

Wittgenstein on Thought and Will by Roger Teichmann (2)

Duncan Richter

By chance, NWR received two reviews of the same work, by Rachael Wiseman and Duncan Richter respectively. Both texts are enlightening in themselves, but the editors found that put together, they constitute an even more interesting read. Hence, both are published here, together. The authors were not allowed to see each other's reviews.

Teichmann, Roger, *Wittgenstein on Thought and Will*. New York/Oxford: Routledge, 2015.

In just 166 pages, including notes, references, and index, Roger Teichmann covers some of the relevant history of philosophy before Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein's thought itself – both early and late, and philosophy after Wittgenstein. The book assumes no prior knowledge of Wittgenstein's work or, really, of philosophy in general, but it is not an easy introduction. Teichmann focuses on issues to do with thought and will, but this gets us into questions of philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and philosophy of action, which is both a lot in itself and a lot of what Wittgenstein wrote about. In other words, this is a book about most of the well-known issues treated by Wittgenstein in his writings, and it covers the Wittgenstein portion of what it bites off in just under 100 pages. That is a lot to chew.

This is not a criticism, but it does mean that the book is not an easy read (nor would Wittgenstein want it to be). It is a book to read slowly and reflectively, and to read in conjunction with the other texts it discusses, including not only Wittgenstein's works but others by, for instance, Elizabeth Anscombe and Donald Davidson. It would make an excellent basis for a course on Wittgenstein that wanted especially to see how Wittgenstein's works relates to, differs from, and might correct the work of other philosophers – both those who came before him and some of the most prominent ones who have

come since. This means also that it should be of interest to anyone concerned with post-Wittgensteinian analytic philosophy, especially in the areas of mind, language, and action, although perhaps only to those who want to know what a Wittgensteinian critique of the mainstream looks like.

One feature of the book that might be criticized by some, although it will surely be welcomed by others, is its treatment of Wittgenstein as a philosopher who can, without too much difficulty or distortion, be brought into dialogue with other philosophers. For instance, as someone with positions that can be described and defended with rational argument. Teichmann presents and defends various positions that he attributes to Wittgenstein. Purists might feel that something must have gone wrong here, but the positions in question do certainly have a Wittgensteinian ring to them, and even if they are not strictly theses for which Wittgenstein would want to argue, they are surely at least views closer to Wittgenstein's than those of the various philosophers with whose work Teichmann takes issue.

An example of such a thesis occurs on page ix: "representation cannot be properly understood abstracted from the empirical phenomenon of human language". This simultaneously sounds like and unlike Wittgenstein. It sounds like him in seeming to be very much the kind of idea that he held (or at least to be the negation of an idea he did not hold).

It sounds unlike him in being couched in language very different from what we find in *Philosophical Investigations* or any other work, published or not, with his name on it. Teichmann addresses this concern early on: he is not interested in merely repeating what Wittgenstein said, nor in aping his style, but in "interpretation, elaboration and comparison" (p. x) of Wittgenstein's work on thought and will with that of others. This seems to require a kind of translation of Wittgensteinian insights into the language or conceptual framework of these other philosophers. Some Wittgenstein scholars will see nothing wrong with this, while others will object that if Teichmann acknowledges that Wittgenstein adopted a particular way of writing for philosophical rather than purely stylistic reasons (as he does on p. x) then he cannot possibly be true to Wittgenstein's philosophy while expressing it in more conventional form. Nevertheless, I suspect that even some of these Wittgensteinians will consider Teichmann's Wittgenstein a worthy adversary for less Wittgensteinian philosophers. And if the real Wittgenstein is someone else, at least engaging with Teichmann's Wittgenstein might move these adversaries in the right direction.

Chapter 1 provides background from the history of philosophy in order to make clear the significance of Wittgenstein's contribution to various debates. The focus is primarily on Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume,

Frege, and Russell, and the three dualisms of mind and body, inner and outer, and thought and will. Teichmann pays special attention to questions of thought and will, including what the nature of thought might be (for instance, does my thinking that x involve a relation between me and x ?, and is a thought an abstract object, something mental, or something else?) and the relation between will and action (e.g., does the will cause action?). This is a lot to cover in one chapter, especially at the level of sophistication that Teichmann prefers, but he is a reliable guide to the territory.

Chapter 2 notes that modern philosophers tend to regard thought and will as relational, and in some cases as involving causal relations between objects. Wittgenstein, Teichmann argues, denies this. Instead he holds that it is internal, non-contingent, relations that connect thoughts to facts, and intentions to deeds. In other words, what appear to be metaphysical connections are in fact grammatical. This means that the investigation of philosophical questions leads not to theories about the workings of the mind but to observations of human behavior, including linguistic behavior. The focus is then less on the mind, with attendant puzzles about the nature of this mind and its relation to the rest of the world, and more on human beings, whose place in the world is rather less mysterious. Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy reduces

mystery but at the price of complexity. He offers no readily summarized doctrines to replace those he rejects (which makes reviewing his thoughts difficult).

Wittgenstein's work is interpreted in various ways, and one question readers might have about Teichmann's book is where he stands on contemporary interpretative debates. The most relevant things to say about this are that there is nothing very peculiar about his interpretation of Wittgenstein and that he does not involve himself much in debates from the secondary literature. Occasionally he mentions a point of agreement or disagreement with P.M.S. Hacker, and he clearly has much sympathy with Anscombe, about whose work he has written another excellent book, but mostly Teichmann presents Wittgenstein orthodoxly. The most original contribution of this book is its last chapter, which sides with Anscombe against Davidson, and with Wittgenstein against scientism. The book's primary value, though, might be as a challenging, dense, sophisticated introduction to the lasting value of Wittgenstein's work.

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