CRITICAL NOTICE

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*
A Reader's Guide
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Following hard upon *Wittgenstein and the Practice of Philosophy* by Michael Hymers (Broadview, 2010), and *Reading Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations *A Beginner's Guide* by John J. Ross (Lexington, 2009) comes Arif Ahmed with yet another volume having the ostensible aim of introducing the relative newcomer to Wittgenstein's later work. Forming a further addition to their growing *Reader's Guide* philosophy series, Arif Ahmed has written the book for Continuum with the specific aim of satisfying the needs of second and third year undergraduates who would normally be expected to come across material relating to *Tractatus* criticism, rule-following and private language in 'any course on the later Wittgenstein' (Preface). Ahmed therefore follows a venerable tradition by ending his discussion of the *Investigations* but halfway through what was originally treated only as Part I of a work in two parts. Part II has only recently been reclassified as *Philosophy of Psychology - A Fragment* to distinguish it from the complete *Philosophical Investigations* which precedes it in its latest Anscombe, Schulte, Hacker translation (4th Ed. Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

Unlike the authors of those other recent volumes, however, Ahmed adopts an interpretative stance towards the *Investigations* that at one time was more prevalent, but is now seen less often in the secondary literature. He provides a sustained criticism from a broadly empiricist perspective of his conception of Wittgenstein's method as it is employed in the treatment of a number of philosophical problems associated with the work. One important consequence of this which the reader is easily able to discover when reading Ahmed's book, is the extent to which Wittgenstein appears at his best when he shows no signs of contravening Lockean or Humean principles in the relevant contexts. Talking, for example, of reaching bedrock and the claim that 'this is simply what I do' (§ 217), followed by the reference to obeying the rule *blindly* (§ 219), Ahmed easily concludes:

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What is especially disturbing about this position is that it appears

to introduce an element of instinct into what had seemed to be a

paradigm of rationality: the continuation of a mathematical sequence.

That is not for a moment to impugn the confidence that we rest in such

continuations, but only to point out that it arises not from any sort of

rational *apprehension* but rather *is* a matter of blind behaviour. (*Ibid*., 106)

Even more telling is the final paragraph of this section which occurs just prior to

his ensuing discussion of sensation and privacy. Quoting *On Certainty* § 359 and the reference

to something animal that lies beyond being justified or unjustified, Ahmed reminds us:

Naturalism is the philosophy that sees us as just one animal

amongst others rather than as beings that *reason* has endowed

with a special sort of insight; it is an important and general truth

that has ethical and political as well as metaphysical implications.

Wittgenstein's greatest achievement in *Philosophical Investigations*

was to show just how deeply it reaches. (*Ibid*.)

This is Wittgenstein seen through Humean spectacles. The book has four chapters. The

final chapter is a short 3 - 4 pages on Wittgenstein's reception and influence, whilst the first in

only six pages covers an immense amount of ground with its inevitably brief treatment of Russell

and his rejection of idealism, his theory of descriptions, Frege on sense and reference, the *thought*

and the context principle, and the *Tractatus* as a work posing the question how thought and

language manage to be *about* something external to themselves. What do the names of a fully

analysed language denote ? How do these names combine to form meaningful sentences ?

There must be something for the *thought* to be about, so what the names in the thought denote

are completely simple, indestructible entities which constitute the form of the world. Yet on

the picture theory of meaning the formal similarity between language and world can never be

explicitly grasped. It can only be *shown*, so that the very doctrines of the *Tractatus* itself fall into

a kind of nonsense when an attempt is made to express them in propositional form. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. This principle applies throughout his work. That there are limits to what can be said is a theme Ahmed takes to haunt Wittgenstein throughout his career, one which for him emerges in the treatment of ostension and the following of a rule. He understands the mystery of the earlier work to lie in the hidden nature of reality as revealed by language, whereas in the later work Wittgenstein's approach leaves us disorientated because it is instead the *everyday* that assumes the quality of mystery.

Ahmed's second chapter of two pages, provides a brief overview of the themes which occupy Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*: the idea that meaningful sentences are combinations of names, the idea that what can be said can be said precisely, the idea that meaning and understanding are mental processes accompanying speech and writing, and the idea that talking and thinking about sensations can go on in isolation from what happens in the public world. There follows an equally brief outline of how Wittgenstein veered away from the first and second ideas in his rejection of the Augustinian picture, and with his conclusion that *language* is a family resemblance concept. The third and fourth ideas are dispensed with by concluding that instead of the postulation of some mysterious relation between simple signs and simple objects hidden *beneath* the complexity of our world, the words of our common language ought rather to be understood to gain their meanings within the contexts in which they are *used*. Yet this equally points to the conclusion that there can be no hidden, internal sphere of meaning which could exist independently of the use of a public language, a point encapsulated in the famous argument against a private language. Ahmed concludes that the effect of the *Investigations vis-a-vis* the *Tractatus* 'on an intelligent and attentive reader' (*Ibid*.,10) is that whilst in one sense nothing has changed insofar as the reader is asked to acquiesce throughout in what he calls 'commonsense' ways of describing reality, in another sense everything has taken on a new aspect. Given Ahmed's general interpretative stance, this is a sophisticated point of view.

Whilst the material in these two chapters is so compressed that it is open to question whether they might not have been dispensed with altogether without detracting from the book as

a whole, given that their relevant content could have been easily incorporated in the main text, the book's true significance inevitably lies in its third chapter of almost 140 pages, a chapter split into four major sections which discuss The Augustinian picture, Family resemblance and the ideal of precision, Meaning and understanding, and Privacy. Ahmed treats all of these subjects in considerable detail, providing a great deal of scope for thought and discussion.

The first major distinction Ahmed draws, one consequent on the 'picture of the essence' of language to be derived from the Augustine quotation, is that whilst the kinds of highly sophisticated theories which are based ultimately on the principle that 'the individual words of language name objects - sentences are combinations of such names' (§ 1), offer *uniform* accounts of sentence and word meaning, Wittgenstein's aim is to break the spell of this illusion by illustrating the great *variety* there is in *our* daily operations with words. Taking Locke's theory of ideas and the picture of naming associated with the *Tractatus* as examples of the sophisticated theories with which he is ultimately taking issue in these early sections, Ahmed sees Wittgenstein's use of the shopkeeper in § 1d as an uncontroversial illustration of 'how *differently* the shopkeeper operates with the words "five", "red" and "apples". When he sees the word "apple" he opens a drawer; but when he sees the word "red" he looks at a colour sample, and so on. But then what hope is there for a *uniform* account of the meanings of those words ?' (*Ibid.*, 13)

This fairly conventional reading is elaborated on by considering the builders in § 2, and this is followed by the use of §§ 11 - 14 as further illustrations of how Wittgenstein stresses the sheer multiplicity of word use by, for example, comparing it to the operation of the many different handles in a locomotive, which all *look* very much alike, but which *function* in so many different ways. What Wittgenstein is opposing, as Ahmed puts it, is any explanatory theory that employs a single mechanism, like reference, as a way of accounting for the meanings of words. Without any warning, however, Ahmed suddenly asks how convincing this attack of Wittgenstein's really is, and he replies that Wittgenstein's likely opponents are unlikely to find the example of the shopkeeper convincing because it embodies only a superficial description of what may *really* be going on:

> There are *inner* activities which accompany or precede the
>
> grocer's outer ones, and when we look at the totality of his
>
> actions we can see that what he does with 'five' corresponds
>
> to what he does with 'red' in just the way that what B does
>
> with 'Slab !' corresponds to what *he* does with 'Beam !' (*Ibid*., 15)

Ahmed then invites his reader to explore the viewpoint of Locke in his *Essay* that ideas as private mental images function as templates with which to compare the application of words to external objects. The conclusion we are invited, if ambivalently, to draw is that Locke's ideas provide a suitable *explanation* for the 'correct' applications we make of words like 'red' and 'apple' : 'If a post-box matches in a certain way the private idea that one associates with the word "red" then one should apply "red" to the post-box too.' (*Ibid*.) Similarly with the word 'apple'. Ahmed's elaboration of this point - which he surprisingly shows every appearance of accepting - will prove to be significant for the conclusions he wishes to draw a few pages later on about § 32 and, therefore, about almost everything that Wittgenstein has to say in those early sections:

> Since Locke applies the same account to number (*Essay* II.xvi),
>
> his theory implies enough uniformity in the uses of 'five', 'red'
>
> and 'apples' for there to be some point in ascribing them all the
>
> same function. For in each case what the grocer 'does' with the
>
> word is to compare external objects with the associated idea. This
>
> both precedes and explains his application of it to the external
>
> object. (*Ibid*.)

Ahmed stresses that Wittgenstein has nothing really to say about this, although he admittedly *asks* how the shopkeeper knows where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'. Ahmed's 'tempting answer' to the first question is that the shopkeeper finds the colour on the colour-table that matches the idea he associates with 'red'. On his view, Wittgenstein does not explore the matter further at *this* point. What Wittgenstein

does of course say, a point Ahmed fails to mention, is that the shopkeeper *acts* in a certain way, that explanations come to an end somewhere, and that the meaning of 'five' rests in how this term is *used*.

But this is a *rejection* of the question how the shopkeeper *knows* where he is to look up the word 'red'. For what is the *purpose* of this check ? If he already knows the meaning of 'red' then the check is pointless. If he knows 'red' is a colour word but he has temporarily forgotten its meaning, then the colour chart will help to remind him of what its meaning is. But if he has no grasp of any language whatsoever, then all of these procedures are taking place in a vacuum, and comparing 'red' with a colour sample will be a useless activity. If the text of the *Investigations* would seem to give the reader even the remotest hint that Wittgenstein's insistence on the multiplicity of word function is wholly disconnected from Ahmed's requirement for an *explanation*, one apparently provided by his Lockean theory, this is because Locke's theory does no more than duplicate what requires to be 'explained'. It suffers from a neglect of the cardinal point that if a word has no meaning, then it is not going to be granted one by its 'association' with something, an idea, that has itself to be intrinsically meaningful if it is to do any work. Yet this generates an infinite regress. Another way of putting this is that Locke's ideas or images cannot *per se* determine how the words with which they are 'associated' are to be applied. Yet if these words do already have an application then 'associating' them with the 'idea' performs no usual function. This is the point Wittgenstein stresses when he says that it is how the shopkeeper *acts* in *using* the term that is really important. It is hard to see how Ahmed could in *this* context have missed this by now far from unfamiliar conclusion (1).

Ahmed's next subject is ostensive definition and the possible misinterpretations to which it can give rise (§ 28), and here he agrees with Wittgenstein in concluding, not that ostensive definitions are impossible, but 'only that they cannot operate in an intellectual vacuum'. (*Ibid*., 20) As he puts it, the pupil must be prepared to respond to the definition of the word 'red' by uttering the word in accordance with the way in which colour-words are standardly used. Ahmed takes this conclusion to be summarised in § 32, one of the most famous passages in the book, where

Wittgenstein describes Augustine's 'account' of learning a language as one in which it is *as if* the child already had a language only not this one, or *as if* he could *think* only not yet speak. In practice ostension makes sense for Wittgenstein only *against* a background of language acquisition:

> If this really is the correct conclusion then Augustine was wrong
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> to place ostensive definition at the foundation of *all* language. In
>
> order than an ostensive definition be successful the pupil must
>
> already *have* a language of some sort; therefore no finite pupil can
>
> have relied solely upon ostension. (*Ibid*., 21)

That Ahmed is correctly committing Wittgenstein here to the proposal that Augustine's child with his apparent possession of a 'language of thought' has only the *appearance* of learning a first language in the way that he would learn a second one, so that it is *as if* the child already had a language, is central to the following paragraph in which he *questions* the main point that Wittgenstein is making in § 32:

> But *is* it the correct conclusion ? It is certainly true that in order to
>
> 'take an ostensive definition in the right way' the pupil must have
>
> *some* capacities that he did not acquire by exposure to ostensive
>
> definition. But why must these capacities be specifically *linguistic* ? (*Ibid*.)

Ahmed then proceeds in a characteristically empiricist fashion to claim that both children and animals can be shown as a matter of empirical fact to be able to react to colours appropriately without being able to speak a prior language, so that he can rhetorically ask: 'Hasn't the child learnt "Red" by ostensive definition without already being able to do anything like speak another language ?' (*Ibid*.) Certainly, Ahmed's child would in such cases have to come pre-equipped with what he calls a *similarity metric*, which as far as one can see is sufficiently close to Scott Soames's pre-linguistic *representational content* or to Ayer's *primary recognition* (2) as makes little difference in the present context. In short, there is something intrinsically meaningful with which we are to imagine that the child is immediately acquainted. Ahmed concludes: 'It therefore seems to me

that Wittgenstein has failed to establish the anti-Augustinian conclusion advertised at PI 32 and quoted above.' (*Ibid.*, 22)

All that Ahmed has succeeded in doing here is to criticise Wittgenstein's rejection of what is often understood to be a central plank of the 'Augustinian Picture' by introducing certain empiricist presuppositions which in their own way appear to provide more than ample support for it. Ahmed's child need not have a proper *language* if it can be shown that the child comes to face the world around him already equipped with the conceptual resources or 'language of thought' that would allow him to name or label the items in his surroundings. As he surmises in the associated Endnote 5 (*Ibid.*,157), '...the distinction between ostensive teaching and ostensive definition can only save Wittgenstein's argument at the cost of making it irrelevant.' Wittgenstein, as Ahmed presents him, wrongly aims to establish that Augustine's child really *ought* to have prior acquaintance with a proper *language*. This thesis is therefore demonstrably false if it can be shown that ostensive teaching in the absence of this language can allow the pupil *via* a *similarity metric* to achieve the conceptual mastery that he uses his examples to demonstrate. Yet the *role* that Wittgenstein allocates to ostensive teaching in § 6 is one in which it is integral to a gradual process of *training* into language acquisition. This training does *not* therefore presuppose that the child *already* possesses the conceptual capacities which would allow him to label different *kinds* of things in the world around him in the Augustinian manner. Indeed, it is precisely the infinite regress embodied in this aspect of the Augustinian Picture which Wittgenstein is at pains to avoid, no matter what initial perceptual capacities and competencies the child may as a matter of empirical fact be discovered to possess (3).

It would, however, be quite wrong to suppose that the empiricist orientation that Ahmed reveals in these passages colours *every* aspect of his treatment throughout his commentary. The reason for this is simply that there are large parts of the text of the *Investigations* which need not be seen to directly conflict with this general stance, although occasionally Ahmed has reason to question a position which Wittgenstein later adopts in opposition to the *Tractatus*. Take, for example, the claim in § 108 that 'sentence' and 'language' do not have the formal unity that he had imagined for them

in the *Tractatus*, a claim that Ahmed finds reason to question because Wittgenstein's earlier self could retort that what he was discussing in *that* context was not ordinary language at all but 'a somewhat more regimented *successor*-concept that picks out a particular kind of language-game of describing how things actually stand.' (*Ibid*., 44) Whilst it may not be essential to all language-games that they in this sense describe how things actually stand, 'why should it not be essential to a very important and interesting subset of them: a subset moreover that includes the language of science ?' (*Ibid*.) Ahmed reasons that although we may accept the general conclusions that Wittgenstein comes to regarding family resemblance, this does not mean on his assessment that we cannot also hold on to the earlier Tractarian ideas they are intended to dislodge. It is, however, arguable that Ahmed in saying this may be neglecting the significance of § 132, with its idea that reforms of language for particular, including scientific purposes, must *begin* from everyday language. Whilst it is not entirely certain whether Ahmed is stipulating that this is something that in the *Tractatus* is being denied, we are left with the impression that on this *matter* the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* is irreversibly altering his thinking.

This scientific orientation is also noticeable in Ahmed's treatment of § 89, in which Augustine reveals himself to be baffled by the concept of *time*, a bafflement that Wittgenstein says would not accompany any *clear* question in natural science. The implication is that Augustine's real difficulties with *time* are conceptual in nature, and that they can be at least partly resolved by looking at the *'possibilities'* of phenomena, and by reminding ourselves of the *kinds* of statements (§ 90) that are ordinarily made about the past, present and future duration of events. Yet Ahmed's reaction to this seems, at least initially, rather scathing with its 'rational' overtones:

> I confess to finding this attitude incomprehensible. I myself
> don't know what time is *whether or not* you ask me ; but if I
> knew its role in an empirically justified physical theory I should
> know well enough what it was. And the same goes for space, and
> colour, and the mind, and language. (*Ibid*. 67)

Ahmed slightly modifies this response with the claim that his conception of philosophy

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in which empirical findings must be relevant to answering very general questions about man and the universe, and the contrasting one in which we remind ourselves of the ordinary use of words in order to avoid conceptual confusion, may be considered to be complementary rather than contradictory. He does not flinch, however, from concluding that what really justifies the study of Wittgenstein for most of his fellow philosophers working in the 'Western tradition' today is that what he has to say has a relevance to *their* particular problems.

The misguided interpretation of Wittgenstein as 'anti-scientific' is well-known. Whilst this is not a description that Ahmed shows any signs of directly attributing to him, the issue arises again in the context of the question whether reading and understanding might be a state of someone's brain. Here Ahmed inevitably draws our attention to *Zettel* § 608, the oft-quoted passage in which Wittgenstein 'thought that the behavioural dispositions by whose manifestations the pupil shows that he can read, or has mastered a series, might have *no* explanation in terms of his brain-states.' (*Ibid.*, 83). Ahmed's reaction to this is simply to affirm that Wittgenstein's apparent objection to a certain form of explanation is so dependent on the successful outcome of physical research into the brain that it really lies outside the scope of his enquiry.

Yet it may be argued here that what Wittgenstein is really drawing our attention to is the fact that our concept of *thinking* has so many ramifications, that it has so many highly diverse employments in different circumstances, that its 'everyday use' is simply not amenable to any kind of correlation with specific processes in the brain. To imagine that it could be, is to be at the mercy of a misleading *picture* of *thinking* as an identifiable *process*. Certainly, no one would nowadays wish to deny as a maxim that all human behaviour is causally dependent in the most general terms on neurophysiological events. This conclusion, though, may be thought to be trivial if its relevant implication is taken to be that in the absence of neuronal activity in the human brain, human beings as we know them would simply not exist.

Ahmed significantly distinguishes the principle at stake in this case from that in § 149. Here Wittgenstein talks of knowing the ABC as the state of a mental apparatus, perhaps lying in the brain as a physical mechanism, by means of which the manifestation of this knowledge may be explained. Ahmed attempts to unravel exactly what Wittgenstein is getting at by drawing a distinction between

knowledge of the construction of the apparatus and knowledge of what it does. Ahmed's Wittgenstein is arguably reaching the conclusion here that since the *sole* criterion for deciding that someone knows his ABC lies in certain behavioural manifestations, anything that we understand to be the *state* that *explains* these manifestations cannot be *identical* with the knowledge someone has of the ABC. (*Ibid.*, 79)

But this would appear to be the familiar argument that, at least in these kinds of cases, the scientific explanation does not provide a *replacement* for our everyday concepts because *what* is being explained is parasitic on their ordinary employment. Ahmed supports his claim by contrasting the *identity* of water and H_2O, which would remain H_2O even if this substance had been opaque and poisonous. But this is a bad argument, because we could just as easily claim that the *role* we attribute to H_2O in explaining the *actual* observable behaviour of water *is* precisely what leads us to treat this statement as one whose truth is unassailable. He is, on the other hand, on slightly stronger ground with his view that there would be no contradiction in the discovery that two different groups of people could have their knowledge of the ABC explained by *different* sets of neural states. But this conclusion may be thought to be trivial on the ground that this is merely a consequence of the fact that the sole criterion for deciding that someone knows the ABC *does* rest in certain aspects of his behaviour. (*Ibid.*)

It is, nevertheless, important to note *a propos* the content of *Zettel* § 608, that a comparison with *Investigations* § 412 can prove fruitful, because in *this* case Wittgenstein has no hesitation in concluding that an effect of light which he sees *is* the clear result of stimulating a particular part of the brain. Here there are two readily identifiable events which, by repeated experiment, can be shown to exhibit a very precise correlation. From the perspective offered by this additional clue, it is at the very least highly unlikely that *Zettel* § 608 *can* be presenting the simple anti-explanatory message that so many commentators, on an admittedly literal interpretation, have chosen to find in it.

It will come as no surprise that Ahmed's general approach to philosophical problems is as far removed from any conception of Wittgensteinian therapy as one could imagine. In his section dealing with Wittgenstein on the nature of philosophy, for example, he quotes § 116 with its reference to bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use, together with the suggestion (§ 127) that the

work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose, only to stare

at these precepts with blank incomprehension: ' What are we to make of this ?' And, a little further

on: 'But why should the correct response to this be to give up on the philosophical claim?' (*Ibid*., 64),

a question followed by an elaborate example in which an economist defines the term 'income' quite

precisely, in order to avoid the inevitable vagueness encountered in its *ordinary* use. Why therefore

cannot the philosopher, like the economist, be allowed to produce his own technical terms for *his*

particular purposes ? Once again, this not uncommon misreading, which can be traced as far back

as the 1960's in the secondary literature, neglects the significance of § 132, with its 'reminder' that

what concerns Wittgenstein are not these kinds of cases at all, but those in which language is 'idling'

and doing no useful work. The point is central to a well-known early paper of Stanley Cavell. (4)

What readers will find much less obviously controversial are Ahmed's detailed

comparisons between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* on a range of familiar questions about

simplicity and analysis, where his highly traditional treatment is occasionally tempered with his

perhaps inevitable puzzlement over Wittgenstein's motivations for opposing the *Tractatus* on a point

of significance, *because* the former view is alright *e.g.*, the issue about knowledge of *sense* (*Ibid*., 32).

It is interesting that when discussing § 50, Ahmed briefly uses the *sepia* sample without using

the more commonly quoted *standard metre rule*, which one might have expected him to at least

mention briefly, following his work on Saul Kripke. He also interestingly points out that a return

to the pre-*Tractatus Notebooks* (64-65) reveals a conception of analysis that is strikingly similar to

that illustrated in §§ 63-64, as distinct from the more obvious metaphysical position actually adopted

in the *Tractatus* on the point in question. (*Ibid*., 34).

Within the section on family resemblance, there is also a long discussion about vague

concepts - including a treatment of the famous 'Moses' example (§ 87) - in which Wittgenstein is

said to argue that the vaguenes of our language is essential to it (*Ibid*., 49). This long discussion

leads to a *Sorites sequence*, a mention of Michael Dummet on Frege on the fundamental incoherence

of vague expressions, and a claim that Wittgenstein does not address this point in the context of the

Investigations. Using other writings of Wittgenstein, however, Ahmed reaches the conclusion that the mere *possibility* that a contradiction could be derived from vague concepts does not make them unusable. If the ending of this part of the discussion seems rather lame, this is because Ahmed declares that Sorites sequences are *not* in any event part of everyday life, although there is a connection between this point and the rule-following paradox to follow. (*Ibid.*, 55)

It is also worth remarking here that the remainder of this section contains a treatment of the idea that grasping a concept *is* to become aware of an object of introspection, which constitutes our *understanding*, say, of a colour term. But the mere presence of an image or sample does not reveal how it is to be *applied*. Yet this point is clearly relevant to the earlier discussion of Lockean *ideas*, ideas which Ahmed in that context, even if only ambivalently, appears to endorse as part of a genuine theoretical *explanation* of conceptual mastery. If we are to take his opinion of § 32 at face value, then the fairly obvious empiricist orientation underlying it *can* often point in a broadly 'Lockean' direction. Yet the reader is inevitably going to be puzzled here just because Ahmed shows no obvious sign that he disagrees with Wittgenstein when he later explains that mental *images* cannot be taken to determine their own applications, a point which is also at issue in the later discussion of the cube at § 139, a picture of which cannot contain its own method of projection. Consider the following:

> Wittgenstein seems to me to have taught us two things about this.
>
> First, he is agreeing that the meaning *can* be a picture that comes
> before your mind, but that this will only happen when the *application*
> of the picture 'comes before your mind' too. And that is what will
> happen if you are prepared to use the picture as it is typically used. (*Ibid.*, 74)

This leads Ahmed in the following paragraph to draw the important conclusion:

> ...we can insist that use remains prior to meaning in the order of
> explanation. A use does not fit a picture because of the meaning
> that the picture already had; rather, a picture has the meaning that
> it does *because* of the use that we typically *give* it (*Ibid.*, 75)

Yet these are not conclusions that point in the direction of a Lockean theory of ideas. As Ahmed sums up the matter in a later section:

> Wittgenstein's treatment of these examples thus uproots the deep
>
> and important misconception that meaning and understanding are
>
> mental states or occurrences that somehow contain within themselves
>
> some particular pattern of usage. (*Ibid.*, 97)

Ahmed's final position on this issue will become clearer when he is later on seen to reject, on *his* particular interpretation, what is being claimed by Wittgenstein in § 258 and in § 293. He next turns his attention to the examples surrounding § 201 which have led Saul Kripke to the notorious conclusion, as Ahmede puts it, that understanding and meaning are *themselves* an illusion. Adopting a fairly conventional perspective on the issue, Ahmed clearly argues, like many other commentators, that the second paragraph of § 201 provides the 'answer' to the rule-following paradox that Kripke expresses by concentrating on the first half of the passage. This is exceptionally familiar material, and Ahmed understandably makes no attempt to break new ground in discussing it.

He does, however, end this section by highlighting the 'animal instinct' aspect of rule-following already mentioned in connection with his empiricism, an aspect that would place Wittgenstein's 'Naturalism' alongside that of Hume. If this seems even mildly puzzling, it is largely because Hume's 'sceptical doubt', whilst *idle* in the face of this animal instinct, is neverthless a *rational* philosophical response to the phenomena. Yet a response of *this* kind could have little or no meaning for Wittgenstein, whose later methodology employs our natural instincts and reactions *within* an overall anthropological framework in which they become part of the *measure* of what we would call 'rational', as expressed in 'how we respond', 'what we do' *etc*. Wittgenstein's Naturalism, insofar as his method justifies the use of this term, is of an entirely different variety from Hume's. His application of this methodology to the issues surrounding privacy and private language can be shown to provide results which have profound consequences for Ahmed's overtly empiricist orientation.

The forty pages which Ahmed devotes to privacy and private language begin by reminding

the reader where the discussion had broken off before: at the point of discussing Augustine's picture of language acquisition, and how this relates to a Lockean viewpoint:

> ...we have seen how Locke took words primarily to stand for one's
>
> private 'ideas', and one plausible interpretation of 'idea' is 'sensory
>
> image'. Indeed, we saw that that thought of Locke's was what lay
>
> behind an objection (still unanswered) to what seemed to follow
>
> from the 'shopping trip' example at PI 1 (1.1). For one might have
>
> insisted that the example did not establish any great diversity among
>
> the uses of the words 'five', 'red' and 'apples', on the grounds that if
>
> we broaden our view of this example to consider the role that inner
>
> states play in it, we see a greater uniformity in their uses than superfical
>
> consideration could reveal. (*Ibid.*, 107)

Ahmed notes that 'private ostensive definition appears to put the application of a word before your mind quite independently of any other regularities in the use of the image on which you are then focussing your attention' (*Ibid.*, 108), and this would appear on his view to be at odds with Wittgenstein's own remarks on meaning and understanding. The following passage echoes this perspective, one which captures the kinds of considerations that weigh heavily with Ahmed when he is led to adopt what will prove to be a distinctly un-Wittgensteinian point of view:

> Suppose that on some occasion I decide to use a word 'S' to denote
>
> sensations of the same type as *this* one - and here I focus on some
>
> particular sensation, say my experience of a particular shade of red
>
> that I have just noticed, By doing so, it seems that I could (at least
>
> in principle) set up an association between the word 'S' and that very
>
> shade, so that it is the image of that shade that occurs to me when I
>
> say 'S' to myself. Now couldn't that be a case in which a certain
>
> conscious occurrence - what we might call a private ostensive definition -

has 'forced a use' on me ? Perhaps indeed that is how our actual

colour words get their meaning. (*Ibid*. 108)

Quoting § 239, in which Wittgenstein asks how he is to know what colour to pick out when he hears the word 'red', Ahmed appears to endorse the answer that he is to take the colour whose image occurs to him when he hears the word. Referring to § 243, in which a private language is defined in terms of two conditions a) that it refer to immediate private sensations known only to the speaker *so that* b) another person cannot understand the language, Ahmed draws our attention to a well-known paper by Edward Craig, 'Meaning and Privacy', in which he 'has shown quite convincingly' (*Ibid*.,109) that if words can refer only to what can be *known* to a speaker, it does not follow that they can be *understood* only by that speaker.

But on Wittgenstein's view, this *is* to allow for the possibility that two people may be said to *understand* each other even if they do not *know* whether one person's word 'red' refers to what someone else calls 'blue' (*Cf. Ibid*.,110). But this is to deny what Wittgenstein would take to have no proper application in a public language because it makes no proper *sense, viz.*, that 'nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something *else.*' This quotation from § 272 expresses the point that it is only the misleading *picture,* underlying our notion of *philosophical* privacy, that *appears* to provide this suggestion with a practical application. But it cannot have any use at all because there are no criteria to determine *how* this picture might be applied.

Ahmed's interpretation of 'the broad drift of the argument' of § 258 (*Ibid*., 112) is very much what one would expect given the kinds of considerations which weigh heavily with him in the foregoing passage. He succinctly summarises its content:

> The private diarist wishes to introduce a word 'S' for the type
>
> of sensation that he is presently having. And he tries to do it by
>
> ostensive definition. But ostensive definition is not just a matter
>
> of uttering the defined expression 'S' in the presence of the type
>
> of sensation that you are intending to name. Nor is it enough to

utter 'S' while concentrating your attention on that type. What is

needed in addition is that the definition brings it about that the

diarist remembers the connection right - the connection, that is,

'between sign and sensation'. But a private ostensive definition

cannot bring that about because it supplies no criterion of correctness

for my use of 'S'. So the supposed private ostensive definition was

not really a definition of 'S' at all. It was an idle ceremony. (*Ibid.*, 112)

Ahmed sets out three possible interpretations of the argument as he understands it, which have had considerable historical significance in the literature, and these he expresses as follows:

(i)   verificationism - if you name a type 'S' you have to specify

evidence for its recurrence, and the private linguist cannot

do this;

(ii)   the meaning-check - if you name a type 'S' then you have

to specify a way of checking later what you meant by it all

along, and the private linguist cannot do this;

(iii)   sortalism - if you name a type 'S' then you have to specify

what type of thing you are naming 'S', and the private

linguist cannot do this. (*Ibid.*, 113)

Ahmed provides an exceptionally good presentation of the factors which played an important role in those historically earlier interpretations of the argument, and this makes his account particularly valuable for those assessing it for the first time. Whilst it almost goes without saying that from his own empiricist perspective he will come to find the argument against a private language on all these readings invalid, it is worthwhile considering a few points he finds particularly important in coming to his conclusion. On the verificationist reading, for example, Strawson is introduced *contra* Malcolm to support the claim that a man might simply be struck by the occurrence of a sensation prior to habitually making a certain mark in a different place every time it occurred. (*Ibid.*, 114)

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What Ahmed does *not,* however, mention is Strawson's extraordinary suggestion, which effectively vitiates his entire argument as an *interpretation* of Wittgenstein, that it is worthwhile asking in this context whether we do ever in fact find ourselves misremembering the use of very *simple* words of our common language, and having to correct ourselves by attending to the use made of these words by others. Further on, Ayer is unsurprisingly introduced by Ahmed *via* his 1954 clash with Rhees as someone who correctly argues for the conclusion that unless there is something that one is allowed to recognise *ab initio* (what he later calls *primary recognition*), *no* test can ever be completed, a point sufficient to undermine a public, let alone a private language. (5)

On the meaning-check interpretation, it is argued that one cannot check one's memory of the definition initially granted because one later on has nothing with which to compare it, and this easily reduces to nothing more than scepticism about the memory of a *meaning* that has already been laid down, a scepticism that could be just as harmful within a public, let alone within a private language. On the later sortalist interpretation, which Ahmed identifies in Glock, Marie McGinn and Stroud (*Ibid*., 119), the objection to the private linguist is effectively that there is nothing that from the beginning the diarist can do even to *set up* a rule for using a meaningful expression, because the 'private act' of doing so exists in a vacuum, isolated from the normal surroundings which allow the very distinction between a correct or incorrect application of a term to acquire its sense. Whilst it is arguable that this comes closer to realising Wittgenstein's intentions - a similar claim can be found in David Stern (6) - this is not going to cut any ice for Ahmed, who resolutely holds on to the empiricist stance he has adopted from the beginning:

> ....it is not clear what logical or conceptual difficulty this version
> of the argument raises for the private diarist....Let the diarist utter
> the sound 'S' in the presence of a sensation on one occasion, and
> let this occasion be so impressed on his memory that whenever in
> future he has something of the *same* sensational type, he then writes
> 'S' in his diary. There is certainly no need for him to be able to say,

in defining 'S', that it is the name 'for a sensation'; all that is needed is that

given his similarity space he responds in similar ways to experiences of the

same sensational type. And I cannot see any logical *incoherence* in this

possibility (though I have no idea how likely it is). (*Ibid*., 120)

So, for Ahmed our sensations are intrinsically meaningful and merely require to be 'named',

insofar as the resources are always *already* available to the diarist for introducing an appropriate

meaning-rule for any particular *kind* of sensation as required. This point will have been only too

obvious to the attentive reader from the beginning, for Ahmed's reference is always to a sensation

of a given *type*, and if this is the presupposition with which he initially operates, then of course it

will seem that the introduction of a 'private language of sensations' is quite unproblematic. After all,

the existence of a given *type* of sensation makes little sense without the associated idea of the consistent

application of a meaning-rule, one usually associated with criteria by which the rule can be correctly

or incorrectly applied.

The interesting point which Wittgenstein insists upon, however, is that in the case of

first-person sensation ascription we do *not* apply criteria to determine that 'this is red *again*', for it

is enough that 'I have learned English' (§ 381) ; and that, paradoxically, is what lies behind Ahmed's

conviction that he could *introduce* a language to talk about his sensations, in much the same way that

we *can* introduce new terms into our language on experiencing new and unusual sensations for the

first time. But in these cases we do so against a background of acquired skills, a background of teaching

and learning which *as a matter of fact* is lacking in the case of Augustine's child. Wittgenstein's main

objection to the empiricist is that *he* stares at this criterionless aspect of first-person sensation ascription

in isolation from the surrounding circumstances in which sensation ascription acquires its meaning for

us as a *practice* in which human beings participate. This is not a *reminder* that the philosopher is duty

bound to accept, although it has the potential to reorient our thinking by encouraging us to conclude,

for example, that Augustine's child takes *acquired* skills for granted. Similarly its *argumentative* power is

captured in the realisation that any attempt to *explain* in a *philosophical* context how it is that we acquire

linguistic skills on Augustine's account, leads to an infinite regress.

In addition to this reminder, however, Wittgenstein importantly *defines* his notion of privacy, the one used to talk about private *objects* in a private *language*, in terms of the need for applicable criteria of identity for these *object*-sensations. With this possibility (§ 288) the lack of any expression of doubt - a doubt that has *no* place in the language-game of talking ordinarily about our sensations in a public language - evaporates, so that it *looks* as if we might *legitimately* begin to doubt afresh. But what is being presented here as an *apparent* possibility is not really intended to be taken seriously, for our sensations as we ordinarily experience them and talk about them, do *not* fit into a model in which the correct or incorrect *identification* of *individual* items each with its own criteria of identity, has any application. The undermining of the private object model is illustrated by the way in which Wittgenstein uses his examples to reveal that the model has no application to our *ordinary* talk about our sensations, a procedure which is ambivalent in appearing to question whether we can have a *genuine* conception of what he is rejecting. Wittgenstein's strategy in these cases is *intended* to undermine the misleading picture from *within* through the use he makes of the examples themselves.

This bears directly on Ahmed's next topic, the beetle in the box, § 293, where Wittgenstein criticises this model of *privacy* in part by deducing that people might have regularly *different* items in their 'boxes', or even items *absent* from them, *private* items which exist in isolation from the proper use of the public terms that speakers daily use to talk about the regularly recurring sensations they enjoy. The irony here, however, is that this criticism may actually appear to work in Ahmed's favour, because the actual *definition* of a private *object* provided by Wittgenstein (§ 288) is so esoteric that it can be far from certain, historically, that famous philosophers like Locke and Hume ever really adopted it. Once again, his answer to the empiricist is *better* understood to be utilising the point of §§ 1 - 2 and § 32, capturing the infinite regress to which he points in referring to Augustine's child who can think only not yet speak, a message reflected in Wittgenstein's reminder-type treatment of sensations in § 257. Here the philosopher is once again caught staring in a vacuum at the criterionless aspect of first person sensation ascription. Entranced by a misleading *picture* which appears to allow him immediate access

to *certain* knowledge of a realm of uniquely *private* (foundational) items, he fails to realise that the very *notion* of privacy he is employing is actually parasitic on the *everyday use* of ordinary sensation terms.

Consequently, Wittgenstein is not denying that we can freely *imagine* the 'logical possibility' of *inverted spectra*, or of the equally infamous *zombie* who lacks consciousness. On the contrary: it is because we can only too *readily* imagine these possibilities that we can so easily be 'taken in' by them when doing philosophy. Wittgenstein's objection to concepts like *inverted spectra*, as *private* objects of introspection, or to the *zombie* who has no conscious states, is not that on reconsidering them we find that we cannot *really* imagine cases of this kind, but that we cannot do anything with them. They readily occur only when our language is 'idling', and doing no real work. This is why reference is usually made only to their *logical* possibility, for there are no ordinary criteria in terms of which these bogus concepts might be applied. In the same way, his objection to the idea that our sensations have inherent *representational content* is not that we cannot *really* imagine circumstances in which we might find ourselves copying Ahmed's 'private linguist' by *inventing* names for *types* of sensations, but that what is being employed in these cases is an ambivalent notion of *privacy* which gains its sense because the 'private' scenario envisaged is parasitic on a pre-established use within the ordinary surrounding circumstances in which first person sensation language is acquired and applied.

It is a consequence of this that Ahmed's considered assessment of what Wittgenstein does and does not achieve in § 293, involves a blatant misrepresentation of Wittgenstein's intentions, for everything he says allow the empiricist's distinction between 'public' and 'private' to continue undisturbed as a *legitimate* tool of philosophical discussion. He emphasises this point at the beginning of the relevant section when he claims that § 293 does not show, nor does it intend to show that ordinary colour words 'could not have a private meaning *in addition* to their public one.' (*Ibid*., 124) Furthermore, when he introduces what for some will seem a somewhat irrelevant argument from Quine which allows for the possibility that 'Wittgenstein's limitation of his argument to the private sector seems arbitrary' (*Ibid*., 128), the point being that § 293 ultimately establishes on Quinean principles the semantic irrelevance of the *outer*, let alone the *inner*, this has the consequence that

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no matter how much this argument allows for variation in sets of inner *or* outer objects, 'the public use of the associated words proceeds quite undisturbed'. (*Ibid*., 127)

Given, however, that Wittgenstein's ultimate objection to this is not that it cannot be *imagined*, but that philosophers are inclined to think in this way only *because* language is 'idling' and doing no useful work, it would seem that what for Ahmed is a *legitimate* reason for affirming that § 293 'establishes no *special* difficulty for a Lockean interpretation of our language on which words denote associated private or inner objects' (*Ibid*., 128), is for Wittgenstein a reason for saying that the *picture* which forces itself on us here is not performing any useful role in our considerations. Yet this, to appropriate a term Wittgenstein employs in another context, is to reach *bedrock*. What is at stake here are fundamentally different orientations towards the problems of philosophy.

This assessment is to some degree confirmed by Ahmed himself towards the end of this section. Following a rather conventional treatment of what he refers to as *The Cartesian Picture* and what he understands to be Wittgenstein's response to it, a fairly comprehensive summary even if one at times a little convoluted, he reaches the conclusion in regard to Wittgenstein's 'account of third-personal sensation ascriptions' that 'In all of these cases we are not told the *truth*-conditions of the statements in question. We are only told when we are *justified* in making them.' (*Ibid*., 145 *et seq*.) Whether or not this reveals the influence of Saul Kripke on this thinking, this is certainly a Kripkean point of view, one which leads Ahmed to a certain dissatisfaction with Wittgenstein's account. This account 'seems superficial' when '*logic itself* seems to dictate otherwise':

> For the law seems to demand that there *be* a fact one way
>
> or another, even if *we* don't know what it is. *We* have to rely
>
> on these external signs of pain, or understanding; but the
>
> statement itself reaches into a hidden region of reality that
>
> in any case makes it true or false. (*Ibid*., 146 *et seq*.)

Yet in what must seem at this point a remarkable *volte-face*, Ahmed draws our attention to two passages in Wittgenstein, 'one of great beauty', which is evidently § 426 as distinct from § 352,

in which he discovers 'the seeds of Wittgenstein's reply' to the *sense* that our language is pointing in the direction of these 'hidden regions of reality':

> We must distinguish between the logical law itself, which is
>
> simply a convention of our language, and the *picture* that it
>
> suggested to us. The picture is of a region of reality that outruns
>
> its visible part: the inside of someone's mind, say, or the infinite
>
> continuation of the decimal expansion of *pi*. But that picture is
>
> *just* a picture: it tells us nothing about the actual use of the
>
> expression but just stands there like an irrelevant or merely
>
> ornamental illustration to a text. (*Ibid*., 148)

Yet even in the course of discovering this fundamental feature of Wittgenstein's method, one which expresses his understanding that in so many cases the *pictures* that may *accompany* a concept are incidental to its use within the ordinary practice in which it is embedded, the reader will inevitably detect a certain ambivalence in Ahmed's attitude: not only does he express dissatisfaction at this point with the apparent reference to philosophy's inertness in § 126, but he also reminds us of what he has already found reason to question in his account, earlier in the book, of Wittgenstein on the nature of philosophy itself. Nevertheless, by indicating that it is the *role* attributed to the picture when doing *philosophy* that leads directly to the 'sceptical', 'anti-realist' conclusions which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein on 'Other Minds', he is successfully pointing to why *Wittgenstein* found his method so liberating, even if, Janus-like, Ahmed still finds himself irresistably drawn to his wholly different and more traditional way of looking at things.

The final short Chapter on Wittgenstein's reception and influence after the publication of the *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953 informs us of Strawson's reference to a 'philosopher of genius', Feyerabend's description of the work as 'a great achievement', and Dummett's assessment of its first hundred or so sections as almost all compelling assent. This, of course, must be balanced by Russell's wholly negative assessment of a philosopher who 'seems to have grown tired of serious

thinking', but this is unlikely to be taken seriously today even by those who are most unsympathetic to what they would understand to be Wittgenstein's method. Quine is mentioned as having points of view in common with Wittgenstein, and Kripke and McDowell are shown to have been influenced or at least inspired by him.

Ahmed ends this, on balance, very valuable volume on a rather pedagogical note with his instruction to the student (in us) neither to slavishly adhere to Wittgenstein's doctrines, nor to practice philosophy in his manner, but to critically engage with his views 'in an attempt to discriminate and to extract whichever of his doctrines make a contribution to our philosophical knowledge.' (*Ibid.*, 153) There are, however, many interpreters who would argue that the philosophy of Wittgenstein does not lend itself to being raked over in this piecemeal way, especially as a means of separating the wheat from the chaff, the nugget of pure gold from the dross, the original insight from the invalid *argument*, because this would be to misunderstand the nature of his method. Indeed, the very idea of accumulating philosophical *knowledge,* in a Wittgensteinian context, surely speaks for itself. On the other hand, Arif Ahmed *has* done a splendid job of packing his book with argument that students can grapple with in the course of gradually achieving a proper understanding of the later philosophy. Indeed, the more discriminating among them who adopt his commendable recommendation to return to the text of the *Investigations* itself, are almost certain to become puzzled, barring that insightful *volte-face* at the end, over the extent to which the account of them that Ahmed so often provides, is completely at odds with Wittgenstein's real intentions.

ENDNOTES

(1) The relevant point here is that later on Ahmed shows every sign of agreeing in other contexts with this general principle. (See page 13 of this review). As an example of its occurrence in the secondary literature, compare Colin McGinn: *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 118.

(2) Scott Soames: *Philosophical Analysis in The Twentieth Century*, Volume 2, The Age of Meaning (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) 37.; and A.J. Ayer: 'Reply to David Pears', *The Philosophy of A.J.Ayer* ed. L.E. Hahn (La Salle Illinois: Open Court, 1992) 403.

(3) This point is now fairly generally accepted in the secondary literature. For a classic example, see Meredith Williams: *Blind Obedience Paradox and Learning in the Later Wittgenstein* (Abington: Routledge, 2010).

(4) Stanley Cavell: 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' in that classic early collection *Wittgenstein The Philosophical Investigations* ed. George Pitcher (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1966).

(5) P.F. Strawson: 'Review of *Philosophical Investigations*'; and A.J. Ayer: 'Can There be a Private Language?' both in the famous Pitcher collection. See (4).

(6) David Stern: *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chapter 7.

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.