

CRITICAL NOTICE

Taking Wittgenstein at His Word: A Textual Study

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According to the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, the traditional philosophical problems forming an important part of the discipline of analytical philosophy as we know it, the problems every student encounters and is made familiar with as he studies the history of his subject, are the result of a kind of intellectual or even moral confusion. This *can* be understood to be reflected in the fact that in the course of being made aware of the nature of familiar philosophical problems, the student is asked to look at things in a quite *specific* way - the way a philosopher looks at them - in order that he can become an accredited member of a very select team, someone who has acquired the credentials that allow him to participate in matters of debate which are quite out of the ordinary.

On the other hand, it can just as easily be argued that this description is highly misleading, because the problems of philosophy are instead the birthright of any reflective individual who will naturally encounter them as he grows up and develops in a culture which bears some resemblance to our own. Far from being the exclusive preserve of a small group of ivory-tower professionals, they arise as a matter of course, and are a prominent feature of any individual's confrontation with the world around him. It can even be argued that these problems are independent of cultural concerns, and that in some form or other, they arise for individual persons and groups at *any* level of social or cultural development, depending on the particular problem, *e.g.*, religious belief, under consideration; and subject to this kind of proviso, a proposal of this nature might generally be allowed.

There can be little doubt that considerations of this nature were more than familiar to Wittgenstein, even in the course of his suggesting that the kinds of philosophical problems with which he was principally concerned, result from the traditional philosopher's staring at a *picture* of other minds, of an external world, or - an example which he made very much his own - of the paradox

of interpretation, the problem which we have become familiar with as manifested in its primary example of *following a rule*. As Wittgenstein envisages them, those philosophical problems are primarily semantic in nature: the idea of staring at a *picture* (*Investigations* § 115) is that of staring at a picture (§§ 423 - 424) which the traditional philosopher takes to capture the *meaning* of what it is to *believe* in other minds or in an external world. In questioning whether the picture has an *application*, Wittgenstein is suggesting that it is solely because the philosopher has become mesmerised by a certain way of thinking, say, about *other minds*, that the problem can even be taken to arise. In the course of abandoning his adherence to the misleading picture, the philosopher will hopefully become released from the paralysing hold of a certain way of looking at things.

To talk of the philosopher's having become captive to a misleading picture which has a paralysing hold on him, one from which he requires to be *released*, almost inevitably suggests that Wittgenstein's task is always one of applying palliative therapy to an individual who has become subjected to a form of mental disturbance ; and whilst this is harmless, it can be quite misleading should it suggest that the role of his therapist is remotely comparable to that of the Freudian analyst. The problems in this case are quite general in nature and arise for Wittgenstein from the role played by the *picture* which lies in our *language*. To say that this language repeats it to us inexorably (§ 115), is to say that we provide it with a certain *role* in our thinking which we find it difficult to forgoe.

What Wittgenstein therefore provides is a new methodology which allows the philosopher to reflect on the role played by the *picture*, a role which he may (wrongly) see as a consequence of the operation of his natural *intuitions*; and on what else, he may reflect, has a philosopher to rely ? This means that in the final analysis the move away from the picture has in Wittgenstein's terms to be an exercise of the will rather than of the intellect. Should a philosopher stubbornly refuse to be moved by these considerations - should he wish to stick to his natural intuitions - there is little more to be said. The notion of this *therapeutic* conception of philosophy depends entirely on the application of the methodology, from which indeed it gains its *raison d'être*, and this is not in the final analysis a matter of the successful application of one *argumentative* strategy rather than of another.

Whilst this is neither the account which would be presented by those who see Wittgenstein as arguing in the *Investigations* for specific philosophical *theses*, nor is it the account which would be presented by those who present him as expressing an extreme person-relative conception of philosophical therapy modelled on Freudian analysis, it is an account which, at least in certain respects - if not in others as will be shown later on - accords with the evidence that can be gained from looking at the *Investigations* itself. It is also an account which, at least in part, is very much in accord with the procedure Robert Fogelin adopts in his new monograph: eschewing the suggestion that his conception of following a rule should any longer be taken to bear comparison with that connecting it with the famous 'sceptical paradox' of Saul Kripke, which it predated in his original *Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1976 & 1987), Fogelin now wishes to take Wittgenstein 'at his word' by 'reading a selection of central themes in Wittgenstein's later philosophy under the constraints of his own methodological pronouncements' (*Ibid.*, xi).

Wittgenstein's aim on this assessment is avowely therapeutic, although this should not blind us to the fact that the relevant passages in the *Investigations* (§§ 89 - 133) which Fogelin understandably refers to in making his point, have equally been used by philosophers like Baker & Hacker to illustrate the adoption of a positive *philosophical* methodology 'bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (§ 116). Indeed, the line between a philosophical thesis-orientated and a 'purely therapeutic' account of what these passages are said to express can often appear to be very thin indeed, and it is significant that Fogelin's original book is often quoted along with works by Anthony Kenny (*Wittgenstein*, 1973 & 2006), David Pears (*Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 1969 & 1986) and the Baker & Hacker Analytical Commentary on the *Investigations* (1980 -) as one of a select number of earlier accounts still relevant today, yet produced at a time when purely therapeutic assessments of Wittgenstein's methodology were much more thin on the ground than they are now. A significant feature of some of these accounts, though not by any means one expressed by all of them, is that Wittgenstein's apparent methodological claims seem strangely at odds with his only too obvious argumentative strategies throughout his later

work, and Fogelin quotes both Crispin Wright and Michael Dummett as philosophers who are only too ready to see a conflict of some kind between the thesis-orientated method he actually follows, and his avowed methodological pronouncements. Fogelin in his original book equally followed a more argumentative strategy than he does now, as illustrated in the following passage:

Training accomplishes what no amount of interpretation can:
it determines that we proceed in a particular way out of all the possible ways that could be made out to be in conformity with the rule. I shall argue that this reference to training constitutes Wittgenstein's Humean (sceptical) solution to the sceptical paradox he has produced. It is a sceptical solution in Hume's sense because it grounds an otherwise unjustified (indeed, unjustifiable) belief in a brute fact of human nature.

(Wittgenstein, 1987, 167).

Whilst Fogelin in his new book wishes to distance himself from any suggestion that he produced a 'Kripke-like interpretation of PI 201 four years before he did' (*Ibid.*, 5), the fact remains that he has changed his mind, a change of mind reflected in his belief that the very idea that there should be thought to be a 'sceptical paradox' at all 'is the product of a misconception, namely, the misconception that rule-following is always grounded in (or implicitly contains) acts of interpretation' (*Ibid.*, 22). Whilst Fogelin sees both Hume and Wittgenstein stressing the importance of 'primitive natural responses shaped through training and other forms of conditioning' (*Ibid.*, 23), he wishes to draw a distinction between the Hume who regards any *further* exploration of the processes underlying human understanding as 'beyond our intellectual capacities' and a Wittgenstein who sees the search for those processes as the result of an illusion (*Ibid.*, 24). This important distinction, which Fogelin admits to having formerly failed to properly appreciate, fundamentally alters the philosophical landscape. It relates to the distinction which can be drawn between Wittgenstein's and Kripke's treatments of scepticism about rule-following, and

about 'Other Minds' in Kripke's well-known Postscript to *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. This distinction turns on the point that Kripke grants to the meaning-determinist *picture* of following a rule *and* to a certain *picture* of what constitutes a 'belief in other minds', the quite specific *role* in our thinking which, because it is a picture he cannot after all *entertain*, leads to a sceptical paradox. Wittgenstein's adoption of neither a realist nor an anti-realist stance is a consequence of regarding the adoption of the picture itself as the expression of philosophical confusion.

Given that he regards himself as producing a *textual* study, Fogelin is happy to let Wittgenstein 'speak for himself', since sentences in the later writings 'are usually transparent as they stand'. The challenge where it occurs is to 'appreciate the philosophical significance that Wittgenstein assigns to them' (*Ibid.*, xi). If this seems unfortunately expressed, this is precisely because the philosophical contexts in which Wittgenstein sentences *are* actually discussed, are contexts in which these 'transparent' sentences have given rise to many competing interpretations, so that it cannot simply be taken for granted that 'Wittgenstein shows how philosophical confusions can naturally arise and seem to be forced on us when we are engaged in the detached setting of philosophical reflection.' (*Ibid.*, *et seq.*) Admitting that what he is actually supplying in his new book is a fair amount that is 'old hat' (*Ibid.* xiii), an assembling of reminders of Wittgenstein's conception of the proper way of doing philosophy, its significance rests nevertheless in the fact that it contains the mature reflections of one of Wittgenstein's most highly respected and acclaimed commentators, and as such is worthy of consideration on this ground alone.

Fogelin begins by drawing our attention to *Investigations* § 198 and § 201. Originally he took Wittgenstein to be making a strong anti-privacy claim in § 202, one from which the impossibility of a private language immediately follows. He took one argument against the possibility of a private language of sensations to rest therefore on the conclusion that no 'sceptical solution' to the paradox of alternative explanations could in *this* case be available (the *training* argument), and finds this reading out of focus because it is not easily reconciled with the methodological pronouncements he now understands to be central to 'taking Wittgenstein at his word' (*Ibid.*, 56 and *Wittgenstein*, 167).

Fogelin also sees Wittgenstein's concern with language as one dictated by the light that descriptions of ordinary use can throw on philosophical problems (§ 109), a concern that Fogelin now takes to be of fundamental importance to an understanding of his philosophy (*Ibid.*, 6), so much so that in the absence of that motivation Wittgenstein would have had little (philosophical) interest in language at all. His general interest in language, in contrast say to J.L. Austin's, does not lie in making fine-grained distinctions, but in rooting out wide-ranging misconceptions covering whole domains of discourse, a claim which is surely correct. So if J.L. Austin is the paradigm of an 'ordinary language philosopher', then Wittgenstein can hardly fall into the same category.

Fogelin in the course of his new reading of 'the rule-following paradox' stresses what he refers to as Wittgenstein's *defactoism*, a feature of his method 'particularly obnoxious to many philosophers' (*Ibid.*, 11) and which will later be discovered to capture Wittgenstein's distinctly anthropological approach as expressed in knowing where to stop, where to bring the investigation to an end with the conclusion that '*this language-game is played*' (§ 654) (*Ibid.*, 30). Stressing the importance of this methodological response to the paradox of interpretation as expressed in § 201, Fogelin explains what he sees as Wittgenstein's 'defactoist' response to it:

Wittgenstein is not saying that an individual's interpretation of a rule is correct to the extent that it squares with the community's interpretation of it. In rule-following, we join a consensus in *action* - a consensus grounded in the kind of training that we, as humans, *can* successfully undergo and the kind of training that we actually *do* undergo in the community in which we are reared. The consensus is grounded, as Wittgenstein puts it, in facts concerning our *natural history*. (*Ibid.*, 27 et seq.)

This accent on natural responses and training is Fogelin's way of countering what he sees as the quite irrelevant claim that Wittgenstein attempts to deal with the paradox, as Saul Kripke is normally seen to do, by introducing some form of *communitarianism* (*Ibid.*, 26), because, on Fogelin's

view, the paradox immediately breaks out again at the level of the community itself.

This might appear a little unfair to Kripke - whose book, incidentally, Fogelin does not discuss in detail in line with his intention to generally avoid considering the work of other commentators - because Kripke's account of Robinson Crusoe (page 110 of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*) is so open to interpretation that it could very well slide into something not too far away from Fogelin's own view. Kripke combines two innocuous claims (a) that each of us *automatically* calculates new addition problems - presumably because of how we have been trained to do so - *without* feeling the need to check with the community, thus pointing towards the operation of basic arithmetical rules, with (b) that the community feels entitled to correct (rare) deviant calculations. Yet from this Kripke could have innocently concluded that an individual *can* show an entire community to be in the wrong provided that the community might be willing on reflection to consider, according to the application of the everyday arithmetical criteria whose existence Kripke has already suggested, that it need not always be in the right. But if these are supposed to be 'assertibility conditions', it is hard to grasp what is so 'anti-realist' about them, a point which is reflected in Kripke's final ambivalent presentation:

What follows from these assertibility conditions is not that the answer everyone gives to an addition problem is, by definition, the correct one, but rather the platitude that, if everyone agrees upon a certain answer, then no one will feel justified in calling that answer wrong (Kripke, *Ibid.*, 112 and Footnote 87).

Whilst Fogelin's failure to discuss the work of other commentators is probably a strategic error, excusable within the context of a relatively short monograph, it does not affect the value of his general presentation, and here he makes the additional point that a further reflection of what he calls 'defactoism' is to be found in Wittgenstein's 'rejection of the idea that training is merely an *external* device intended to induce in the trainee a grasp of the correctness, the legitimacy, of what he has been trained to do' (*Ibid.*, 36). So important is this idea, one which sees Fogelin gesturing towards conclusions we have become familiar with elsewhere in the work of Meredith Williams, that

it is worth quoting the relevant passage from the *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Cambridge, 1939) that he employs as his example:

The only criterion [for a student's] multiplying 113 by 44.....
is his doing it in the way in which all of us, who have been
trained in a certain way, would do it. If we find that he cannot
be trained to do it the same as us, then we give him up as hopeless
and say he is a lunatic. (*LFM*, 58).

Once again, the point here is not that the student, once suitably trained, could never be revealed as a mathematical genius who could then show his trainers to be in many respects in the wrong, but rather that his ultimate ability to show, say, that they *are* in the wrong cannot consist in his being party to any kind of mental intermediary that fixes its own application. This is a point Fogelin discovers in *Investigations* § 389, and it is also found in the reference to 'philosophical superlatives' made in § 192. In the course of pointing out that he has presented the paradox of interpretation and its treatment differently from Kripke, he then stresses that Kripke pays scant attention to the importance Wittgenstein attributes to training in the course of coming to acquire techniques of calculation (*Ibid.*, 41 *et seq.*) This is consistent with the fact that earlier on he has already expressed astonishment, along with many other commentators, that Kripke entirely fails to quote the famous second paragraph of § 201, a paragraph that for Fogelin captures Wittgenstein's central claim that meaning cannot be fixed by *interpretation* alone, because acting in accordance with an interpretation is simultaneously to both follow and *not* follow a rule. (*Ibid.*, 17 *et seq.*)

Towards the end of his 40 page first chapter on following a rule, Fogelin in a section headed 'From the Sublime to the Mundane' compares the determinate 'rules underlying our language' which in the *Tractatus* 'are thought to mirror the eternal, unchanging, necessary structure of the world' with the loose, open-textured nature of language with its non-rigid rules and the abandonment of definiteness of sense, characteristic of the *Investigations*. Readers will find these final pages with their traditional discussions of anti-essentialism, language-games,

family resemblance and the name 'Moses' an excursion into only-too-familiar territory, though for many so much the better for that. Finding a *pairing* of the meaning of an expression with the rules for its application a feature *common* to both Wittgenstein's earlier and later philosophy, he nevertheless finds a deep discrepancy between them in respect of the shift from a 'sublime' to a 'mundane' conception of rules and meaning, reflected in the move from determinacy to indeterminacy of sense. Fogelin ends by considering the many passages in Wittgenstein's writings in which he 'brings into prominence the fact that the use, hence the meaning of certain expressions depends on contingent, though reasonably steady, features of the world', (*Ibid.*,54), without any hint that there has to be something not quite right - what Wittgenstein would have referred to as 'fishy' - about any reference to the *stability* of those general facts of nature upon which the function of our language games may be said to depend, a way of speaking which can so easily begin to hover over the precipice of unintelligibility. It almost invites the question what conception we might have of *instability*, what could conceivably count in favour of the claim that there could be circumstances in which we could employ no language-games at all: this is an idea for which we can have no application. Fogelin in closing looks forward to putting to work his notion of *defactoism* in considering Wittgenstein's idea of a private language.

Fogelin's principal claim here, a reflection of his change of mind in the interpretation of § 202, is that he is no longer willing to deduce from the statement that 'obeying a rule' is a practice that it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately' in the sense introduced in § 243. § 202 and surrounding statements should be seen differently:

I now hold that these propositions are *grammatical* reflections on linguistic rule-following intended to show that the notion of a private language lacks coherent content. We think that we understand this notion, but, as grammatical reflection can show, we do not. (*Ibid.*, 57)

Following his view that Wittgenstein adopts a *rich* conception of rule-following,

by which he means a conception in which rules are inherently connected with complex human practices or institutional activities, it would appear that in isolation from these activities the notion of a 'following a rule' would lose its meaning. Fogelin consequently sees the anti-privacy remark in § 202 as a note on the *grammar* of the expression 'to obey a rule "privately"':

If that is right, then any claim to the effect that a private language is *not* possible would be misleadingly expressed, that is, still in need of an explication that neutralizes its capacity to mislead. Perhaps this is why Wittgenstein encloses the word 'private' in quotation marks - but I will not press the point. (*Ibid.*, 60)

But the enduring puzzle over the content of § 202 lies in attempting to explain what in this context 'privately' *means*, for either it does mean here what it means in § 243 and beyond, in which case this meaning is one for which Wittgenstein has left us totally unprepared, or it is being used in relation to its surroundings with a different but relevant meaning. For example, obeying a rule 'privately' might be a way of talking about obeying a rule in the absence of a proper context, a context in which there is nothing that could *count* as 'obeying a rule' and 'going against it', a context therefore in which we might '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 the reference to merely *thinking* one was obeying a rule in the absence of a proper practice, a case therefore in which it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately' seems too reminiscent of the content of passages like § 258 and § 262 not to see Fogelin's interpretation as having a lot in its favour (1).

Turning to § 243 and the beginning of the private language sections proper, Fogelin stresses that Wittgenstein is largely concerned with the notion of our capacity to *imagine* a language used to refer to a speaker's own private sensations and which he alone can understand. Yet this is presented *as if* the issue of whether we *can* imagine such a language is not in question:

We can imagine there being a language that is private in this way; the only question is whether such a language actually exists.

Looking at the matter this way, I previously drew the conclusion that, given the kind of creatures we are, a private language of this kind is not a possibility for human beings. I now think that the underlying assumption leading to this conclusion is just wrong.

I now see Wittgenstein as challenging, not accepting, the assumption that we can imagine such a language. The challenge, however, does not concern our powers of imagination. Instead, it concerns the grammar of first-person reports of sensations (*Ibid.*, 63).

This conclusion is reflected in Wittgenstein's immediate concern in the famous § 244 with the circumstances in which a child learns how to acquire the concept of pain. Here Fogelin quite understandably draws the conclusion, *not* that sensation-terms *could* refer to something wholly private only that the way such terms are used reveals that they do *not* function in this way. Instead:

What this treatment reveals, as I understand it, is that we have no grasp of how sensation-terms could gain their meaning through purely private reference even though, when doing philosophy, we are inclined to think that we do. (*Ibid.*, 68)

What Fogelin can be understood to be drawing our attention to here, although he does not express it in this way, is the tendency when discussing these questions to hover between what has come to be known in the secondary literature as 'substantial' *v* 'resolute' conceptions of *nonsense* (2). However, it is much better to avoid talk of *nonsense* altogether here and say instead that whilst the 'theoretical' Wittgenstein reveals that a certain *model* of sensation language involving direct reference to sensations as *objects* can have no *application* to our ordinary sensation talk, the 'therapeutic' Wittgenstein is telling us that in the final analysis we have no real *conception* of what such a model might be.

Yet this tension is an inherent feature of the methodology that Wittgenstein employs in the

relevant passages, and is reflected in the way in which he *uses* his examples to *undermine* a notion of *super-privacy* involving reference to *private objects*, one that Wittgenstein actually *invents* as a means of reinforcing the claim that our ordinary first-person criterionless sensation-reports do take place in the public surroundings of § 244 and § 257. Consequently, when Fogelin argues that Wittgenstein in § 258 reveals to us that the supposed act of private ostensive definition performed by the diarist is an idle ceremony (*Ibid.*, 70), or in § 261 that ‘our assumed understanding of the act of assigning names to purely private entities is an illusion’ (*Ibid.*, 71), he is merely echoing the strategy that Wittgenstein actually employs in drawing our attention to the way in which our sensation language operates in practice. Fogelin also importantly draws our attention to an aspect of Wittgenstein’s multi-layered procedure that has puzzled philosophers who see him denying that we can ‘identify our sensations’:

If, however, this act of giving oneself a private definition (in the sense at issue) is empty of content, why doesn’t it strike us in this way? Well, it seems to be the easiest thing in the world to assign a name to a particular sensation, and then keep a record of its occurrences. The reason this seems unproblematic is that we tacitly rely on the paraphernalia of our public language in order to provide the surroundings - the stage setting - for giving the expression the status of a name (*Ibid.*, 70 *et seq.*).

What Fogelin is doing here is not merely to indirectly remind us of Wittgenstein’s rejection of a certain model of a private object as something which has its own individual criteria of identity (§ 288), but to reinforce his claim that we are deluding ourselves if we think that we can have *any* conception when doing philosophy that our sensations have ‘representational content’, that they are intrinsically meaningful prior to our attaching a label to them in the first person - as it sometimes seems to us that we do - which is not already parasitic on our prior acquaintance with the public language which we in *fact* have learned in the normal ways Wittgenstein points towards in § 244 and § 257.

This is a reflection of the fact that Wittgenstein actually has *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 repudiates the idea of a private language in § 258 by providing us with a *model* of super-private sensations in which these private objects are already 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. (3) 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. Fogelin continues by making a further interesting point regarding the 'criterion of correctness' integral to our understanding of § 258:

The diarist's use of the sign 'S' to stand for a sensation takes place in the total absence of such independent means for checking correctness.

The private diarist's activities take place, we might say, in a context where the question of correctness does not come up - no room has been made for incorrectness. (*Ibid.*, 73)

Yet the point which it is easy to miss here, a point reflected in the further example of § 270 that Fogelin next goes on to discuss, is that whilst those who are attracted to a therapeutic interpretation of Wittgenstein's method are free to view his strategy in *these* cases as confirming his intention to teach the reader to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense (§ 464), Wittgenstein's method *already* employs the concepts of *super privacy* and

of a *private object* which, as shown here, have been so *defined* that it can be far from certain, historically, that famous philosophers like Locke and Hume ever really adopted them. The *undermining* of the private object model is then *already* taking place through the way in which Wittgenstein expresses his examples as a means of showing that the model has no *application* to our ordinary sensation talk, a procedure which is inevitably ambivalent in appearing to question whether we can have any *genuine* conception of what he is rejecting: the indifference shown to correct or incorrect *private* identification where in the case of our *public* sensation talk the question of *identification* cannot arise (§ 270); the inability to remember *what* a *private* word for 'pain' could mean when this is quite irrelevant to the *public* use of the term (§ 271); the supposition that different people might have different *private* sensations of red when their *public* use of colour words perfectly agrees (§ 272); the use of a *private* timetable in the imagination which is used to confirm itself (§ 265); the creation of a diary to record the occurrence of a sensation when the *private* sensation term can never be meaningfully applied (§ 258); and the regularly *different* items in, or even *absent* from their 'boxes', *private* items which can have no bearing on the proper use of the *public* terms speakers daily use to talk about the regularly recurring sensations they enjoy (§ 293).

Wittgenstein's methodological - one can equally say *argumentative* - strategy in these cases has far more hidden structure than might immediately appear, because it is *intended* to undermine the misleading *picture* from *within* the example itself. This is achieved because the private object has already been so *defined* that it can have no *application* to our ordinary sensation talk, and this again incurs the danger of appearing to *reject* something of which it seems that by rights we cannot have any proper conception. Fogelin agrees with this second claim, although he does not venture into any discussion of the wider issue as conceived by Mulhall *via* the distinction used by Cora Diamond and James Conant in a different context with their resolute and substantial conceptions of *nonsense* (4).

He does, however, in the course of claiming that most of what he is saying in this section has been said before, take issue in his summing-up with a particular conception of Peter Hacker's. This is Hacker's well-known yet ultimately puzzling 'invocation of the notion of *defeasibility* to

establish the existence of conceptual connections weaker than those found in analytic propositions but stronger than those found in ordinary empirical propositions' (*Ibid.* 75). Suggesting that Hacker may be attracted to this notion because it allows that pain-behaviour as a *criterion* of the existence of pain can establish these claims with *certainty* even if they cannot always be shown to hold up in practice, so appearing to provide *some* kind of evidence against scepticism, Fogelin can only treat Hacker's reference to a 'bewildering notion of *a priori* yet defeasible evidence' (*Ibid.*) as 'feigned self-mockery'. The ultimate reason for this, although Fogelin again does not put it in exactly this way, is that Hacker is attempting to provide an intellectual argument in favour of the notion of *defeasible criteria*, when the *grammar* of pain ascription allows that the degree of doubt or certainty that someone is in pain inevitably varies from case to case. Yet because of this there can be no *ultimate* question of doubt whether someone is ever *really* in pain when all these criteria are satisfied, not because these claims can be established with *certainty*, but because *this* kind of doubt depends on the philosopher's use of the misleading *picture* of what it is for a person to be in pain, one that exists in isolation from the *practice* in which we ascribe pain both to ourselves and to others. Fogelin's anti-intellectualist reaction to Hacker's treatment of *defeasible criteria* is entirely justified. His final answer to the question Wittgenstein raises in § 243 is that Wittgenstein's method is to attempt to locate the misunderstandings that give the question itself the false appearance of intelligibility, and to that extent he focuses less on Wittgenstein's purely *argumentative* strategies in the relevant passages, and more on his avowedly therapeutic pronouncements. Yet there is ample evidence to show that taking Wittgenstein 'at his word' can sometimes mean looking beneath the *surface* of the text to fully explore the argumentative strategies that he is employing.

Turning to the second half of Fogelin's monograph, which is devoted to an exploration of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics, the reader can hardly avoid the feeling that here he is being introduced to a different and lesser-known world. From a consideration of two of the most discussed questions to have occupied commentators, with thousands of articles devoted to the issue of pre and post-Kripkean private rule-following, Fogelin considers a subject that whilst of the utmost concern to

Wittgenstein in terms of the space he devoted to it in his writings, and in terms of how he saw it in relation to the ultimate relevance of his philosophy, has had relatively scant attention paid to it in the secondary literature. The vast majority of writers who have tackled Wittgenstein's writings, early and late, have usually decided to avoid talking about it altogether. Whether this situation would have altered had Wittgenstein's original intention been realised in practice to publish the *Investigations* including his reflections on mathematics, is an open question, although one suspects that those philosophers who do have an interest in Wittgenstein yet have no real mathematical bent - and that probably includes most of them - are glad that they do not need to discuss the technicalities of a subject with which they may have little sympathy.

Yet whatever purely technical difficulties may be encountered in discussing Wittgenstein's treatment of mathematics, the purely philosophical issue that is forever to the forefront of his thinking is usually abundantly clear. Just as those working in neuroscience can sometimes feel almost irresistibly inclined to say that the evidence which their researches are managing to uncover *must* point towards a revision in the use of our *ordinary* concepts, *e.g.*, of the will, Wittgenstein draws our attention (*Investigations* § 254) to the inclination of the professional mathematician to talk (at least sometimes) about a 'reality of mathematical facts'. Gilbert Ryle would have expressed the point of the first example in terms of the scientist's making illegitimate Sunday observations of a philosophical nature which are incidental to the legitimate activities in which he indulges during the week (*Dilemmas*). Wittgenstein similarly thinks that what the mathematician is tempted to say about the reality of mathematical *facts*, is a subject for philosophical *treatment*.

The famous § 255 with its reference to the treatment of - an illness - importantly refers back to § 254 and to what we are, sometimes irresistibly, *inclined to say*, usually in the course of *doing* science or of *doing* mathematics; and this is not of course - as Wittgenstein puts it - a matter of indulging in philosophical reflection itself, but only its raw material. Philosophy begins from the irresistible temptation to claim that our researches in neuroscience, say, *must* lead us to revise our ordinary concepts, because there is a *picture* at work which is forcing us to treat our discoveries

in this field as *uncovering* a better *account* which will allow us to *replace* the theory that our ordinary concepts are implicitly understood to be only imperfectly and naively attempting to convey. Similarly, the mathematician is irresistibly drawn to see his work in terms of his discovery of new and fascinating *facts* of a mathematical kind. Fogelin refers to the final paragraph of *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, xiv, 232, in which Wittgenstein introduces the possibility of an investigation in mathematics which parallels the one investigating the confusions into which we are tempted when reflecting on our psychological concepts:

Broadly speaking, the connection is this: In both cases confusions arise from employing a referential model for understanding a class of expressions where that model is inherently misleading. With respect to mathematical propositions, his primary target is, as it is commonly called, platonism in mathematics. Wittgenstein's competing conception, briefly stated, is that platonism involves a misunderstanding of mathematical necessity and that platonists' mathematical objects serve no useful purpose in explaining the character or the legitimacy of mathematical activity (*Ibid.*, 80).

Yet in both cases, philosophy leaves everything as it is (§ 124). The mistakes arise, not from ordinarily following rules, talking about other minds, discovering what is going on in the brain or in making a mathematical calculation, but from giving free reign to the accompanying *pictures* that irresistibly incline us to say certain things which are incidental to our participation in these ordinary activities. As always, it is the anthropological feature, the participation in the practice itself, that is central to Wittgenstein's methodology.

The difficulty, of course, is that to those who are committed to following their *intuitions*, what they are 'irresistibly inclined to say' is more than raw material: it is the expression of a philosophical insight that captures the *essence* of the problem at hand, what it *really* is to 'believe in other minds', the true *consequences* of discovering what is going on in the brain, or the real

necessity we encounter in calculating that $25 \times 25 = 625$. Far from expressing merely that a *rule* has been followed only when 625 is the result of calculating 25×25 , making this, so to speak, an empirical proposition hardened into a rule, it *must* be the inherent necessity of the mathematical proposition itself that leads us to treat it in the way that we do. The point is central to this part of Fogelin's discussion when he attempts to grasp what is going on when Wittgenstein says that the empirical proposition is withdrawn from experience but now serves as a paradigm for judging experience (*Ibid.*, 101 *et seq.*).

Those philosophers with their platonist wish to talk of mathematical propositions concerning real mathematical *facts*, are then inevitably committed to regarding Wittgenstein as someone who *denies* that there are real *necessities* discovered in the course of making a mathematical calculation. Yet all that Wittgenstein is attempting to effect is a redescription that 'leaves everything as it is'. One way of explaining why Wittgenstein even makes this attempt is that he has become convinced that the account of arithmetical calculation as a description of the behaviour of numbers and their reactions with one another in a reality of their own, is wholly untenable. It beggars belief, so that a more accurate redescription must be available.

This point is echoed in Wittgenstein's reference to the sorts of things that people are prone to say, *e.g.*, when they are inclined to refer to the multiplication that *must* lead us to get the same result if we follow the rule (*Ibid.*). He responds to this with the amusing remark that if this way of speaking were no more than an expression of the hysterical way of putting things that we are used to in university talk, then it need be of little concern to us. But, on the contrary, the idea that in calculating correctly we *must* get the same result, is the expression of an attitude to the technique of calculation which is universal in human life. Far from denying that the results of our calculations are *really* necessary, Wittgenstein is attempting to trace the source, as Fogelin reminds us, of the inexorability of the *attitude* that we universally adopt towards the technique of calculation. If this appears to have a Humean flavour, then we ought to remind ourselves that the *kind* of answer that Wittgenstein is looking for is quite different from the kind that would

have been provided by Hume, nor is the reason for looking for such an answer the same. What Fogelin tells us is that on Wittgenstein's assessment, the techniques of calculation acquire their status because we employ them in such a way that they become insulated from criticism (*Ibid.*). In what is a very telling passage in his chapter on 'The Mysteries of Mathematics', Fogelin reveals the kinds of attitudes that are perfectly natural to all of us in calculating during the course of our ordinary activities, yet which are also common to professional mathematicians:

I have, on occasion, presented these Wittgensteinian reflections on transfinite cardinals to mathematicians who specialize in such matters. For the most part, they have dismissed them with amused condescension. 'Are we to believe', they more or less say, 'that the extraordinarily deep, complex, and sometimes beautiful results that have been found in transfinite mathematics amount only to so much piffle?' (*Ibid.*, 128)

Fogelin's answer is that Wittgenstein is not against these results so much as the gas that inflates them, if this means that the *kind* of investigation which he is undertaking is not a mathematical one, yet one which is very much *against the grain* of many mathematicians and many philosophers of mathematics (*Ibid.*). Wittgenstein's point once again is not that he wishes to draw a mathematical conclusion, by saying for example that transfinite propositions are either true or false, but to convince the mathematician that he is being misled by a *picture*. Consequently, should the mathematician be 'led out of Cantor's paradise', this would be, not necessarily because he would cease to talk about transfinite cardinals, but because he would see this game in a different light. He would come to see himself as doing something *other* than he thought he was doing, *e.g.*, no longer regarding himself as an explorer discovering new truths about a world of mathematical *facts*. In the final part of his chapter on mathematical mysteries, Fogelin suggests that the *stage-setting* surrounding his example of pairing men and women as dancing couples, as a way of making a one-to-one correlation, entirely disappears when we

complacently extend the procedure of one-to-one correspondence to infinite sets. Yet this for Fogelin interrupts 'the smooth flow of the story that seemed to take us almost effortlessly from dancing couples to a hierarchy of ever-increasing infinities. Isn't that too bad? Well, yes, for people fond of exotic places.' (*Ibid.*, 134 *et seq.*)

Robert Fogelin adopts a very tentative attitude towards his interpretation of Wittgenstein in these chapters, often reaching his conclusions only with the qualification that he has *rightly* gauged Wittgenstein's intentions, realising that what is being said really does go *against the grain* of the thinking of most philosophers. Take, for example, Wittgenstein's claim that a child has got to the bottom of arithmetic in knowing how to apply numbers, and that is all that there is to the matter:

It is the *and-that's-all-there-is-to-it* clause that is the shocker.

The student's mastery of arithmetical techniques constitutes the 'foundation' for her arithmetic activity. This defactoist foundation is not, of course, the kind of foundation that mathematicians and philosophers of mathematics have been seeking. (*Ibid.*, 90)

Yet if this be the case, if arithmetic begins by being unproblematic, how do problems arise in the philosophy of mathematics at all? This returns us to the misleading picture directing the course of our thinking, and here Fogelin interestingly compares Frege's contrast between an 'adjectival' and a 'singular' use of number terms, the former broadly speaking with an application in applied arithmetic (counting out apples) and the latter when saying that $1+1 = 2$, although he is careful to add that later in life Frege adopted a position similar to Wittgenstein's. According to Wittgenstein, when mathematics becomes pure, it loses contact with the ordinary day-to-day practical counting procedures from which it derives its life, and this seems to leave the philosopher with only two possible accounts of the status of mathematical expressions: platonism, with its commitment to numbers as objects inhabiting a distinct world of their own, and formalism,

which regards mathematics as a set of rules governing the manipulation of symbols (*Ibid.*, 93 *et seq.*) But rather than see Wittgenstein as having to make the choice between a view that is mysterious (platonism) and one that is ridiculous (formalism), Fogelin takes Wittgenstein to be adopting an utterly simple way out of the dilemma with his claim that it is the natural everyday adjectival employment of numerals in ordinary counting procedures to which mathematics owes its life as part of our natural history.

This response is once again wholly methodological, and as such is not part of an *argumentative* strategy, yet it is *combined* in Wittgenstein's thinking with continual references to the misleading *pictures*, leading philosophers astray, that accompany our practices, and this adds force to his general attempt to encourage the philosopher to adopt a new way of looking at things which will release him from the paralysing hold of his current perspective. Just occasionally in the *Investigations* these two facets of his thinking can be seen to run in tandem:

You think that after all you must be weaving a piece of cloth:

because you are sitting at a loom - even if it is empty - and going through the motions of weaving. (§ 414)

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes. (§ 415)

Fogelin's final chapter on Wittgenstein's treatment of mathematics sees him supporting the claim that as a *matter of fact* Wittgenstein believes that a contradiction in a calculus need not destroy it, and that believing this does not mean that he adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards inconsistencies, paradoxes and contradictions (*Ibid.*, 139). Of particular interest is Fogelin's treatment of Wittgenstein's reaction to the Paradox of the Liar, which is startling because of his claim that there is nothing at all problematic about the Paradox. If according to Wittgenstein we have a use for 'I'm lying' from which it follows that 'I'm not lying',

then this is a useless game. Fogelin reminds us of how much this aroused the ire of Charles Chihara in 1977, who regarded Wittgenstein's hasty dismissal of 'an ancient and venerable problem' which had remained without a generally accepted solution for over 2000 years, as 'neither well-reasoned nor insightful'. Fogelin's answer is that if the best minds in logic and philosophy have failed to provide an answer over such a long period of time, then this suggests that the formulation of the paradox involves a conceptual misunderstanding. As it turns out, Wittgenstein in *Zettel* 691 does take another look at the paradox, and the gist of his treatment is that whilst the statement 'This proposition is false' has no proper application, the statement 'This proposition, viz., "....." is false' can be used to express a statement which is either true or false, a point which Wittgenstein expresses by saying that 'This proposition' cannot be used to allude to its object without having to go proxy for it. Gilbert Ryle is shown to have reacted to the paradox in a similar way (*Ibid.*, 160 *et seqq.*)

In a final short chapter acting as a coda to the book, Fogelin stresses the importance of his approach to Wittgenstein in relation to what he regards as the *intuition-centred* tendencies prevalent in contemporary philosophy. He makes what is surely the very Wittgensteinian point that to respond to a philosophical question with what we are unhesitatingly inclined to say is almost certain to be a way of reiterating, as it often is for Wittgenstein, a conceptual confusion embodied in the question itself. He repeats his earlier claim that the use of expressions in our language 'depends on broad stabilities and continuities that we take for granted' (*Ibid.*, 170). Yet this claim, in a *philosophical* context, has a tendency to lose its platitudinous aspect whilst simultaneously tottering on a knife edge : it has the appearance of taking on the role either of a transcendental deduction or of a piece of nonsense. He ends with the pessimistic note already encountered in his Preface, that the warnings Wittgenstein issued sometimes appear largely to have been in vain.

As a publication, Fogelin's book is elegantly presented. It is also exceptionally clearly written. Those who are unhappy with their level of mathematical competence will find that even the more technical aspects of the few mathematical procedures discussed are only serving their

purpose in relation to Wittgenstein's, and Fogelin's overall philosophical goals. If it sometimes appears to us that his treatment of mathematics is not so easily integrated, unlike his better known treatments of mind and language, into the body of his philosophy, that may be no more than a historical consequence of our relative unfamiliarity with Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics; or it may signal instead a certain hesitancy over whether his method in *this* case is really as successful, at least to those who are in sympathy with it, as it has proved to be in other fields.

Robert Fogelin is not the only author to have issued a book with the ostensible aim of taking Wittgenstein at his word. Interested readers will be familiar with Duncan Richter's *Wittgenstein at his Word* (Continuum, 2004). But the books are not really comparable. Richter's is much more wide-ranging, speculative and discursive, with its coverage of the earlier and later philosophies together with its long chapters on ethics and religion. On Richter's interpretation, the word of Wittgenstein becomes rather prolix. From this point of view, there is something to be said for providing Fogelin's kind of crisp and clear account of a few carefully chosen topics. With its lack of jargon - leaving aside *defactoism* - his book is in some ways reminiscent of the best kind of writing that emerged from the almost forgotten period of 'ordinary language philosophy' itself.

ENDNOTES

- (1) To cut a long story short, this relates to the well-known Baker & Hacker point that in their eyes there is a certain incongruity in the placing of the final part of § 202 into its current position, because the reference to obeying a rule 'privately' comes from a piece of text originally placed *after* the private language sections in the MS, so that when moved to its present position, it becomes an inadvertent anticipation of the sections surrounding § 258. The relevant text is *Scepticism, Rules & Language*, by G.P. Baker & P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 21.
- (2) This general distinction is used by Stephen Mulhall in his *Wittgenstein's Private Language Grammar, Nonsense and Imagination in Philosophical Investigations §§ 243-315* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Prior to Diamond - Conant, and the appropriation of this idea in a different context by Mulhall, few readers would have had any desire to say that we could have *no real conception* of what Wittgenstein is appearing to be rejecting, for this new idea arises from the conclusion that the philosopher who believes that he can invent a private language in the fashion of § 258 is talking nonsense ('gibberish'). Yet if Wittgenstein *is* providing a proper argumentative strategy in § 258, as it can be shown that he is, the distinction to be drawn should rather be between saying (a) that Wittgenstein does have a clear conception of what he is rejecting, since this after all is his *invention*, and (b) saying that the idea of a wholly private language, given that our actual first person sensation ascriptions are criterionless, has a tendency to hover over the edge of unintelligibility.
- (3) Gordon Baker: *Wittgenstein's Method Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) Chapters 5 - 7. It would be wrong to believe that Baker's exact reasons for drawing this conclusion would have coincided with those alluded to here.
- 4) It should be borne in mind that this distinction as applied by Stephen Mulhall to the *Investigations* is playing such a different role in its *new* context that it is only because its proponents are *already* convinced of the wholly therapeutic methodology employed in these passages that they are willing to allocate this apparently useful role to it. The plan adopted here, which neglects any important role for a distinction between substantial and resolute conceptions of nonsense in the private language passages, is just to distinguish between the different responses made by a 'theoretical' as distinct from a 'therapeutically orientated' Wittgenstein.

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.