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Book Review

Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Critical Essays. By Meredith Williams. Rowman & Littlefield, Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pp. v + 238.

Meredith Williams' *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: Critical Essays* offers little for Wittgenstein scholars or for those already familiar with the major critical sources on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The collection of essays contains previously published works from well-known philosophers, including Warren Goldfarb, Anthony Kenny, John McDowell, P. M. S. Hacker, and others, and will therefore be of little help for those seeking new insights into Wittgenstein's later philosophy. For those unfamiliar with the critical resources on the later Wittgenstein, however, or for college and university professors teaching seminars on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Williams' book is both useful and illuminating. It contains some of the clearest and most accessible critical reviews of Wittgenstein's later work, and is thoughtfully organized to cover major themes in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Williams divides the book into four sections, with each section containing two articles related to that particular theme. The sections include reference and meaning (Goldfarb; Hintikka and Hintikka); rules and their application (McDowell and Williams); privacy and the private language argument (Kenny and Wright); and necessity and grammar (Hacker and Lear). The organization of the book into these distinct themes is insightful, as it corresponds to major issues in the *Investigations*.

The first two articles develop Wittgenstein's critique of ostensive definition by focusing on his use of language games. Warren Goldfarb's article, "I Want You to Bring Me a Slab" offers a detailed reading of *PI* ¶2, in which Wittgenstein presents a "primitive" language game in order to show how words attain their meaning through use rather than reference. However, Goldfarb argues that it would be a mistake to think that Wittgenstein presents this "primitive" language game as a complete language on its own, and instead suggests that it is meant to point out the complexity of everyday language, and to "resist the impulse to localize meaning in a specific act or event" (p. 30).

Whereas Goldfarb argues that Wittgenstein's purpose in the *Investigations* is purely methodological and heuristic, Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka's essay "Language-Games in Wittgenstein's Later Thought," argues that Wittgenstein's use of language games signifies a basic link between language and the world. By focusing on the connection between words and activities in Wittgenstein's language games, the authors reformulate the problem of language games in a "quasi-epistemological" mode by asking how we come to recognize the basic semantical links between language and the world, suggesting that Wittgenstein's latter thought shows how language

“mirrors” the world through the use of language games. The link between language and reality which language games provides, however, is not a metaphysical link, as it was for the early Wittgenstein, but “quasi-epistemological” link, in that “our language-games serve to define the linguistic symbols involved in them and thereby guarantee them a role in our interactions with reality” (p. 54).

The following two articles offer critical responses to Saul Kripke’s famous formulation of the supposed paradox of meaning in Wittgenstein’s later thought. In ¶201 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein asserts that “this was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule,” and Kripke interprets this paradox as a skeptical stance that dissolves meaning “into thin air.” To resolve the paradox, Kripke suggests that the relation between rule and rule-following is grounded in social patterns that are shared within communities rather than rational grounds or private individuals. Meredith Williams’ own article, “Blind Obedience: Rules, Community, and the Individual” argues against Kripke’s account that Wittgenstein presents a skeptical problem, while retaining the importance of community to make sense of reference and rule-following. She argues that there is an unreflective component in linguistic practice that cannot be reduced to explicit rules or mere “conformity of use,” and that this unreflective component expresses a complex background of shared agreement. While the details of this shared background cannot be mapped out by explicit rules, they are nevertheless shown in linguistic use and practice.

John McDowell’s paper, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule” also addresses Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein’s paradox, and argues that Kripke’s solution, which sees rule-following as de facto community agreement, succumbs to its own paradox of interpretation. According to McDowell, Wittgenstein was interested in debunking a view of language as contractual agreement, in which we grasp meaning, use, and understanding as forms of contracts that require rigid adherence to linguistic rules. McDowell argues that the attempt to account for the normativity of these rules within an interpretive framework is caught within a vicious paradox of interpretation: if I account for a rule and its application by an act of interpretation, then I must also appeal to another interpretation to interpret the first interpretation, and so on. McDowell sees Wittgenstein as warning us against taking this route, pointing instead to a “transcendental” way of for understanding rules, which, in line with Wittgenstein, is not simply another “interpretation.”

The next two essays address Wittgenstein’s “private language argument” and the Cartesian conception of mind that is presupposed in the account that we have private sensations. Anthony Kenny’s paper, “Verification Principle and the Private Language Argument” offers a detailed reading of the “private language argument,” showing that Wittgenstein’s criticism of it proceeds along two prongs: one about the nature of experience and another about the nature of language. “The mistake about experience was the belief that experience is private; the mistake about language was the belief that words can acquire meaning by bare ostensive definition” (p. 132). Kenny addresses both mistakes, showing how Wittgenstein attacks the traditional idea that words attain meaning by ostensive definition or verification, and argues that Wittgenstein dismantles the idea that sensations are known “only by me” in some private fashion.

Crispin Wright’s essay, “Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy of Mind: Sensation, Privacy, and Intention,” focuses on the grammar of introspection, and argues that Wittgenstein successfully shows how the identification of private sensations rests on a grammatical mistake: thinking that our

“intentional states” such as belief and understanding, actually refer to internal, ontological states of consciousness. Given that the grammar of intentional states requires “content which may be verified, acted upon, complied with, fulfilled, etc., by subsequent performances, states of affairs and events” (p. 159), the Cartesian picture of psychological ascription and internal privacy lack coherence. Interestingly enough, Wright refuses to see Wittgenstein offering any other “positive account” to fill the vacuum created by his critique of internal psychological language. Rather, he frames Wittgenstein as questioning this very enterprise: “It is precisely this (sort of) craving, I believe, that Wittgenstein’s emphasis upon the error of seeking philosophical *explanations*...is meant to engage” (p. 174).

The final two essays focus on Wittgenstein’s methodological use of a “grammatical investigation,” and question whether Wittgenstein’s later philosophy eschews the creation of positive philosophical theory or communicates transcendental insights. P. M. S. Hacker’s essay, “Metaphysics as the Shadow of Grammar,” adopts the former approach, and argues that Wittgenstein’s later thought is best understood as showing the confusions embedded in metaphysical language. The problem of metaphysics, as Hacker sees it, arises by not attuning ourselves to the actual grammar of language and by thinking that all questions can be answered by the methods of science. “Metaphysical propositions appear to describe the necessary features of the world. They look like super-empirical descriptions of reality. But in fact they are either expressions of grammatical rules for the use of words, or nonsense” (p. 192). For Hacker, Wittgenstein shows that “metaphysics is the shadow of grammar,” and argues that his later thought does *not* produce any insights into the nature of the world. Rather, it simply produces insights “into the grammar of our descriptions of the world” (p. 200).

The final essay by Jonathan Lear, “Leaving the World Alone,” sees a “depressing strain” in Wittgenstein’s later thought: namely, that the only job of philosophy is to prevent “language going on a holiday,” in other words, to stop philosophy from doing what it does. Lear’s essay is critical of this non-revisionary strain in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, arguing that there is indeed room for philosophy to revise our beliefs and practices. “For perhaps we are so minded as to change certain of our beliefs under the stimulus of philosophical activity” (p. 217). Lear also argues that the *Investigations* is best seen as an “act of pointing” to our “mindedness,” that is, it can awaken us to those beliefs and practices “that have no explanation or justification” (P. 216). The attempt to give empirical explanations for *all* of our philosophical questions eventually runs into a dead-end, and “we must first recognize that we are empirically exhausted: i.e., that our quest for understanding will not be satisfied by a more embracing explanation or justification” (p. 214). The *Investigations* provides just this type of recognition, according to Lear, and therefore awakens us to our “mindedness.”

In sum, Meredith Williams’ book is a substantial contribution to the field of Wittgenstein scholarship. It contains important essays and book chapters from Wittgenstein scholars, and is organized thematically, corresponding to major themes in the *Investigations*, including the problem of reference and meaning, rule-following, the “private language argument,” and “grammatical investigation.” Williams’ book is equally valuable in that it includes various—and sometimes competing—interpretations of the *Investigations* rather than a list of authors all in agreement. It will prove especially useful for graduate and undergraduate seminars on Wittgenstein’s later thought.

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