

David Pole: *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Bloomsbury Academic Collections, 2013, London. ISBN: 978147250654

Review by Mauro Dillullo, University of Glasgow.

David Pole's *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, is an important resource for those who need an introductory account of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, his linguistic approach to philosophy and its complex relation to logic and normative language. There is undoubtedly a real necessity for a basic commentary on what we should describe and discuss as an extraordinarily challenging corpus of philosophy. David Pole's book is a valid response to that need and all students of Wittgenstein can certainly turn to it. Yet, there are many problems in this book that should be underlined, explained and discussed. Many of its sections are successful in defining and describing Wittgenstein's later work but there are also many generalizations and simplifications

A major problem of the book is its failure to explain Wittgenstein's engagement and clear rejection of reductionism and behaviourism. Reductionism and behaviourism still continue to have great impact in cognitive science and philosophy of mind and both were strongly contrasted by Wittgenstein and more recently by John Searle; Wittgenstein's philosophical challenge to reductionism and behaviourism should have been comprehensively addressed through the book. Readers can only find isolated references to this significant issue.

The book is also discussing Wittgenstein's use of terms like "grammar" and "rules", but even in this case, there is never a clear indication that they mean for psychology or behaviour studies and/or a critical analysis of Wittgenstein's relation to psychology or behaviour studies.

Furthermore, among other significant philosophical oversimplifications, we should remember Pole's claim that "Wittgenstein's method, the central conception is simple"(5), his tendency to easily assimilate Wittgenstein's philosophical work to received positions within analytical philosophizing, particularly significant in his incomplete discussion of John Wisdom's philosophical relation to Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and, finally, the author's failure to accurately engage with Wittgenstein's specific philosophical method, including his appeal to ordinary language.

As such readers who are less familiar with Wittgenstein and his later philosophy might need greater explanation to understand the 'turn' between early and late Wittgenstein and the multifaceted relation existing between Wittgenstein and analytical philosophy. Furthermore, there is no discussion or explanation for the relation between Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle and the different continental philosophical reception of Wittgenstein (in the work of such important figures as Habermas, Lyotard, and more recently Badiou), is also completely and inexplicably ignored in the whole book. Nor is there any discussion of the reception of Wittgenstein-- in fields such as ethics, morality, religious studies and political philosophy, to which his late writings have a clear and direct significance. Yet, some of these serious lapses might admittedly be excused in the context of a book that is undeniably introductory and whose interpretive objectives are not openly based on reconstructing a complete history of reception of Wittgenstein's challenging philosophy.

The book is structured in four chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter, which can be described as a valid introductory summary to Wittgenstein's philosophy, attempts to discuss and explain the linguistic approach to philosophy. This is an important chapter where single fragments of

Wittgenstein's 'philosophy of language' are discussed and clarified in a simple and straightforward manner. Yet, in this chapter Pole does not specifically address and discuss how "Wittgenstein is here engaged in extirpating the errors of his own youth" (p.9) and the 'turn' between early Wittgenstein (*Tractatus*) and his late philosophical works is left without consideration and explanation.

What are the errors of his youth and are they significant for the linguistic approach to philosophy? This question is left unanswered apart from vague references to an 'early Wittgenstein'. A more articulated discussion of *Philosophical Investigations* is also lacking from this chapter. As Pole clearly writes: "...I think, sometimes happens to the reader of *Philosophical Investigations*; he lacks any landmarks to set his bearings by."(p.9). Unfortunately, this often happens to the reader of this book; he/ she cannot clearly understand what is the relation between the *Philosophical Investigations* and the 'linguistic approach to philosophy' as explained by 'language-games'. Yet, the link between the introductory chapter and the following two is also not clearly clarified to the readers. Chapter 2 and 3 of the book concern the Logic and Normative Language and the Inner Experience. In chapter 2, Pole moves quickly from the linguistic approach to philosophy to the logic and normative language through the picture theory of meaning, the truth-functional structure of propositions, and the tautological nature of logical propositions. In the same chapter, the author interrogates Wittgenstein's views about systems of language and knowledge, suggesting (though he seems to admit that the evidence is rather ambiguous) that these views may lead to a very problematic form of relativism. This method sometimes extends, as well, to Pole's attempted critical assessment of existing interpretive positions on Wittgenstein's philosophy. Regrettably, even in this chapter, important

philosophical and logical steps as the picture theory of meaning, the truth-functional structure of propositions, and the tautological nature of logical proposition are not clarified to the readers. Also, if the author claims that “Wittgenstein’s interest in Mathematics remained in some sense a focal point in his thinking” (p. 38), why the chapter contains only few paragraphs discussing this ‘interest’? Chapter 3 concerns the conception of the interrelated issues of the structure of reality and the limits of language. Yet, the chapter is offering no apparent interpretation or discussion of the early Wittgenstein’s ‘metaphysical picture’ in its critically important relation to ‘Inner Experience’. There is an equivocal and vague reference to this ‘metaphysical picture’ and readers are not able to fully relate this ‘picture’ to the issue of the “private language argument” as widely discussed in these pages. The chapter reconstructs the "private language argument" as a direct response to a Cartesian’s philosophical discussion of sensations and their individuation, rejecting Wittgenstein’s conclusion that it is impossible for me to say and affirm meaningfully that I "know" I am in pain. Yet again this chapter simply mentions Monism and Dualism without clarifying these two fundamental terms and Wittgenstein’s relation to them. Chapter 4 gives a description of the development of Wittgenstein’s thinking through the difficulties existing in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. In p.78, the author states that “My aim in this chapter is merely critical” (p.78). His aim is not followed by a satisfactorily analytical engagement with these difficulties; there is no attempt to discuss these difficulties through Wittgenstein’s long-term academic and personal relation with Russell and/ or the Vienna Circle and Pole’s criticism of Wittgenstein’s late philosophy is regrettably not clearly explicated. Wittgenstein’s late work *On Certainty* and his important views on religion and ritual belief are also left outside the chapter. Finally, the concluding epilogue gives a brief overview of John

Wisdom's philosophy. Yet, readers cannot understand John Wisdom's place in this book and his relation to the late Wittgenstein's "legacy and influence" for the practice and concerns of analytical and continental philosophers today. Furthermore, the author affirms that Wisdom takes Wittgenstein's philosophy further than he did and we need both before us. (p.103). This is another very important claim that remains not totally answered in this conclusive chapter adding more misunderstanding and confusion to a methodology of limited and unhelpful *extraction and evaluation* which unfortunately organizes the whole book

The scope of issues treated in this short book is generally quite broad, covering most of the topics discussed by Wittgenstein from his early writings to his later philosophy (with concerning and very important omissions). Throughout these wide-ranging discussions, Pole's reading of Wittgenstein's texts consists largely in drawing from them arguments for easily recognizable theses and positions on the nature of the various subject matters taken up, seeking the basic correct solution to definite problems of philosophical investigations.

The book also does not begin with an informative summary of Wittgenstein's biography and disappointingly fails to establish the unique character that animated his philosophizing throughout his life.

For some audiences this general and basic framework will be a merit of this book; for instance, it allows the author to discuss, in passing, the interpretive and substantive ideas of many of the prominent analytic commentators who have also read Wittgenstein, at least in part, in the attempt of providing explanations and accounts of fragments of his challenging philosophy. However, there are recognizable problems with this task especially remembering what Wittgenstein once remarked:

"If someone were to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them," and "we may not advance any kind of new theory. There must not be anything hypothetical to our considerations. All *explanation* must disappear, and description alone must take its place."