

## BOOK REVIEWS

Opportunities for Reflection:  
*The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, ed. by  
Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn

Martin Gustafsson

Kuusela, Oskari & Marie McGinn (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 848 p.

According to the cover blurb of this massive Wittgenstein handbook, it constitutes “the definitive resource for the study of this great philosopher”. Fortunately, that is not true. After all, no collection of commentaries, be it as comprehensive as you like, could be the definite resource for the study of any great philosopher. For it is part of what makes a great philosopher great that his or her original writings have a life that precludes such definiteness – a life that makes his or her thoughts continuously grow beyond the loads of secondary literature produced by academic scholars. Hence it is a relief to see that what this collection in fact does – and what the editors actually aim at doing – is to exhibit the inescapable *indefiniteness* of Wittgenstein scholarship. As the

editors begin by noting, “Wittgenstein is a contested figure on the philosophical scene”, and the thirty-five contributions give the reader a clear and updated sense of how deep, wide-ranging and yet often intricately connected the various controversies about the significance of his philosophy are.

The editors are particularly concerned with Wittgenstein’s marginalization within contemporary mainstream analytic philosophy. This worry has two sides to it. On the one hand, there is the worry that analytic philosophy gets impoverished if it forgets about one of its own most important and original representatives. On the other hand, there is the worry that Wittgenstein scholars, by isolating themselves

from the wider analytic community, unwittingly mummify Wittgenstein's philosophy by not putting it to real philosophical work. To counter both these tendencies, the editors have made an effort to have among the contributors not only people who consider themselves Wittgenstein specialists, but also those whose philosophical approach lies closer to the analytic mainstream. The collection's being a meeting place for these diverse voices is one of its chief merits, and it is only to be hoped for that the book can substantially contribute to the sort of anti-isolationism that the editors are aiming at. The flipside of the coin is that potential connections between Wittgenstein and other philosophical traditions are left invisible and unexplored. There is no discussion at all of the relations between Wittgenstein's thought and the various strands within twentieth-century continental philosophy.

In his thought-provoking chapter on private experience and sense data, Paul Snowdon says that "Wittgenstein is fundamentally a negative thinker", and spells out this characterization as follows:

His aim is primarily to establish claims of the form Not [P], or, perhaps: "we should not think that P'. [...] Thus, when he says that his aim in philosophy is "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle', we should, surely, think of being trapped in the fly-bottle as a metaphor for being in the grip of an intellectual con-

fusion to the effect that P, and escaping as coming to realize that Not [P]. (403-4)

Many Wittgenstein scholars would respond to this passage by saying that the fly-bottle metaphor is designed precisely to *counter* the natural tendency to think of philosophical problems in terms of being in the grip of a confusion "to the effect that P" and think of the solution to such a problem in terms of coming to realize "that Not [P]". According to Wittgenstein – the response would continue – the very idea that there is a determinate view "to the effect that P" is often what gives rise to the problem in the first place, and the solution is to realize, not that one should not think that P, but that the apparent meaningfulness of both P and its anti-thesis might instead be the products of an artificial and tacitly relied-on dialectical scheme or picture which will lose its attraction if brought out into the open and properly scrutinized.

Now, Snowdon is of course aware of the possibility of this sort of response, and tries to forestall it in a footnote that I cancelled from the above quotation – a footnote where he says that "[i]n characterizing the intended conclusion as 'not thinking that P', I hope to leave it open that the problem in thinking that P might be, according to Wittgenstein, that the state characterized as thinking that P is deficient in proper content" (403, n. 6). However, this note seems to play no substantive role in Snowdon's

ensuing discussion of Wittgenstein's methodology. Thus, he counters Wittgenstein's notorious conception of philosophy as not proposing any theories, by claiming that "since Wittgenstein argues people out of the bad convictions [...] he has to advance some positive claims [...] and there really is no chance that such claims can all be, as one might say, a-theoretical" (404; original italics). The only way that Snowdon can make sense of Wittgenstein's conception is to think of it as a misleading way of suggesting that philosophy traffics only in trivial, agreed-upon truths: "Wittgenstein conceives of himself as saying something positive, albeit of such an untheoretical kind that no one has ever doubted it" (ibid.). As Snowdon immediately goes on to notice, however, many of Wittgenstein's own philosophical remarks, including his characterizations of philosophy, seems far from untheoretical in this sense – after all, few philosophical works are more hotly contested than Wittgenstein's.

I bring up this discussion of Snowdon's in some detail, because it seems to me representative of how mainstream analytic philosophers refuse to take fully seriously Wittgenstein's conception of what philosophical problems are and how they should be treated. By contrast – and as illustrated by the fact that no less than seven papers of this collection are included in the section "Method" and several others are centrally occupied by methodological issues – a dominant

(though by no means unanimous) trend in recent Wittgenstein scholarship is precisely to try to understand what it would be to take that conception fully seriously, the idea being that understanding this is critical to a proper interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy *überhaupt*. As a consequence, there is a strong tendency to emphasize and describe as essential to Wittgenstein's approach precisely those elements which mainstream analytic philosophers are inclined to see as eccentric and unfruitful distractions: his peculiar style of writing, his insistence that philosophy is not a science, and the idea that philosophical problems should be dissolved rather than solved. No wonder, then, that there is a sense of estrangement on both sides: today's analytic mainstream runs in a direction opposite to that of recent Wittgenstein scholarship. Also, while worries about the meaningfulness of philosophical problems and philosophy's proper relation to science were central to many of the classic figures in the analytic tradition – Frege, Russell, Carnap, Ryle, Austin, Sellars, and even Quine – a similar intellectual context is absent today. Thus Wittgenstein's treatment of these issues is bound to seem stranger now than it looked 50 years ago.

Putting Wittgenstein's philosophy to work in the context of contemporary analytic philosophy is thus not without its difficulties, especially if one is impressed by the developments within Wittgenstein

scholarship that I have just rehearsed. At the same time, to let methodological quandaries stop one from entering such conversation would seem to amount to a form of methodological dogmatism foreign to the author of *Philosophical Investigations*. As many contributors to this volume emphasize, later Wittgenstein is a methodological pluralist who warns against the idea that we can know beforehand precisely what sort of treatment a particular problem requires, and his approach is decidedly piecemeal (the exact sense of “piecemeal” here is the main topic of James Conant’s thoughtful essay). Indeed, it is refreshing to see how many of the authors that are willing to let the problems before them speak for themselves, rather than imposing upon them preconceived methodological guidelines (Barry Stroud’s contribution is a particularly fine example of this).

After the editors’ introduction, there is a short but insightful paper by Brian McGuinness about the relation between Wittgenstein’s life and work. Thereafter follows a section on logic and the philosophy of mathematics, with eight papers by Gregory Landini, Colin Johnston, Wolfgang Kienzler, A. W. Moore, Michael Potter, Mathieu Marion and Simo Säätelä. I found Johnston’s chapter on assertion and propositional complexity in the *Tractatus*, Moore’s discussion of Wittgenstein and infinity, Marion’s paper on Wittgenstein and the surveyability of proofs, and Säätelä’s discussion of

open problems in mathematics especially thought-provoking. Marion’s paper in particular breaks new ground in the study of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics, beyond the standard worries about his alleged strict finitism and verificationism, his criticism of Gödel’s incompleteness theorems, his attack on set theory, and so on (worries clearly spelled out in Potter’s contribution). Marion allows us to read Wittgenstein’s discussion of the need for surveyable proofs, not as an argument for strict finitism, but as exploring the idea that there is an ineliminable though traditionally neglected visual element in formal proofs – an idea which has gained increased attention in recent work on the role of visualization in mathematics.

The next section is on the philosophy of language, and also contains eight papers. Stroud’s contribution has already been mentioned. The other papers in this section are all good: Travis offers a difficult but worthwhile discussion of the notion of proposition during various phases in Wittgenstein’s development, and Ian Proops discusses logical atomism in Russell and early Wittgenstein. Like Stroud, Edward Minar nicely brings out the non-reductionist character of the rule-following considerations. David Cerbone has a fine paper on the hard question of linguistic idealism in Wittgenstein, and argues compellingly against Thomas Nagel’s and Jonathan Lear’s idealist-leaning readings. Cora Diamond’s “The

*Tractatus* and the Limits of Sense” illustrates with striking force how artificial the handbook-wise division of Wittgenstein’s philosophy under different headings really is: her paper could justifiably be placed in virtually any section of the book.

“Philosophy of Mind” comes next. The section contains six papers: besides Snowdon’s contribution, William Child discusses Wittgenstein and the first person, Joachim Schulte deals with Wittgenstein’s use of the term “private”, John Hyman brings up later Wittgenstein’s remarks on action and the will, Edward Witherspoon discusses the problem of other minds, and Michael Ter Hark focuses on Wittgenstein’s remarks on meaning experience and secondary use. Here I found Witherspoon’s paper particularly illuminating, in its identification of the Kantian strands in Wittgenstein’s treatment of the problem of other minds, and its useful comparison of McDowell’s and Wittgenstein’s conceptions of criteria.

The epistemology section contains three papers. Duncan Pritchard discusses Wittgenstein and scepticism, and Tomas Baldwin deals with Wittgenstein and Moore. The most original paper here is Kim van Gennip’s intriguing discussion of the connections between intuition, rule-following and certainty in Wittgenstein’s response to Russell’s “The Limits of Empiricism” in “Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness”. Van Gennip argues that Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell is

importantly similar to his earlier criticism of Brouwer, and makes a bold parallel between Wittgenstein’s 1930 reflections on rule-following, his criticism of Russell, and the *On Certainty* conception of certainty as fundamentally residing in action.

The next section is the one on method. Oskari Kuusela’s discussion is a sensitive account of continuities and discontinuities in Wittgenstein’s methodological development, and contains a reasonable description of how a “resolute” reader of the *Tractatus* can make sense of Wittgenstein’s later criticism of his early self. Conant’s contribution tackles similar issues, showing how the idea of a “piecemeal” treatment of philosophical problems can be seen as undergoing subtle but important changes during Wittgenstein’s philosophical career. Marie McGinn’s contribution gives a useful account Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar, Beth Savickey deals with Wittgenstein’s use of examples as a method of conceptual imagination, Avner Baz offers a refreshingly new perspective on aspect perception in Wittgenstein, and Marjorie Perloff discusses the literary form of Wittgenstein’s writings. Finally, Joel Backström brings out what he takes to be the “submerged” theme of the moral dimension of philosophical problems in Wittgenstein.

The final section of the collection, “Religion, Aesthetics and Ethics”, contains three very useful papers on those topics: Stephen Mulhall on Wittgenstein on religious

belief, Malcom Budd on Wittgenstein and aesthetics, and Anne-Marie S. Christensen on Wittgenstein and ethics.

In sum, then, this book is no definite resource, but provides plen-

ty of opportunities for further reflection and controversy – and that is meant as high praise rather than as a point of criticism.

Wittgenstein and the Complexities of  
Semio-Translation:  
*Wittgenstein in Translation*  
by Dinda L. Gorlée

**Horst Ruthrof**

Gorlée, Dinda L., *Wittgenstein in Translation: Exploring Semiotic Signatures*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012. 361 p.

Readers familiar with Dinda Gorlée's earlier works, *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* (1994) and *On Translating Signs: Exploring Text and Semio-Translation* (2004) will quickly recognize the signature of a scholar consistently dedicated to the Peircean semiotic tradition in her new book *Wittgenstein in Translation*. They will also appreciate that the new venture is not only a gold mine for a better understanding of Witt-

genstein and Peirce, but also paints its picture on a generous palette of reading and scholarship from Plato, the Bible, St. Augustine, to not so recent as well as some contemporary writers. One of the obvious strengths of *Wittgenstein in Translation* is the author's comprehensive familiarity with the published works and manuscripts of Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as an impressive range of existing translations of his