

Review of Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, edited and introduced by Katherine Morris, Wiley-Blackwell 2006. Paperback 328 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4051-5280-8

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Gordon Baker is known to every student of Wittgenstein through the line-by-line commentaries on the *Philosophical Investigations* he and Peter Hacker produced during the 1980s. Many will also know his and Hacker's polemical essays and books on Wittgenstein, Frege and the philosophy of language. But fewer readers will be familiar with the essays, published by Baker under his own colours between 1990 and his death in 2002, and developing an interpretation quite distinct from that of his earlier works, which are now collected in this useful volume.

The book is thus not a single treatise on Wittgenstein's method but a collection of essays on a number of topics published in various journals over a twelve-year period. Several focus on specific passages of the *Investigations*, others consider general textual issues ("Italics in Wittgenstein") or such themes as aspect-seeing and Wittgenstein's understanding of "grammar", and there is a series of articles considering the writings of Friedrich Waismann. But there is an evident unity on display, both in the interpretation which the essays propound and in the approach to the reading of Wittgenstein's texts which they exhibit.

The interpretation takes as seriously as possible the analogy Wittgenstein drew in the Big Typescript and the *Diktat für Schlick* between his work and psychoanalysis. It connects this analysis with the idea that Wittgenstein's consistent aim in his later work was not to put forward theories but to remove sources of philosophical anxiety – that his approach to philosophy is not constructive but therapeutic.

The resulting reading, perhaps most clearly summarised in the essay "Wittgenstein's method and psychoanalysis", has it that Wittgenstein's later writings are entirely aimed at the cure of philosophical disquiet in particular individuals. They are thus *patient specific*. The direct relevance of a Wittgensteinian discussion of a particular topic is confined to those who suffer intellectual distress arising from their thinking about that topic. Others will benefit from observing a certain therapeutic method which they may be able to apply in their own cases.

The diseases for which Wittgenstein is interested in providing cures do not consist in false beliefs or mistaken assumptions but in forms of disquiet or distress. It is only because the patient suffers intellectual discomfort that therapy is appropriate. And the therapy consists in removing the discomfort and not in correcting mistakes. Relatedly, the patient must enter therapy voluntarily, and its aim is not only to diagnose the source of discomfort but also to help the patient to acknowledge that source.

Therapy can consist in making the patient see a matter in a new light: no claim need be made to replace falsity with truth. It follows that no conclusions with implications beyond the particular case should be drawn. The interpretation goes well beyond simply denying that Wittgenstein was interested in constructing general *theories* of language, mind or mathematics. It denies even that he was interested in correcting common mistakes about, or in improving our understanding of these things.

Baker defends his interpretation, in part, by appeal to a number of texts arising from Wittgenstein's dialogue with Waismann in the early 1930s. These include Waismann's *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*, a book which was intended as an exposition of Wittgenstein's thought but which was never endorsed by Wittgenstein himself as such. But the book is cited by Baker as if it had an authority commensurate with that of Wittgenstein's own writings. Great weight is given also to Wittgenstein's dictations to Waismann. These are texts which, unlike other parts of his Nachlass, were not later revised or worked on by Wittgenstein. Where they differ in emphasis or substance from his own typescripts, and above all where they differ from the *Investigations*, it should not be assumed that they represent his considered opinion on the issues they discuss. (On these points, see Hacker's contribution to Kahane, Kanterian and Kuusela, eds., *Wittgenstein and his interpreters*, Blackwell, 2007).

In general, evidence for Baker's interpretation is relatively thin in Wittgenstein's later writings. In particular, it is thin in part one of the *Investigations*, which surely ought to be afforded authoritative status as a canonical text. One's impression is that Wittgenstein in the early 1930s was struck by analogies between his non-constructive approach to philosophy and Freud's psychoanalysis (in which he anyway maintained an interest), but became less impressed by these analogies as time went on. Baker does not seem to me adequately to address these concerns.

Inspiration is also found for the interpretation in Waismann's "How I See Philosophy", to which one of the essays in this volume is devoted. Waismann's essay which was written in 1956, long after its author broke with Wittgenstein, and can certainly not be taken as an authoritative exposition of Wittgenstein's views. Indeed, Hacker argues in the piece cited above that the essay is partly an attack on Wittgenstein's philosophy as Waismann understood it.

Perhaps the authoritativeness or otherwise of Waismann's texts matters less than the fertility of the readings of Wittgenstein which they inspire. How convincing are Baker's readings? One notices a certain dogmatic determination to avoid drawing any positive conclusions whatsoever from Wittgenstein's writings. This can be used to Wittgenstein's advantage, as in Baker's valiant effort to defend the utility (not, of course, the truth) of Wittgenstein's notorious statement in the Blue Book that thinking is "operating with signs". The valiant effort is, to this reader's mind at least, ultimately unconvincing.

On the other hand, some of the morals for detailed reading which Baker draws from his interpretive model are highly salutary. The emphasis on patient-specificity leads him to treat the remarks in quotation marks at which Wittgenstein directs so much of his discussion as representing a variety of possible reactions and viewpoints, rather than as the successive dialectical moves of a single philosophical opponent. The way is opened to a reading of the texts as discursive rather than polemical, an approach which can be useful even to someone who resists Baker's interpretation as a whole.

Better still, Baker takes a fresh approach to questions in the texts. He refuses to treat them as uniformly rhetorical. Some he sees as expressing genuine uncertainty, others as posing problems intended to show us the unseen difficulties of an apparently unproblematic philosophical position. In neither case need we think that a particular answer is implied. This feature should be welcome to anyone who has witnessed group discussions of Wittgenstein texts in which a question is agreed to be rhetorical, but different people have opposite views on what the answer is supposed to be.

But the real importance of the book, in my opinion, lies in Baker's close readings of particular passages, often of the *Investigations*. These are often thought-provoking and convincing. No doubt different readers will find different sections of particular importance, but it seems worthwhile to cite some examples that seem to me particularly insightful. One such is contained in the essay "Some remarks on 'language' and 'grammar'". At PI § 13 Wittgenstein writes: "Wenn wir sagen: 'jedes Wort der Sprache bezeichnet etwas' so ist damit vorerst gar nichts gesagt". Anscombe's translation has: "When we say: 'every word in language signifies something' we have so far said nothing whatever". Baker argues that the German "die Sprache" should be taken to refer to the particular language game Wittgenstein has been discussing, and not "language" in the abstract. This reading (which greatly changes the complexion of the whole passage) had never occurred to me before, but examination of the text convinced me that Baker is right. Again, the reading is obviously consonant with Baker's interpretive model, and no doubt has been inspired by it, but could be accepted even by someone who is sceptical of the model.

There are whole essays devoted to new interpretations of such Wittgensteinian terms as "perspicuous representation" (PI § 122) and the distinction between "metaphysical" and "everyday" uses of a term. A fascinating essay ("Wittgenstein's depth grammar") challenges the obvious, though to Baker's mind insufficiently evidenced, connection between the notions of "surface grammar" and *Satzklang*, that is, the issue of whether a string of words sounds like a proposition to a competent speaker of a given language. All these discussions will be of interest independently of the significance of the analogy between Wittgenstein and Freud.

Baker's interpretation is hardly definitive, and his approach will, one suspects, not be emulated by too many Wittgenstein scholars. But it is worthwhile insofar as it suggests genuine insights into Wittgenstein's difficult texts. The book's ambitions may be exaggerated, but it is for all that a valuable one.