial' spin; we might end up regarding grammar, like logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, as prohibitive and as preventing us from articulating something that is, nevertheless, in some sense, perfectly intelligible. So we might be seduced into thinking that we can get intimations of what lies beyond the limits that grammar has demarcated.

I believe this problem to be spurious. If grammar sets limits to sense, then there is indeed nothing—no *thing*—that lies beyond these limits and hence there is, in this sense, nothing (no *thing*) one cannot do. The rules of grammar, just as the rules of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, are constitutive rules, so what they rule out is *a fortiori* not something that *could* be done, but that should not be done. (For a forceful articulation of this point, see Peter Hacker, ‘Was He Trying to Whistle It?’, in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds), *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge, 2000. See also my *A Confusion of the Spheres*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, Ch. 3.) Anyone who thinks otherwise has not understood what it means to be a condition of sense. Hence, if endorsement of this muddled view is supposed to be a characteristic feature of ‘substantial’ readings of the *Investigations*, one wonders who could possibly be a proponent of them. To his credit, Mulhall does not actually saddle anyone in particular with this conception.

More promising might be the thought that ‘substantial readings’ of the *Investigations* involve attributing to Wittgenstein an ‘implicit philosophical theory of the (now grammatical) conditions of sense—quite as if our everyday abilities to distinguish sense from nonsense require at the very least a philosophical grounding or foundation (perhaps a criterial semantics, or a theory of language-games, or an anthropology of the human form of life)’ (p. 9). There certainly are philosophers who ascribe just such views to Wittgenstein and who are puzzled by the very idea of not advancing theses in philosophy. Nevertheless, there is also a long line of distinguished Wittgenstein scholars who are very far indeed from doing this, but who would not accept a ‘resolute’ reading of the *Investigations*. It would, I think, strengthen the case for ‘resolution’ if, instead of being offered as an antidote to a ‘substantial’ conception, it were rather to engage with the kinds of reading that—while not qualifying as ‘resolute’—would also reject both conditions necessary for counting as ‘substantial’ (i.e. readings that would neither ascribe a theory to Wittgenstein nor regard the limits of sense as limitations). There are more than just two alternatives here.

These problems are compounded by the fact that the meaning of ‘substantial’ itself seems to shift throughout Mulhall’s text. That is to say, as we read on beyond the introduction, it becomes clear that a ‘substantial’ reading of the *Investigations* is not just a conception that has succumbed to what I have called the ‘spurious’ error above, or one that attributes some form of theory to Wittgenstein—no, it seems to comprise *any* reading (including Mulhall’s own from ‘pre-resolute’ times!) that regards Wittgenstein as advancing a non-empty view, or some form of argument. For example, any reading of Wittgenstein’s famous ‘private diarist’ passage (§258) that attempts to show that ‘private ostensive definition’ is logically impossible is characterized as ‘substantial’ by Mulhall. For, according to a ‘resolute’ reading, this passage ‘does not show us that something (noting the occurrence of our pains) is logically impossible in the kind of context the diarist stipulates; it shows us that, although we

thought that we were imagining someone noting the occurrence of his sensations, we were not imagining anything ... Wittgenstein's aim is to get us to see that 'the tale of the diarist' amounts only to someone making a mark, or uttering an inarticulate sound' (p. 99). But, surely, if Wittgenstein is right, and 'private ostensive definition' is logically impossible, then it just follows from that that all the 'private diarist' is doing is, in the end, nothing in particular (for what he claimed to be doing, is not, in fact, possible). So, the 'substantial' reader's conclusion does not, in this respect, differ from the 'resolute' one. But, if so, why prefer 'resolution'?

Mulhall anticipates this type of objection on p. 82 and responds: 'if one's interlocutor is convinced that her empty words articulate an insight, then simply to oppose or dismiss them (by directly invoking a grammatical articulation that they appear to violate) would fail to acknowledge the fact that she will necessarily respond to that invocation from within her conviction' (p. 83). Such a response would, in other words, fail to take the interlocutor seriously as a subject. This is not convincing, however, for no proper Wittgensteinian philosopher would go about attempting to defuse a philosophical position by just quoting chapter and verse of grammar. In fact, this charge would be an especially unfair characterization of what Mulhall's former self was about in *On Being in the World* (London: Routledge, 1999). So, again, there seems no good reason here to prefer a 'resolute' reading.

Perhaps the only imaginable selling-point of a 'resolute' reading is the fact that it is genuinely difficult to understand the role of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments (in the sense of arguments that reduce, quite literally to absurdity, not contradiction) in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. For, as Mulhall asks,

How could any *reductio* argument deliver a genuine conclusion, by revealing the sheer nonsensicality of its apparent starting-point? And if *reductio* arguments really are legitimate means for gaining intellectual insight, then the position in which they leave us is surely no more uncomfortable than that offered to us by the *Tractatus*, with its concluding claim that a criterion for understanding its author is the realization that every elucidatory word of his must be recognized as simply nonsensical—as simply to be thrown away. Perhaps, when our concern is with the limits of sense, there is no other way of acknowledging them, and of inviting others to share that acknowledgement. And perhaps it is a criterion of properly understanding our difficulties here that we apprehend the latent nonsensicality of the previous sentence ... No doubt, our false sense of understanding here was undergirded or encouraged by Wittgenstein's use of the word 'beetle' in articulating his putative analogy to a fantasy about 'pain' and pain—as opposed, say, to 'brillig', or '\$%&', or '\*'. (p. 137)

Although I agree with Mulhall that this may stand in need of further clarification, I do not believe that a satisfactory response to this problem can be just to write off as plain nonsense both what Wittgenstein says in such passages *as well as* everything we say about what Wittgenstein is up to in such remarks. But I do not see how this unpalatable consequence can be avoided if the fantasy about 'pain' is really no different, as Mulhall says, from '\$%&', for, if so, then our articulation of that fantasy will also turn out to be '\$%&'—a fact that

Mulhall seems to be acknowledging when he says that we must 'apprehend the latent nonsensicality of the previous sentence'. Given that the fantasy about 'pain' pervades much of Mulhall's text, however, it will not just be the 'previous sentence' mentioned in the passage that will reveal itself to be sheer nonsense, but significant parts of the book.

All of that said, there is also much in this work that is genuinely thought-provoking. For example, in a short chapter entitled 'Wittgenstein's Semicolon', Mulhall reminds us of an important bit of punctuation that has gone missing in Anscombe's translation of §255 of the *Investigations*: 'The philosopher treats a question; like an illness', which Anscombe renders as 'The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness'. Mulhall is right that Anscombe's translation, however natural, 'fails to do justice to the concision and multivalence of the German original' (p. 89); he further suggests that the original 'allows for the possibility that what is like an illness is not the question but the philosopher's treatment of it, and even for the possibility that it is the very inclination to talk or conceive of philosophers as treating questions that is like an illness'. Although I am not persuaded by this interpretation of §255 because I think it jars with the context within which the remark appears, one cannot but admire the imaginative dexterity with which Mulhall subverts ingrained readings of the text, challenging the reader to re-examine features of Wittgenstein's work she may have, unwisely, taken for granted. So whether one agrees with Mulhall or not, his new work reads well, and certainly deserves close attention.

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***Sounds: A Philosophical Theory***, by Casey O'Callaghan. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 193. H/b £30.00.

Sounds have received relatively little philosophical attention, which is surprising given the significant amount of work done on perception more generally and vision in particular. No more than a handful of articles have been devoted to sounds, and O'Callaghan's is only the second book-length treatment of the topic by an analytic philosopher, and the first in English (see R. Casati and J. Dokic, *La philosophie du son*, Nîmes: Chambon, 1994). *Sounds* is impressive. It is carefully argued and well-written. O'Callaghan defends the proposal that 'particular sounds are events of oscillating or interacting bodies disturbing or setting a surrounding medium into wave motion' (p. 60). In addition to pre-