

CRITICAL NOTICE

Wittgenstein and the Practice of Philosophy

Broadview Guides to Philosophy

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Ought there to be some concern that every month there now appears without fail at least one new volume on Wittgenstein ? This might be a survey of his entire oeuvre, or a work relating to the *Tractatus*, to the *Philosophical Investigations*, to his so-called Middle-Period, or to *On Certainty* ; or it might instead be a collection of essays dedicated to some individual theme that an editor believes to play an important role in unravelling the methodological principles apparently underlying his entire philosophy. Yet if this be a concern, it is one that is hardly new. It reminds us of the 1970's and 1980's when almost every writer who provided us with a new volume about Wittgenstein, including well-known figures like Saul Kripke and A.J. Ayer, felt the need to apologise for adding to the already vast secondary literature, an apology usually accompanied by the claim that *he* had discovered some new aspect of the philosophy that had previously been insufficiently explored, or some new audience for Wittgenstein's work that had not yet been adequately addressed. It equally reminds us of the remark T.E. Burke felt compelled to make in his October 1982 *Mind* review of Derek Bolton's *An Approach to Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Macmillan 1979) that 'There have been so many approaches and introductions to Wittgenstein's philosophy, so many critiques and expositions, that their production has long since become subject to Austin's "law of diminishing fleas" '.

But if there are philosophers who show concern that the 'fleas', far from diminishing, have instead continued to increase in number and size, this is a reflection of the fact, not that any longer there is thought to be an *urgent* need to explore and explain the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophy as a relatively new addition to the philosophical tradition, but that forty years further on Wittgenstein's status has changed: he has already joined that select group of philosophers like Aristotle with his vast number of commentators, those who like Kant and Hume regularly have new volumes devoted to

their philosophies precisely because of the historical significance these have attained. In *this* context, apologies for providing *yet another* work on these subjects are not required. For this reason any relevance which the work of these Great Philosophers may be thought to have for contemporary philosophy will tend to assume less importance relative to the intrinsic historical significance it is thought to possess. Yet, as Severin Schroeder reminds us on the cover of the present volume, Michael Hymers' new book about someone who is after all a 20th Century thinker 'should be particularly salutary and useful to students' precisely because it can serve as a suitable antidote to an excess of scientism 'At a time when uncritical emulation of scientific methodology is common in philosophy.'

The fact remains that with such an unprecedented proliferation of works about Wittgenstein, works which with the passage of time almost inevitably build on their predecessors to provide more and more illuminating accounts of what Wittgenstein is about, those that do little more than repeat themes already explored in great detail, or are simply uneven in quality are almost inevitably going to fall by the wayside. If it so happens that Wittgenstein's name currently has a high standing in the publishing world mainly because of the public interest attached to his personal life, this is on balance a fact to be welcomed even if it should incur T. E. Burke's concern that the sheer number of volumes that continue to appear may prevent the student from being unable to see the wood for the trees.

With his new presentation, Michael Hymers has no need to worry that his book may not be providing a useful addition to the philosophical canon. In its own way it provides a highly readable and occasionally exemplary if nevertheless traditional account of Wittgenstein from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty*, where *traditional* can be understood to incorporate metaphysical leanings in the *Tractatus* and overtly therapeutic tendencies throughout the later work which are but partially exhibited in the earlier too. Here, for example, is Hymers leaning very much towards Peter Hacker in his treatment of Diamond-Conant and the 'New Wittgensteinian' approach to the *Tractatus*:

Diamond's view, like the related views of other New Wittgensteinians, is subtle, sophisticated, elegant and even beautiful. But for all that, I do not see how it can be right. What exactly is it that I imagine when I try

imaginatively to understand another person whom I take to be spouting nonsense? Diamond's answer is that I imaginatively enter 'into the tendency to be attracted by such sentences'. But what does it mean to be attracted to such sentences? I can find them attractive, presumably, only if I think that they say something, that they are not nonsense, but if we stop there and give no further content to what they might be saying, it is difficult to see how I could find them attractive....But I see no way of understanding the person who speaks nonsense that scrupulously refrains from trying to interpret what she might be trying to say and failing. (*Ibid.*, 72 *et seq.*)

This down-to-earth approach is further reflected in Hymers' claim that 'what persuades me that this view must be wrong is the great concern that Wittgenstein later shows for the doctrines that he ostensibly did not hold while writing the *Tractatus*.' (*Ibid.*) What Wittgenstein later says in the Preface to the *Investigations* about the 'grave mistakes' he made in that work, mistakes he was partly enabled to realise through his discussions with Frank Ramsey, point for Hymers towards his *rejection* of logical atomism and the saying-showing distinction: 'Surely Wittgenstein held these doctrines in the *Tractatus* and later gave them up!' (*Ibid.*, 74).

Bearing only superficial comparison to Sir Anthony Kenny's *Wittgenstein* (Revised edition Blackwell 2006), with its coverage of the earlier and transitional periods, the later *Philosophical Investigations* with chapters discussing §§ 1 - 90 and to rules and private language, with yet another devoted to *On Certainty*, Hymers covers similar ground to Kenny with an inevitably more contemporary feel provided by his discussion of those issues raised by Kripke, Diamond and Conant that post-dated Kenny's original 1970's book. Beginning with a short Introduction in which Hymers immediately raises the question of how significant we ought to regard the claim made by Wittgenstein that the philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness (*Ibid.* xiii), and to how many so-called philosophical questions this treatment is intended to extend, he raises the second of his main concerns by suggesting that 'perhaps philosophy is an

extension of the natural sciences, which are surely concerned with asking genuine questions, not curing our desire to ask them.' (*Ibid.*) This sets the scene for Hymers' aim of exploring those methodological commitments which he believes to govern Wittgenstein's approach, so that by presenting what he takes to be Wittgenstein's answers to particular philosophical questions he will come to reveal how this important methodology is practiced throughout his work. He does, however, see this method altering with time so that it is only really in the transitional writings 'that Wittgenstein's mature conception of philosophy as a "therapeutic" practice begins to emerge.' (*Ibid.* ix) This makes Hymers' account more traditional than many others - including Kenny's with its emphasis on the continuity of the oeuvre - and confirms why he takes issue with the views of those philosophers whom he refers to as the 'so-called New Wittgensteinians'.

The remainder of the Introduction provides a concise summary of the content of the chapters which follow, the first of which, 'Philosophy and Science', is an exploration of several accounts of philosophy which, in direct contrast to Wittgenstein's approach throughout his life, see it as having importance only insofar as it relates to natural science. Consequently, Hymers presents us with Philosophy *via* Descartes as a foundation for the sciences, *via* Locke as an under-labourer to them, *via* Kant as Queen of the sciences, *via* Russell and the Vienna Circle as logic, and *via* Quine as a discipline continuous with science. Whilst this chapter is undoubtedly interesting in its own right, and whilst the seven pages devoted to Quine in particular - considerably more than to any of the others - provide us with a succinct treatment of the Verification Theory of Meaning and its relation to Quine's reasons for rejecting the analytic-synthetic distinction, it is a chapter that could have been dispensed with, without altogether affecting the discussion of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* that Hymers goes on to present. The main reason for including it at all would appear to be not merely, and clearly that it discusses questions which excite Hymers' interest, but that it serves to express in particular the view of the logical positivists that philosophy is only an under-labourer to the sciences, a view Hymers believes to have supported a mis-reading of the *Tractatus* as expounding the claim that philosophy is in the business of clarifying scientific concepts.

But as Hymers goes on to point out, this claim is completely and perhaps only too obviously at odds with what he refers to as ‘the serious paradox that Wittgenstein presents at the end of the *Tractatus*’ (*Ibid.* 28), a paradox which he feels must be confronted ‘head-on’, one which has little to do with the scientific world-conception of the Vienna Circle. It is at this point that Hymers expresses his view that, once again in contrast to the ‘New Wittgensteinians’, there is a very important difference between Wittgenstein’s early, middle and later approaches to ‘how we ought to think about normativity’ (*Ibid.*)

Stressing that the ‘*Tractatus* is a startling book, both because of the spareness and elegance of its form and because of its extraordinary difficulty’ (*Ibid.*,29), a book so startling that J. Alberta Coffa amongst others believes that no one can seriously claim to understand what it says about anything, (*Ibid.*) Hymers admits that whilst difficult it is far from being completely opaque, a point he makes in the course of presenting his highly traditional reading stressing the 7 numbered propositions the work is said to present, beginning with the famous *The world is everything that is the case* and ending with the general form of the truth-function as the general form of a proposition. It is worth mentioning that on the same page Hymers succeeds in seamlessly welding in a short paragraph of biographical material providing some background about Wittgenstein as the son of a very wealthy family up until his completion of the *Tractatus* at the end of the First World War. What biography the book contains is occasionally supplied in the same way, so that the reader hardly notices that he has become party to information normally supplied in a separate introductory chapter.

Hymers provides what is probably as clear an account of the metaphysics of logical atomism as anyone would require, and after describing atomic facts as the most basic constituents of the world consisting in a configuration of objects, he stresses that a properly analysed sentence should contain nothing but a concatenation of logically proper names, names which are not disguised descriptions like ‘Russell’ or ‘Walter Scott’ (*Ibid.* 33), and that it should contain no logical quantifiers either:

The key to understanding this latter claim lies in recognising that ordinary existence claims are to be analysed as claims about the configuration of simple objects. To say that Santa Claus exists, or that there is beer in the fridge, or that there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is to say that the simple objects stand in certain relations with each other and possess certain properties. Similarly, to deny that something exists is to deny that the simple objects are configured in a particular way. (*Ibid.*, 34)

Despite containing a political statement which for Wittgenstein would have had no more than ephemeral significance, this passage expresses an approach which has the advantage that it might even lead the reader to ask, as Wittgenstein in time was no doubt led to ask, why our ordinary attributions of meaning should require an extraordinarily complex metaphysical edifice of this kind to support them. Hymers elaborates on his highly traditional account in this chapter entitled 'Philosophy and Science in the *Tractatus*', where the reference to 'science' is really intended to do no more than capture the distinction that he has already drawn between the general outlook of the logical positivists and that of Wittgenstein at this period:

Part of the task of philosophy in the *Tractatus*, it seems, is neither to be an under-labourer for the sciences nor to be their queen, but to protect the value of the world, which must lie beyond the world, from being confused with and diluted by all that is merely contingent and accidental. (*Ibid.*, 59)

Following Peter Hacker's claim that some kinds of nonsense can be illuminating rather than misleading (*Ibid.*, 57), a reflection of Hymers' belief that what Wittgenstein cannot *say* he can nevertheless attempt to *show* (*Ibid.*, 54), he concludes his chapter with the proposal that 'it is precisely by its giving up the conviction that what makes for necessity (logical, ethical, or aesthetic) must lie outside the world that Wittgenstein's later work is characterised'. (*Ibid.*, 61)

This follows a succinct account of the difference between Russell and Wittgenstein over Russell's multiple-relational theory of judgement, a theory which made the principles of logic dependent on contingent principles of human psychology.

'After the *Tractatus*', Chapter 3, begins with the thought that whilst it would be oversimplistic to suggest that Wittgenstein in his later work rejected wholesale everything he wrote earlier on, it would be quite wrong to propose, as do the 'New Wittgensteinians', that the doctrines Wittgenstein espoused in the *Tractatus*, including logical atomism, the picture theory and the saying-showing distinction, are no more than examples of the kinds of temptations that Wittgenstein is subtly enticing the reader to resist. Indeed, for an interpreter committed to the belief that the *Tractatus* is a metaphysical treatise, this kind of proposal will be preposterous, a point illustrated by Hymers when he draws our attention to *Tractatus* § 6.3751, where it is stated clearly that the logical structure of colour makes it impossible for two different colours to be in the same place in the visual field. But this implies that a colour's being blue rather than green is not a *logically independent* atomic fact in terms of § 1.21, and since there is no necessity other than logical necessity, so much for logical atomism. Hymers mentions that the problem was addressed inadequately in the famous paper from 1929, 'Some Remarks on Logical Form', only for Wittgenstein to finally regard it as insoluble. (*Ibid.*, 67 *et seq.*)

There follows an account under the heading 'Verification for a While' of Wittgenstein's brief but puzzling acceptance of the claim that a proposition can be conclusively verified by comparing it with an independent fact, a claim which is incompatible with Wittgenstein's recent rejection of logical atomism. Hymers suggests 'Schlick's cultured personality' as the cause that pointed Wittgenstein in the wrong direction here (*Ibid.*, 70). In 'Whistling in the Dark' (*Ibid.*, 71), Hymers provides his most sustained criticism of Diamond and Conant, for reasons which have already been considered, before describing the move in Wittgenstein's thought from thinking of grammatical rules not as transcending and grounding linguistic practices, but as conventions with a distinctly anthropological character.

Hymers mentions that what he regards as this shift from the transcendental to the conventional took some time for Wittgenstein to fully assimilate, a progression he connects with a relocation of value and normativity within the world in terms of its *naturalization*, so that during 1930 Wittgenstein is already rejecting the 'senseless tautologies of the *Tractatus*' in favour of the preoccupation of philosophy with *trivialities*:

In what follows, my suggestion will be that the trivialities of interest in philosophy are none other than the contingent conventions that make particular meanings possible in a given language. (*Ibid.*, 79)

Hymers tries hard to bring out just what this boils down to in practice, with his reference, for example, to the philosopher's job as that of providing a synopsis of trivialities as a way of putting things in order. But what things? He suggests as an answer our concepts, only to qualify this by reminding us that Wittgenstein takes the disorder in question here to rest not so much in our concepts but in ourselves, so that it is not after all our concepts that are out of order as 'our spontaneous description of these concepts and their inter-relations.' (*Ibid.*, 80) If none of this is perhaps as clear as it might be, Hymers elaborates on the point a little further on:

I do not need to be able to describe clearly the use of a word in order to be able to use that word. My grasp of the conventions governing its use can be largely implicit. However, precisely because my grasp of conventions of use may be implicit, I am vulnerable to a special kind of confusion - philosophical confusion - which can be overcome only by attaining a synoptic view of my linguistic practice.

What is that confusion like? (*Ibid.*, 81)

If one senses that Hymers is struggling here, precisely because he is attempting to provide some kind of overview of what Wittgenstein is about in the absence of any relevant

context in which a genuine philosophical problem is actually being attacked, and at a point in his account of Wittgenstein when the mature outlook of the *Investigations* was still to some degree in the future, the difficulties subside a little with three references he makes to passages in the *Investigations*, the first to language as an ancient city (§ 19), a city in which we can get lost in a labyrinth of paths (§ 203), so that one can approach from one side and know one's way about yet approach from another and get lost (§ 123):

But what exactly does it mean to say that we can get lost in the labyrinth of language? Why and how is that a problem? And how does a synopsis of things that we already know help us to find our way out? In a sense, clear answers to these questions can be given only by looking at particular examples of philosophical problems and Wittgenstein's recommendations for dealing with them - a task I take up in the remaining chapters of this book. But a simple example of what Wittgenstein has in mind may help for the moment. (*Ibid.*, 82 et seq.)

It is perhaps unfortunate that the example chosen is that from *The Blue Book* in which the statement that 'Mr. Nobody is in the room' is understood to be a conventional way of saying that nobody is in the room, with the consequent (philosophical?) temptation to assume that 'there is a deep similarity between "Mr. Nobody" and "Mr. Smith"', for this example is sufficiently trivial to raise the inevitable question whether Wittgenstein's method surely has deeper consequences than this, a point Hymers perhaps realises in stressing that this is merely one example of many and that the unravelling of philosophical confusion may require different methods in different cases (*Investigations* § 133). Nevertheless, those philosophers who attempt to reify Mr. Nobody do serve to remind us of how we can fall 'into confusion when we fail to take a synoptic view of our language - when we fail to remind ourselves explicitly of what we already know implicitly....' (*Ibid.*, 84). There follow two well known passages from *Culture and Value* (§ 22 and § 25) in which

Wittgenstein draws our attention to the failure of philosophy to progress, that it is really no further forward now than at the time of the ancient Greeks, and that language as an immense network of wrong-turnings, constantly sets everyone the same traps. The failures on the part of the philosopher to realise that he has left one context of application for another or to sense that he (*pace* 'Mr. Nobody') has mistaken superficial for deep similarities, are added to according to Hymers' Wittgenstein by the temptation to draw an analogy with scientific investigation, and this stimulates a search for what is hidden behind the manifest phenomena, a search that is 'the real source of metaphysics, leading the philosopher into complete darkness.' (*Blue Book* § 18)

These difficulties ultimately result because, for Hymers, being master of a technique does not necessarily imply that one can describe clearly the use of a word in order to be able to apply it, and at this point he introduces the far better example of 'to think', Wittgenstein's subject in *Zettel* §§ 114 -116, where our ordinary use of the concept does not prepare us for the question 'what is thinking?' Though he does not elaborate on this initial point, what makes questions like 'do animals think?' or 'do computers think?' good examples in this context is precisely that the questions themselves result from the natural tendency to succumb to the illusion that *thinking*, far far from being a widely ramified concept (*Zettel* § 110) is instead that of a series of mental events that take place *alongside* speech and behaviour. Consequently, we fail to realise that the question at stake here is really whether we have reason on the basis of available evidence - with animals *yes*, with computers so far almost certainly *no* - to extend for particular purposes into different contexts the use of a concept we apply only to human beings in ordinary situations. We become mesmerised by a *picture* (in this case of an *accompanying* process), in the sense that Wittgenstein regularly uses (*Investigations* § 115) and it is for this reason that *thinking* is a perfect example with which to illustrate Wittgenstein's method. Yet the failure to properly bring this out leaves Hymers, for all that he is on the right lines, speaking in generalities which require further clarification:

In order to deal with philosophical problems we need to command
a clear overview of how our words are used, and we accomplish this

by rearranging the ordinary expressions of our language, which have been put in a state of disarray by philosophical questions. This provides us with a synoptic view of our language, which is what is supposed to free us from philosophical puzzlement. Such an investigation can be called a 'grammatical' one (PI § 90), because we need to examine our customary forms of expression, the conventions that govern our use of words, which are familiar to us but which we grasp implicitly without necessarily being skilled in describing them. (*Ibid.*, 86)

The reference to what is 'supposed to' free us from philosophical puzzlement suggests that even Hymers is not entirely sure exactly what this method is, and whether it works, a point he manages to reiterate when he refers to Wittgenstein's aim of *ridding* ourselves of the need to ask philosophical questions as a consequence of what is 'supposed to happen when we come up with a perspicuous representation' (*Ibid.* 87). It goes without saying that for a philosopher who is genuinely sympathetic to Wittgenstein's method, there could be no *supposing* about it. Despite a further reference to the philosopher's treatment of a question as the treatment of an illness, and despite Hymers' support of Wittgenstein against charges that he after all provides explanations (Gellner), or that he supports some form of political conservatism (Marcuse), Hymers prefers to leave his more detailed account of Wittgenstein's later methodology until treating the *Philosophical Investigations*. (*Ibid.*, 89)

The first of two chapters on the *Philosophical Investigations* proper, 'Language Without Essence', begins in earnest by quoting Wittgenstein's remark in § 5 that the study of language in primitive kinds of application in which we can command a clear view of the aim and function of words helps to disperse the fog with which Augustine's general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language. Is there any reason at all to believe that this remark is tinged with a certain irony? The answer is that it would have to be if we are to take seriously a certain interpretation of the shopkeeper example (§ 1), one in which it becomes an implicit criticism of a

certain view of the shopkeeper's strangely mechanical procedures as the public expression of underlying mental mechanisms governing his public behaviour (1). This view may actually appear to be particularly relevant here when we go on to consider what Hymers has to say about the shopper and the shopkeeper:

This transaction may seem artificial, precisely because the motions that the customer and the shopkeeper go through are laid out in explicit detail - counting out loud, consulting a table of colour-samples, and so on - things we normally do 'in our heads'. Their behaviour is like that of someone who has not yet internalized certain operations that we take for granted. It seems *childish*. But that fact highlights another aspect of language-games that Wittgenstein stresses: 'A child uses such primitive forms of language when it learns to talk' (§ 5). It is just by having children engage in such games that we teach them to speak....(*Ibid.*, 94)

But why should certain operations that we take for granted have to be 'internalized' in our heads? If the Mulhall-Stern interpretation of the shopkeeper passage is to be taken seriously, then it would appear that Hymers has become party to the very *picture* that on their view is the subject of Wittgenstein's implicit criticism. It may very well be true that there are things going on in our heads, and so in our brains upon which our properly drawing an apple of a certain colour from a drawer is causally dependent, but our (philosophical) *understanding* of what it is to perform this operation is manifested in the performance of the act of withdrawing the apple from the drawer, and not in any *underlying causal mechanisms* of the kind described.

Yet there *is* a positive aspect to Hymers' description of the shopkeeper because, just as the shopper could be a deaf-mute, a foreigner unfamiliar with English, or a young child on an errand, (2) the shopkeeper can easily be seen to take on the role of someone recovering from a stroke, or that of a shell-shocked soldier just returned from the front and undergoing rehabilitation into civilian life: the mechanical procedures in which he indulges can be seen as part of a strict regime of *re-training*,

enabling him to reacquaint himself with the arithmetical and linguistic skills that as a result of his medical condition he is only slowly able to recover. Only with time and perseverance will his exercise of these skills again be something which will become second nature to him, when they are eventually manifested in the performance of tasks that he performs with unthinking confidence, and so *blindly* (§ 219).

From this perspective, the emphasis on *training* reflects the importance Wittgenstein attaches to the idea that the child uses such primitive forms of language in the process of *learning* to talk, so that the shopkeeper and builders examples take on the role of 'primitive' forms of language only insofar as they are viewed out of the ordinary context of a complex social life for the *specific* purpose of emphasising the role of training in the learning of language. It would then be in *this* sense alone that we are to think of the builders' language as the *whole* language of a tribe. What is referred to as 'ostensive teaching' as distinct from ostensive definition then takes on the role ascribed to it within the context of training, where the child is not yet able to ask what the name is because he is not yet acquainted with an *understanding* of the function of names. Wittgenstein directs our attention to pointing to the shape of a slab when teaching the child the use of the word as part of this process of ostensive teaching, 'because it is so with human beings; not because it could not be imagined otherwise' (§ 6) ; and here we can perhaps *imagine* a child's *using* the word 'slab' without having been *taught* it at all. Perhaps he is a born-Crusoe, and that can mean *either* that he is intended to illustrate some form of Augustinian child who can think only not yet speak (§ 32), *or*, much less controversially, that he can be taken to illustrate an innocuous distinction along the lines of that drawn by Baker & Hacker, between the genesis and the exercise of an ability (3).

The aspect of this complex set of questions set right at the beginning of the *Investigations* that Hymers next decides to emphasise, however, is that relating to the *nature* of Wittgenstein's enquiry. Is he doing child psychology, and if so, surely this is an empirical matter ? The answer is supplied in § 130, where Wittgenstein refers to those examples of language-games as *objects of*

comparison which are intended to throw light on facts of our language by way not only of similarities but also of dissimilarities. For Hymers, this points to the *contingency* of so many of our practices, the fact that they are 'rooted not in something that lies beyond the world in a realm of unspeakable necessity', but in 'our practical activity (which, in turn, is bounded in some ways by those "very general facts of nature"....' famously referred to by Wittgenstein and to which Hymers has already drawn our attention. (*Ibid.*, 96)

It is in the next section on 'Learning Names' that Hymers expands on the topic of names, pointing out that many of the first 100 or so sections of the *Investigations* read like a sustained criticism of the *Tractatus*, and that the so-called Augustinian doctrine that all words are names as supposedly illustrated in the builders' language actually bears little comparison with the logically proper names of the *Tractatus*. What follows is a fairly conventional treatment of the builders examples, followed by a description of the role of 'Excalibur' in § 39 as an illustration of the function of names in the *Tractatus*. (*Ibid.*, 103) This leads on to the subject of proper names and a discussion of the famous 'Moses' example in § 79, and here Hymers prefers to take the view that it is quite harmless for Wittgenstein to insist that he associate with the name a number of descriptions some of which he will be prepared to 'lean on' should others come in time to be inapplicable. He combines this with the acceptance of Saul Kripke's famous claim that proper names are rigid designators, holding that there is no 'all-or-nothing' choice here. This does lead him to say that all the definite descriptions associated with the name 'Moses' might be inapplicable to any individual called by that name, without undermining its reference, (*Ibid.*, 104) yet for some philosophers who associate names with descriptions (*Cf.* Ayer), this would incur the unacceptable consequence that the name was in danger at some indefinite point of then losing its reference altogether.

There follow discussions of meaning as use, the standard metre as a means of representation - as a description of the role the metre rod plays in a certain contingent convention - and the coloured squares of § 48 as a mirror of the use of names in the *Tractatus*, leading to the conclusion that what appears to be a transcendental condition of the existence of simple objects

is again a function of the role that we attribute to the squares in the example chosen. That facts thoughts and propositions share a logical form in the *Tractatus* is replaced in the later thinking for Hymers by the view that what once might be thought to have been a wholly *metaphysical* claim about the harmony between thought and reality is to be found instead in the grammar of the language (*Zettel* § 55).

Hymers' treatment of the multiplicity of language games and of the associated topic of family-resemblance follows conventional and acceptable lines, and his discussion of the ancient problem of universals serves as an example 'of the kind of problem that Wittgenstein thinks arises when we are misled by "certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language "' (§ 90)' (*Ibid.*, 119). In what he admits to be a crude presentation - reminiscent of 'Mr. Nobody' - if a name obtains its meaning from the object which it may be said to represent, then the philosopher can be prone to conclude that there must be some object, the universal *redness*, for which the word 'red' stands. Siding with Renford Bamburgh in his paper 'Universals and Family Resemblances', partly on the grounds that we are bound to accept that our use of general terms is nevertheless far from arbitrary, Hymers quotes Wittgenstein in § 383 as arguing that both Nominalists and Realists in the dispute make the mistake of thinking of all words as names, and this once again results in a failure to attain the perspicuous representation of the grammatical conventions implicit in our linguistic practices that Hymers takes to be required if we are not to succumb to philosophical temptation.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the concept of number, followed by Hymers' expression of general agreement with the view of David Stern that we gain a better grasp of what Wittgenstein is doing in the *Investigations* if we see the book as a dialogue between opposing voices (4). Agreeing with Stern's view that the argumentative and therapeutic aspects of the book are actually complementary and interwoven, Hymers reiterates his claim that philosophical problems as Wittgenstein conceives them have their source in confusions about grammatical norms. For Hymers this is in its own way a *kind* of distinctly philosophical claim.

Chapter 5, 'Rules and Private Language' sees Hymers engage principally in a debate with the rule-scepticism of Saul Kripke, and at the beginning he expresses the principle that underlies his approach:

The examination of rule-following, I shall argue, shows that mastery of techniques that one does not learn to describe is necessary for learning a language, because the alternative would involve an explicit grasp of all linguistic norms, and this would lead us into an infinite regress. The rule-following passages are thus deeply significant for Wittgenstein's entire philosophy (*Ibid.*, 129)

What Hymers would appear to be saying here is that our practical understanding of rule-following is not innate, and has to result from a process of learning, for if it were innate, then we would be back to Augustine's child who can 'think only not yet speak' and this rather begs the question of how we are to *understand* its coming about that we can in practice exercise the ability in question; although here one wishes that the point - if this be the point - had been more clearly presented. In spite of this, it may appear that not far into his discussion, Hymers manages to pinpoint the source of Kripke's problem, and therefore of Wittgenstein's 'solution':

In Wittgenstein's example, if we have never tested the pupil's grasp of the series beyond 1000, we do not know that he has been following some other rule than the one that we follow, because up to now his behaviour - by which Kripke means his bodily movements described in the sorts of non-intentional terms we apply equally to rolling stones and orbiting planets - has been in no way different from our own. (*Ibid.*, 131)

The principal point here is that if we *already* understand the behaviour as that of *doing addition* rather than 'quaddition', then we are already within the context in which the

so-called sceptical problem raised by Kripke cannot arise, for that problem depends on staring in isolation at a particular instant of time, one at which we naively ask how a rule can show what has to be done at *this* point, for whatever one does on some *interpretation* is in accord with the rule (§ 198). But this is precisely to stare at the 'rule' out of context, so that it seems as if we can give one interpretation after another, as if each one contended us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it (§ 201). Yet when we are inclined to see the rule itself *as* something which *is* exhibited in what we call its *magically* carrying us forward towards its *infinite* number of future applications, what we are *really* pointing towards is our down-to-earth capacity to *act* in a way which we call 'obeying' and 'disobeying' the rule in particular cases. As a further example of the application of Wittgenstein's method, this shows how, when doing philosophy, there is a temptation to stare at a *picture* that is doing no real work. Hymers sees Wittgenstein's treatment of following a rule as a perfect example of the method he uses to show how a hypothesis-confirmation scientific model can again be the source of metaphysics, leading to complete darkness:

Indeed, we could see Wittgenstein's discussion of the proposals that Kripke examines as an extended *reductio ad absurdum* of the application of a scientific explanatory model to the various phenomena of understanding. If my understanding a rule or a word has some hidden essence, then that essence must be given by one of the answers proposed. However, each of these answers leads to absurdities: finite behaviour is compatible with applications of many different rules; behavioural dispositions can be identified only by presupposing rules and on their own cannot distinguish following a rule from failing to follow it; the same type of image can be associated with indefinitely many different words or rules... (*Ibid.*, 140)

Within the twenty pages or so that Hymers devotes to rule-following, he manages to provide a fairly complete and powerful account of Wittgenstein's method as it is realised in

deflating the 'rule following paradox', in the course of which he almost inevitably joins many other commentators in pointing not only with Kripke to the first, but also to the very important second paragraph of § 201. In closing his argument, he draws our attention to the 'real' private language argument as envisaged by Kripke, and that argument is captured in the thought that 'if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have *no* substantive content' (*Ibid.*, 149, quoting Kripke WRPL, 89). But Kripke's reading of what is strongly or super *private* in the sense provided in § 243, *i.e.*, of a language described as one that another person *cannot* understand, is captured *only* by this controversial idea of a person 'considered in isolation'. This idea has understandably led to a considerable number of attempts to properly interpret it. Hymers therefore feels not without some justification that Kripke fails to appreciate that the 'private language argument' as applied to sensation terms still requires the wholly separate treatment that the secondary literature on the topic both prior to and - if to a lesser extent - subsequent to Kripke has in abundance provided for it.

Hymers begins his account of 'the private language argument' by declaring that he has the difficult task of making some sense of those passages with which we are all only too familiar, reflecting in general terms on what would appear to be Wittgenstein's recurrent concern about 'the dubiousness of modelling words for sensations on names for publicly observable spatio-temporal objects and events.' (*Ibid.*, 150):

But given that what we understand of naming rests on ostensive teaching, there is no clear reason to think that naming can be successfully carried out where there can be no ostensive teaching. This general theme recurs in a number of Wittgenstein's arguments. (*Ibid.*)

Directing our attention to the consequences to be drawn from § 293 and § 244, Hymers gestures towards the conclusion that our very understanding of the *privacy* of our sensations, a quite innocuous notion if seen in the right light, derives from our ability to talk about them in a

public language. Here, however, he tends to overemphasise, as many philosophers are inclined to do, the fact that some sensations do in *fact* have a public means of expression in behaviour:

But it would be puzzling how sensation-terms would ever be learned at all if they lacked the public accessibility that goes with Wittgenstein's *expressivist* view. As Wittgenstein says later in the *Investigations*, 'An "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria' (PI § 580). (*Ibid.*, 152)

The important clue here, however, does not lie in the fact that some sensations do have behavioural expression, just as some do not, but in our ascriptions of sensations to ourselves in the first person without the need to apply criteria at all. It is because of this that our private sensations as we experience them are not private *objects* in the sense conveyed in § 293, so that the reason I know in practice that this colour is red, or that I am experiencing red *again* - Cf. § 258 - is not *primarily* that I speak a language in which what I say is subject to *public* check *via* the kinds of behavioural criteria to which Hymers refers, but simply that 'I have learned English' (§ 381). What Wittgenstein is doing here is not merely to reject a certain model of a private object as something which has its own individual criteria of identity (§ 288), but to remind us that we are kidding ourselves if we think that we can have *any* conception of our sensations when doing philosophy as having 'representational content', as being meaningful prior to our attaching a label to them in the first person - as it may seem that we can do - which is not already parasitic on our prior acquaintance with the public language which we in *fact* have learned in the normal ways described in § 244 and elsewhere.

The lack of unanimity in the interpretation of § 258 and surrounding passages can then be partly attributed to the very fact that Wittgenstein addresses these *two* different objects of attack. Firstly he provides a methodological stage-setting (§ 257) reminder-type treatment of *ordinary* sensations, drawing our eyes away from the inevitable temptation to see them as self-intimating, direct providers of meaning, independently of a public language. This point is echoed in §§ 1 - 2

and § 32 and reflects the infinite regress to which Wittgenstein points in referring to Augustine's child who can think only not yet speak. Yet he also provides an extraordinary view in the passages repudiating the idea of a private language (including § 258), of super-private sensations as private objects so *defined* that they cannot meet any criteria which would allow them to conform to our ordinary understanding of what a sensation is, a point which is reflected in Gordon Baker's later conclusion that we ought to be wary of attributing the acceptance of this model wholesale to earlier philosophers like Descartes and Hume when it is highly doubtful whether they were ever really committed to it. (5) If these philosophers can be criticised, it is from the standpoint of Wittgenstein's reminder-type treatment of sensations in § 257. These two different objects of attack run in tandem even if they are not at first sight easily reconcilable with each other.

Hymers is actually convinced that from § 258 and other passages, it is impossible to derive the outright refutation of the 'logical possibility of a private language' that some philosophers have taken them to involve, principally because the task of the philosopher, in accordance with the method Wittgenstein clearly espouses, is to assemble reminders, not to provide categorical refutations (*Ibid.*, 156). Yet he combines this awkwardly with the claim that although § 258 contains a very powerful argument, it is not one by which he finds himself necessarily persuaded:

I am not convinced that a dedicated proponent of a private language need be swayed by it. Why shouldn't she simply insist that it is possible to have a brute capacity to recognise one's sensations on different occasions ?

This may seem like magic, but magic is not *impossible*....(*Ibid.*, 155)

But what can this 'brute capacity' *be* other than a reflection of the tendency philosophers have to think of their sensations as having 'representational content' in isolation from the normal surroundings described in § 244 in which we come to understand sensation terms, surroundings providing the background upon which our (philosophical) understanding of this 'content' is actually parasitic ? What Hymers is doing here is to conflate the two different approaches that Wittgenstein adopts. Yet in the course of presenting what appears to be the sound logical argument he claims to

detect in § 258, he ends by becoming victim to the very temptations to which Wittgenstein is drawing our attention in § 257 and elsewhere, temptations which Hymers agrees are the real object of Wittgenstein's attack in his task of 'assembling reminders' for a particular purpose.

In a section entitled 'Robinson Crusoe', Hymers discusses the possibility that someone 'considered in isolation' in Kripke's terms can genuinely be regarded as speaking any kind of language whatsoever, so pointing towards the 'essentially social' character of language as a thesis Wittgenstein is often thought to propose; and here he takes the common view that what would seem if realised to be an empirical mystery is still a logical possibility (*Ibid.*, 159). This reflects the innocuous Baker-Hacker distinction between the genesis and the exercise of an ability. It has to be remembered, however, that when Robinson Crusoe is seen in the role of Augustine's child, who is effectively born with the innate capacity to *name* the *kinds* of things around him that he is *already* able to distinguish prior to any form of training which would allow him to acquire a (public) language, what is being presented is a *picture* that Wittgenstein regards as empty of content. This does not mean, however, that the rejection of the born-Crusoe on these grounds reveals that language is 'essentially social', for it is not at all clear what this proposal can be taken to mean: it seems to have the character either of an empirical hypothesis, or of some kind of conceptual/philosophical claim of the kind associated with philosophers like Kripke and Malcolm, one revealing what in some sense *must* be so; and in neither case could it conceivably be of interest to a philosopher who, as Hymers rightly informs us, is solely concerned *qua* philosopher with issuing reminders intended to draw us away from proposing conceptual or empirical claims of these kinds, as distinct from adding irresponsibly to their number.

In a section entitled 'Expressivism', Hymers provides a fairly straightforward account of Wittgenstein on *avowals*, drawing our attention to *Investigations* Part II,ix, 189, in which he points towards descriptive and non-expressive uses of sensation terms. Hymers also uses this section to describe Moore's paradox regarding belief, in which first person uses of the verb 'to believe' differ from second and third person uses. The chapter ends with a section entitled 'Other Minds', which

is again intended to provide a brief overview of Wittgenstein's method in which he 'offers us in the *Investigations* no categorical refutation of solipsism and the problem of other minds', since his aim is instead to offer us 'a way of talking that prevents these problems from getting a foothold in our language' (*Ibid.*,163). If solipsism and the problem of other minds depend crucially on adherence to a Cartesian picture of the self, getting rid of that picture for Hymers entails getting rid of these sceptical worries: if inner episodes are not essentially private, there need be no objection in principle to the idea of knowing about the inner episodes of persons other than one's self, a point expressed by Wittgenstein in his exhortation to try, in a real case, to doubt someone else's fear or pain (§ 303).

If Hymers' treatment here seems excessively perfunctory, no more, indeed, than an appeal to some argument from the paradigm case, then that is regrettable, for it impinges on questions concerning Wittgenstein's method which arise in the following chapter about *On Certainty*. For this reason, it would be worthwhile providing a brief account of Wittgenstein's actual method as it relates to the problem of 'Other Minds', and to do this it is instructive to compare what he has to say to the clearly presented accounts of two other philosophers. Here is Saul Kripke in his Postscript relating to 'Wittgenstein and Other Minds' in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Blackwell, 1982):

Wittgenstein would reject any attempt to 'explain' my attitude and behavior towards a sufferer by a 'belief' about his 'inner state'. Rather, once again the order is to be inverted: I can be said to think of him as having a mind, and in particular as suffering from pain, in virtue of my attitude and behavior towards him, not the reverse. (*Ibid.*, 138)

On this reading, the position of Kripke's Wittgenstein would be, not that we are debarred from having *knowledge* about the sensations of others, and for that reason are almost bound to be sceptical about attributing inner states to them. It is rather that because we cannot

entertain that conception which, our intuitions inform us, grounds our understanding of what it is to 'believe in other minds', we must find another justification for our 'belief', a 'sceptical solution' to our doubts resting in the circumstances in which we warrantably assert propositions about their contents. By contrast, here is A. J. Ayer in his book on *Wittgenstein* presenting what he regards as his definitive solution to a problem that he admits had dogged him throughout his career:

My attributing consciousness to others is not just a matter of my accepting, on the strength of a doubtful analogy, the generalisation that two different sorts of events, one mental and one physical, habitually go together. It is a consequence rather of my accepting a whole body of theory which enables me to account for the behaviour of others by crediting them with conscious thoughts and sensations and emotions and purposes. My ability to entertain this body of theory does depend on my having learned from my own experiences what these mental states are like, but my justification for accepting it is that it has been found, in Putnam's words, to have 'genuine explanatory power.' (6)

If Kripke's avowedly anti-realist approach leaves us with the lasting impression that he is *denying* the truth of something that ordinarily we would not consider to be up for assessment, then Ayer's response has all the hallmarks of treating what seems a genuine (philosophical) question - whether people other than myself have conscious thoughts and sensations as have I - *as if* it were a question of fact. Yet there are no ordinary empirical criteria which would allow this question to be provided with a factual answer unless, of course, it is *already* understood to be an ordinary factual question about whether certain specific people on certain specific occasions are enjoying conscious experiences - *e.g.*, they are not actually unconscious - in which case the framework allowing this question to be sensibly asked and answered will already be in place.

The response Wittgenstein provides to this conundrum is therefore to say that what Ayer is asking is not a *genuine* question to begin with, because it is asked outwith the framework

which would allow it to be provided with an *ordinary* answer. This response is a methodological one, insofar as it does point to the practice providing the framework within which we do 'attribute conscious states to ourselves and to others' ; and whilst this has the *appearance* of an 'argument from the paradigm case', it is also important that his response should not be presented *only* as if it were an argument of this kind. Wittgenstein's underlying point is that because there *are* circumstances in which we do participate in the practice of talking about 'other minds', the philosophical problem of 'other minds' can arise only because the philosopher is guilty of being party to a *picture*, innocent in itself, which harmlessly accompanies our practice yet which appears according to the dictates of his philosophical *intuitions* to encapsulate what it *means* to make the attributions in question. Our apparent inability to *apply* the picture, together with the intuitive conviction (shared by Kripke) that only through its application do we acquire our understanding of what it is to attribute pain to others, is what gives rise to the interminable (sceptical) doubt whether someone is really suffering pain irrespective of whether our ordinary criteria are, or are not, actually satisfied.

This outline of Wittgenstein's method has an immediate relevance to the presentation that Hymers offers of the so-called Cartesian sceptic with whom Wittgenstein is supposedly crossing swords in *On Certainty*:

In other words, the Cartesian sceptic presents an *underdetermination* argument, which purports to show that a certain body of evidence - my experiences as if of a world beyond my senses - could be explained just as well by some sceptical hypothesis as by the hypothesis of an external world. If that is so, then, the sceptic insists, I am not justified in any of the beliefs I am disposed to hold regarding the sources of my experiences. So the philosophically initiated are right: Moore really is begging the question after all, but for much more complicated reasons than it might have first appeared (*Ibid.*, 169).

But whatever may be said about Moore, who unlike Wittgenstein would genuinely appear to have adhered to a *belief* in 'Other Minds' and in an 'External World' as *metaphysical* theses - regardless of his seeming adherence to some concept of sense-data as part of the surface of a material object - the choice between opposing alternatives that Hymers offers here is not one that Wittgenstein would have felt bound to accept. The idea that we are forced to choose between *either* 'the hypothesis of an external world' *or* 'the hypothesis that you have always been a brain in a vat, attached to some experience-stimulating machine by electrodes...' (*Ibid.*) is entirely at odds with Wittgenstein's methodology: if our *practices* of apparently referring to 'external objects' and to 'other minds' can indeed be shown to result indirectly from our being 'brains in a vat', then the proposal that *we are* brains in a vat can gain its sense only *as* a verifiable hypothesis within the existing spatio-temporal framework in which our illusions find their home. Isolated from this framework, the 'brains in a vat' concept becomes an idle fantasy. Indeed, what provides this kind of sceptical proposal with its obvious appeal is the kind of interminable doubt to which it gives rise, a doubt which cannot in principle be allayed because the proposal is not really *intended* to present us with an option the validity of which is even open to proper empirical assessment.

Whilst this is certainly one way of presenting Wittgenstein's answer to Hymers' sceptic, it is not the way that Hymers himself prefers, for in the course of arguing that Wittgenstein is not so much attempting to refute the sceptic as to avoid a confrontation with him (*Ibid.*, 172) he presents what at first sight seems a rather convoluted argument albeit that it appears to be reflected in passages from *On Certainty*, *e.g.*, in § 114, § 369, § 383, § 456, and § 506:

....given our ordinary practices of language-learning, there is no reason to think that it is possible to entertain doubts without being able to speak and understand a language. That observation might be vulnerable to sceptical doubt, but it seems that the sceptic must rely not merely on the uncertainty of this observation, but on a *positive* thesis to the effect that it is possible to formulate relevant doubts -

doubts about knowledge of the world around us - without understanding a public language. If our ordinary practices do not commit us to that consequence, then we need not be troubled by the sceptic's reasoning. (*Ibid.*, 172)

But what Hymers' so-called sceptic *is* relying on is in our taking doubt to be *conceivable* outwith any *practical* context in which it might make sense, so that the kinds of examples to which Wittgenstein appeals in doubting, say, out of any normal context whether this is my hand *as* the reason for doubting whether the word 'hand' has a meaning (§ 359 & § 456), *are* intended to reinforce his claim that a doubt which seems interminable cannot be a genuine doubt. The point is integral to those basic certainties which are said in the literature to be expressible in so-called 'hinge propositions'. Yet for Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, expressions of objective *certainty* which are expressed as 'hinges' have nothing to do with *knowledge* at all: they are best seen as ways of acting that, for Wittgenstein, find their *expression* in *rules* of the form 'this is a hand' or 'I have never been on the Moon', rules to which the true-false polarity cannot apply. Hymers, by contrast, distances himself from what he perceives to be Moyal-Sharrock's view in her Editorial Introduction to *The Third Wittgenstein* (Ashgate 2004), one which sees her arguing that this Wittgenstein had converted *or* reverted to a 'more conservative method of doing philosophy' (*Ibid.*, 165).

But are there any reasons for taking these positions to be mutually exclusive ? As Wittgenstein's method as applied to 'Other Minds' in the *Investigations* reveals, there is an obvious similarity here to his reaction towards Hymers' sceptic. Furthermore, it cannot escape our notice that to 'the plain man', an individual who used to be regularly and rather condescendingly introduced not all that long ago by popularising scientists, so-called 'hinge-propositions' have no *genuine* role in day-to-day speech. They are in fact very largely *manufactured* for a particular purpose - and so in that respect have a *philosophical* role - even if the overall task of *On Certainty* is to elaborate upon a general conception of philosophy with a highly anthropological thrust, one with which we have already become familiar in the *Investigations*. It is because these 'propositions' have no *genuine* role in ordinary day-to-day talk

that anyone who in our company spent all his time, apparently for no obvious reason, telling us that he was certain he was seeing a tree, that he had two hands, that he had a brain and had never been on the Moon, *etc.*, would be seen, not as making a point of philosophical importance, but as suffering from a mental affliction. If we think of Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* as struggling in the attempt to capture an important point towards which he sees Moore as gesturing, albeit indirectly, and perhaps even unknowingly, then his approach becomes much closer to that which we would think of applying to him in the *Investigations*.

The fact that these 'hinge-propositions' are largely manufactured for a particular purpose also helps to explain why they sometimes simply fail to work (e.g., § 659 about the certainty of *just* having eaten a meal when there is a strong possibility of having slept after it, or § 676 where the certainty of just having returned to England in the last few days is arguably compatible with being wrong about this if judgement had been impaired, say, as a result of intoxication on the flight), a point which Wittgenstein also conveys from time to time by remarking how badly he is managing to express the points he is attempting to make (§ 358 & § 400 - 402). From this perspective, it is only for strictly *philosophical* purposes that we could even be tempted to follow Daniele Moyal-Sharrock in her claim that 'I have a body' or 'Here is a hand' could remotely be thought of as expressions of '*nonpropositional basic beliefs that manifest themselves as ways of acting*' (*Ibid.*) even if we can properly take such 'beliefs' to play an important role in *On Certainty* as an *extension* of his methodology in the *Investigations*.

On the other hand, there is a *strong* case here for concluding that, at least where statements 'of the form of empirical propositions' are hardened into rules *because* they form part of the *cultural* heritage of the era - 'I have never been on the Moon' said in 1950 - we can accept this distinction as a rather informal one so that Wittgenstein's annoyance at himself then results from presenting his case in a manner which makes it appear to be far more formal and rigid than it really is. Emphasising § 97 - 99, outstandingly brilliant passages where Wittgenstein indirectly points, say, towards the kinds of difficulties we may encounter in trying *nowadays* to imaginatively think our way into adopting a

pre-Copernican outlook, Hymers reminds us of the distinction between what he refers to as empirical propositions (movement of the waters) and norms of representation (the riverbed). (*Ibid.*, 193) Consider too how easy it is for me to convert the thought that there is someone at this moment on the other side of the Earth - to whom I can talk on the telephone - who is also thinking about *On Certainty*, into the thought of someone on the other side of the galaxy who is now doing the same. Here we can compare *Investigations* § 350 and the idea of '5 o'clock on the sun'. Whilst Wittgenstein's example in § 350 is a reminder that our 24 hour clock is tied to the idea of diurnal rotation, the second example points to the fact that even today we can find it difficult, at least in our ordinary day-to-day considerations, to make the imaginative leap that is required if we are to wholly dispense in appropriate contexts with a Newtonian conception of space and time.

How far does this take us in assessing Hymers' claim that *On Certainty* fails to express a radical departure from his method in the *Investigations*? On *his* evidence, probably not very far. It is really beside the point that the later work has been 'cobbled' into a book by his literary executors, or that Wittgenstein himself, had he had time, would have no doubt radically pruned the 'book' or reassembled its sections as was his wont (*Cf., Ibid.*, 165). If read properly, there is no genuine reason for taking *On Certainty* with a grain of salt. Neither ought we to see it as a *radical* departure from the *Investigations* in respect of its methodology, for this could result only from adopting an inappropriate conception of the role of 'therapy'. It is probably better to see a continuity throughout his work with variations in emphasis at different periods. Consequently, if Hymers does stress this continuity, he does so for the wrong reasons, and whilst Moyal-Sharrock points towards *On Certainty* as breaking new ground by *extending* the methodology of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Hymers' contention that Wittgenstein at the end does *not* become 'a more systematic and less therapeutic philosopher', even if correct, is totally independent of any validity that may be attached to the principle that *On Certainty* is primarily concerned with basic 'certainties' that are manifested in acting, as distinct from being expressed in propositions of any kind whatsoever. (8)

The final chapter of the book, 'Objections and Extrapolations' sees Hymers exploring

common objections to a 'therapeutic' reading of Wittgenstein, opposing misunderstandings that might see him as in some way 'privileging' ordinary language for hidden philosophical purposes, or as expressing misconceived versions of 'quietism' 'pessimism' or 'conservatism'. Generally sympathising with Wittgenstein's aim of dissolving rather than solving philosophical problems, Hymers nevertheless does not believe that all philosophical problems can be tackled in the same way. This is excessively familiar territory, and Hymers unsurprisingly sweeps over it in a fairly conventional way.

Turning towards Wittgenstein on ethics, amongst a number of other things Hymers wishes to argue, understandably, that moral standards are not merely arbitrary, although in doing so he may appear to validate Wittgenstein's oft-quoted claim in his 'Lecture on Ethics' that in talking about this subject philosophers are inclined to run up against the boundaries of language. They may also occasionally appear to tie themselves in knots and to end by stating platitudes, or perhaps nothing at all in the act of attempting to say something of importance:

The kind of creatures that human beings are - for all their diversity and variation - places constraints on what is morally possible for us. I do not mean by this that we are incapable of doing terrible things to each other. That is obviously false. My point, rather, is that some kinds of moral principles are more naturally plausible and relevant to us. A moral principle that advises us to maim and kill as we please is not a principle that can be contemplated by a person of moral seriousness (*Ibid.*, 226).

It is interesting to note that Hymers quotes Theodore Redpath in *Ludwig Wittgenstein A Student's Memoir* (Duckworth 1990) where he recalls that Wittgenstein had told him that he *could not* discuss politics in his lectures, and that one day - which apparently never came - he would provide another lecture explaining why. (*Ibid.*, 219) The book ends with a recapitulation of earlier reflections on the differences between Wittgenstein and Quine.

As he mentions in his Acknowledgements, Hymers' book originated from notes for a seminar on Wittgenstein that he taught at the University of Alberta in the autumn of 1997. For various reasons its first draft did not appear until 2005, and prior to publication it has since received the benefit of comments from a large number of colleagues and students. It is therefore the culmination of a considerable amount of thinking about Wittgenstein over a considerable period, and to a large extent this shows in the careful presentation that Hymers succeeds in providing. At a time when more and more new volumes about Wittgenstein covering similar ground are regularly appearing, it is inevitably becoming more and more difficult to stand apart from and above the hubbub, and, therefore, to say anything at all that has not been said before. Hymers has in this respect managed to provide his approach with a twist of his own that is bound to succeed - where in Wittgenstein's words it really matters - in stimulating any reader to thoughts of his own.

ENDNOTES

- (1) Provided by Stephen Mullhall in : *Inheritance and Originality Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Keirkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43, and echoed by David Stern in *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.
- (2) Mulhall, *Ibid.*, 46 et seqq.
- (3) G. P. Baker & P.M.S. Hacker: *Wittgenstein Rules Grammar and Necessity* Vol. 2 1985) 169 et seqq.
- (4) David Stern, *Op. cit.*
- (5) See Gordon Baker's posthumous *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub.: 2004) Chapters 5-7.
- (6) A.J.Ayer: *Wittgenstein* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985) 38.
- (7) I am grateful to Daniele Moyal-Sharrock for clarifying her position with regard to what have often been referred to as hinge-propositions, yet which from her perspective are not to be regarded as propositions in any correct sense, with the consequence that if they have even the appearance of failing to work in *this* role (e.g., § 659 & § 676), then at that point they become ordinary empirical propositions and not true hinges at all. (*from a recent communication*). These matters will deservedly continue to receive further discussion in the literature.

As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH and PHILOSOPHIA. His latest, on Wittgenstein, appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, with a further in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010.