CRITICAL NOTICE

Wittgenstein
A Feminist Interpretation
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> Ludwig Wittgenstein saw his own philosophical work as unfashionable, as out of step with the prevailing spirit of his era, written for only a few readers. He expresses these sentiments, for instance, when he writes that he finds the spirit of his epoch as 'alien and uncongenial' (*CV* p. 8). These words voice an attitude which is not uncommon amongst philosophers and other intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth. These are thinkers who experienced modernity as a loss, a kind of spiritual failure. (1)

For Alessandra Tanesini, Wittgenstein is a philosophical critic of the autonomy and self-sufficiency towards which the aspirations of modernity are primarily directed. The subject matter of both his earlier and his later work, including his remarks on the limits of language and solipsism in the *Tractatus*, together with those on scepticism about other minds and the following of a rule in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 'can be read as trying to free us from this modern (Kantian) picture which fails to acknowledge the reality of human finitude'. (2) Tanesini's guiding principle is that this modernist ideal of the autonomous human being should be regarded as an important target both of his earlier and of his later work.

But the originality and depth of his criticism of this modernist ideal is also a matter of considerable significance for feminism, because this ideal is understood to be implicitly masculine, a striving to escape from the organic universe and from the body, both of which are understood

symbolically to be female. (3) There is therefore an important convergence for Tanesini between Wittgenstein's and feminists' criticisms of this modern ideal of the autonomous subject. Not only that, but 'this reading helps us to make sense of what Wittgenstein wrote about the activity of doing philosophy':

> This interpretation tries to do justice to - rather than ignore - his warnings that he has no novel truths to offer. Wittgenstein was concerned with spiritual malaise. He did not offer theories, but therapy. For him 'the philosopher treats a question; like an illness' (*PI* § 255). He was, in his own words, 'a disciple of Freud' (*LA* p. 41). (4)

Within the first few pages of her book, Tanesini sets the scene for what is to follow, the portrayal of Wittgenstein as primarily a philosopher of Culture, a compatriot of Kierkegaard, Neitzsche and Heidegger, a critic of the aspirations of modernity offering philosophical therapy along Freudian lines accompanied by an important and contemporary feminist message. It cannot be entirely unexpected that with aspirations of this kind, things do not go quite according to her intended plan: the feminist message fails to play the important role in the book that its title might appear to suggest ; the only too obvious discrepancies between what can be gleaned from Wittgenstein's remarks collected from *Culture and Value* (5), and from the prefaces to his major works, and what can be understood to follow from the texts of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* treated as works of philosophy, create a tension between what one might hope to substantiate in the way of revealing Wittgenstein to be a philosopher of Culture, and what can in fact be easily demonstrated *philosophically* ; and lastly, though perhaps a little ironically, when she is at her best, engaging with Wittgenstein's texts on their own terms, the significant results that Tanesini does achieve tend to portray a Wittgenstein already familiar to analytic philosophers rather than one performing the role of an individual quite out of step with his times.

Certainly, Wittgenstein as a philosopher of Culture is by now a very familiar figure.

But whether this role can be successfully attributed to him depends only too obviously on the perspective from which his work is viewed. Erich Heller, regarding Wittgenstein as a contributor to German literature, sees Wittgenstein against a now very familiar background :

> What manner of man was Ludwig Wittgenstein?.....
> a man of rarest genius.....But how else describe a man
> who was a logician of the first order; a writer of German
> prose abundant in intellectual passion and disciplined
> clarity (perhaps only talent is needed for writing such prose
> in any other language, but certainly genius for writing it in
> German) ; an engineer of great promise.....the architect of a
> modern mansion; a gifted sculptor; a musician.....; a hermit
> capable of enduring for long periods the utmost rigors of mind
> and loneliness; a rich man who chose poverty; a Cambridge
> professor who thought and taught but who neither lectured
> nor dined? (6)

Heller earlier than most is acutely conscious of a particularly *Austrian* dimension to Wittgenstein's alienation from his times, one he remarks upon in referring to Wittgenstein's use of a sentence from one of Austria's classical comic playwrights, Nestroy, as a motto for the *Philosophical Investigations*. He also mentions the spiritual reawakening Wittgenstein achieved from watching a play by Anzengruber, a lesser Austrian dramatist. Heller points towards the importance of affinities in their ways of thinking and writing shared with the German aphorist Lichtenburg, before drawing our attention to the true but (at least for some) totally unexpected fact that the name of Wittgenstein marks the historical point at which.....

> .....the cool analytical intellect of British philosophy
> meets with those passions of mind and imagination which
> we associate first with Nietzsche, and then, in manifold

> crystallisations, with such Austrians as Otto Weininger,
> Adolf Loos, Karl Krauss, Franz Kafka and Robert Musil. (7)

Heller interestingly draws attention to the now famous use of the semi-colon in *Investigations* § 255, pointing to how it 'marks the frontier between a thought and a triviality':

> How can this be? Are we speaking of an artist or a
> philosopher? We are speaking of Ludwig Wittgenstein.
> *'Den philosoph behandelt eine Frage ; wie eine Krankheit.'*
> It is a profound semicolon, and not even a philosophically
> initiated translator could save the profundity: 'The philosopher's
> treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness'
> is, by comparison, a flat *apercu.* (8)

Tanesini has already quoted this passage in English, rightly with its semi-colon in place. Heller also manages to put his finger on the very difficulty that bedevills attempts to present Wittgenstein as a genuine philosopher of Culture, the fact that, as he puts it, the high moral pathos of his life would appear to be entirely unconnected with both the trend and tone of his philosophical thought:

> Every page of Pascal, or Kierkegaard, or Neitzsche, at
> once conveys.....a sense of urgent personal involvement;
> but it is possible for anyone.....to read many pages of
> Wittgenstein's without suspecting that the ruthless precision
> and often apparently eccentric virtuosity of his thinking,
> which has neither models nor parallels in the history of
> philosophy, is anything but the result of the utmost
> intellectual detachment. (9)

Given that this is coming from someone who sees Wittgenstein in his distinctively Austrian context as a philosopher whose work does have a cultural relevance, one might assume

that the problem should be even more acute for those who may naively think - at least initially - that the cultural significance of Wittgenstein's work is so obvious that the difficulty can simply be dismissed. Fortunately, Tanesini is more than aware of the problem, but this does not mean that she finds it easy to accommodate:

> Wittgenstein's philosophy is not normally associated with the work of critics of modernity like Nietzsche and Heidegger, because, unlike them, he does not often explicitly discuss his dissatisfaction with his times. Instead, Wittgenstein seems to concern himself exclusively with topics in the philosophy of logic, language and mind which are familiar to analytic philosophers. It is, however, a great mistake to think of Wittgenstein as a philosopher who is only (or even mainly) concerned with such technical matters. These are the issues he discusses. But he discusses them because of the therapeutic effect that getting clear on these matters has on him and, hopefully, his readers. (10)

If one detects a certain tension in Tanesini's presentation in this and in similar passages, this is because, far from merely *seeming* to concern himself with certain matters, she is only too well aware that for many who discuss his work in the relevant contexts, he *is* concerning himself with these matters; and although Tanesini does not actually say that in the course of appearing to be discussing certain matters, he is *really* doing something else, the implication remains that in discussing certain matters, his motivation for doing so is to achieve a certain therapeutic effect. But that cannot be true either, since his motivation is to get clear about these matters *simpliciter*, whether a certain therapeutic effect follows or not. The getting clear about these matters is not personal in the way that a therapeutic, yet incidental consequence of his thinking may very well be.

Having misrepresented the role played in his life by his strictly philosophical thinking, and therefore in what respect the results of that thinking may be considered to have therapeutic value, Tanesini then continues to misrepresent Wittgenstein's methodology :

> For Wittgenstein, philosophy is an activity whose point is to cure us of a sickness which manifests itself in a sense of distress. He does not think that philosophy is concerned with offering new truths about that distress. Hence it is not at all surprising that Wittgenstein rarely says anything explicitly about his dissatisfaction with modernity. He is, after all, concerned with a cure, not a theory.....Wittgenstein's discontent with modernity is, however, often explicitly mentioned in his sketches for prefaces of books. This is also not surprising, since prefaces are the places where Wittgenstein *states* what he intends to do, and what its point is, rather than actually doing it. (11)

To many readers, this will surely appear to be no more than a blatant begging of the question. The implication is that Wittgenstein's real motivation is to be discovered in his prefaces. Although this motivation governs what is going on in the body of his work, he does not *need* to say *there* what he is *really* doing, so that although we can be easily misled into thinking that in the body of his work he is attempting *solely* to solve philosophical problems, this activity is really a symptom of an underlying malaise, a sickness manifesting itself in a sense of distress. Towards the end of this section, Tanesini compounds the difficulties in which she has become embroiled, in the course of revealing another aspect of her own methodology:

> .....I turn to some of Wittgenstein's more personal remarks about his feelings of loneliness and his experience of modernity as a loss. Often these are remarks that he expunged from the typescripts he tried to prepare for publication. It is, therefore, tempting to conclude that they are of purely biographical value,

> and should be ignored by philosophical readers of his work.
> This attitude.....is mistaken.
> Wittgenstein avoided personal remarks in his typescripts because he thought that they would not be of help to his readers. They are nevertheless the raw materials of his philosophy, since they are the more personal expressions of the sort of distress which prompts philosophical reflection and which philosophy tries to cure. Thus, they offer us cues as to the nature of the ultimate critical targets of Wittgenstein's more philosophical remarks. (12)

But any reader armed with Occam's Razor is surely going to interpret this as a plain refusal to accept that Wittgenstein's obvious reason for avoiding certain remarks in his typescripts is that their insertion would muddy the waters because *in this context* they are purely personal, biographical and therefore *philosophically* irrelevant. Not only that, but we are now told that these remarks would not be of help to his readers when it has already been implied that they truly encapsulate the nature of the distress underlying the philosophical reflection his readers surely require to understand if their *own* personal therapy is to be of any value to them.

Consequently, if Wittgenstein is to be presented as a philosopher of Culture, then this is clearly not the way to do it. The root of Wittgenstein's new approach to the problems of philosophy does indeed lie in his methodology, and the adoption of that methodology does have a therapeutic aspect insofar as the philosopher - or the philosopher in us - is enabled to look at things in a new and enlightening way. The therapeutic effects, when they exist at all, are personal in a way in which the methodology *per se* cannot be, since that is a way of enabling thinkers to look at the nature of *philosophical* problems in a new and enlightening way. But this is consistent with viewing Wittgenstein's method as itself *philosophical.* Whether philosophical problems themselves really reflect cultural imbalances of some kind or other, or whether they are

instead perennial problems arising from the nature of aspects of the syntax of our language, say, are separate questions regarding separate treatment. Similarly, the proper cultural significance of Wittgenstein's tendency to see himself along with Heller's group of disassociated Austrian poets and artists as estranged and alienated from their times, is an interesting question which can arise in a literary context, but possibly not in one where Wittgenstein is seen exclusively, as he often is, as an analytic philosopher, albeit of a rather unusual kind. If Heller provides some substance to his cultural view of Wittgenstein, it is solely because he allows us to recognise the kinds of contexts in which Wittgenstein as a philosopher of Culture makes sense, and, by implication, those totally different contexts in which this notion may have no real application. Here is a final quotation from Tanesini indicating how she can so easily mislocate the *source* of Wittgenstein's alienation from his times, and so misread the role that *philosophical* thinking plays in his life:

> Philosophy reaches to the core of our way of existing in the world. It finds its roots in the troubling questions which give rise to personal distress. For Wittgenstein's philosophical activity is part of the cure for the distress which he experienced. His discussions of mind, scepticism and language are intended to help him to see what is behind his personal distress, as well as to help him to deal with the sickness of which distress is a symptom. (13)

Towards the end of her introductory chapter, Tanesini considers accusations of conservatism and misogynism that have been made against Wittgenstein, and easily counters the more obvious misunderstandings of critics like Nyiri, whose views on rules, at least as she interprets them, fail to capture the significance of *Investigations* § 242. Tanesini properly regards 'agreement in judgements' as a framework condition for speaking a common language, rather than as a set of community pronouncements which are by definition beyond reproach.

Quoting from *On Certainty* §§ 94-98, she makes an interesting connection with these passages from the end of Wittgenstein's life in the course of illustrating that the accusations of conservatism are unwarranted. Although this matter is not discussed in detail, Tanesini illustrates here how engaging with Wittgenstein's texts in their own terms can lead to significant results.

On the question of misogyny, there is clearly a great deal to be said on both sides, and insofar as Wittgenstein is respectful of the variety of human experiences, his relevance to feminism is upheld - in the course of comparing what he says about the Jew to what he says about women - in spite of some rather obviously disrespectful personal opinions about women in general and intellectual women in particular that he is reported to have held during his lifetime.

The second chapter of her book deals in some detail with questions of style and method, and a lot of its content consists in a rather predicable continuation of Tanesini's attempt to show that Wittgenstein's indulgence in philosophical thinking is a manifestation of a sense of personal distress from which he is attempting to secure a form of therapeutic release:

> Wittgenstein's aim, thus, is to be 'nothing more than the mirror in which...[the] reader sees his own thinking with all its deformities' (*CV* p.25). This method of diagnosis works only if the reader herself acknowledges the description as accurate.....Hence, there is absolutely no guarantee that Wittgenstein's therapy will work on us. Further, it is of crucial importance to this diagnostic activity that we find the right form of words which captures correctly what causes philosophical anxiety. (14)

Tanesini thus makes great play with Wittgenstein's notion of the *liberating word* that can enable the philosopher to obtain release from his conflict, a constant theme in his earlier and later writings - backed by about 20 references to the *Nachlass* in her notes (15) - a theme also said to have deeply religious connotations. Quoting yet another remark from *Culture and*

Value in which Wittgenstein refers to his need for the redemption of his soul with its passions, rather than of his abstract mind, Tanesini immediately asserts that 'This remark highlights the parallels between the message of redemption presented in the New Testament and Wittgenstein's conception of the tasks of philosophy.'(16) She then concludes that 'there is good reason to believe that Wittgenstein intentionally drew an analogy between his search for redemption and the promise made in the Scriptures', a point confirmed for her in Wittgenstein's claim to Drury that he could not help seeing every problem from a religious point of view:

> What is remarkable is the widespread failure among commentators to explore this theme.....What seems to be largely lacking is an appreciation of the parallels between Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical activity and the redemptive message of the Christian Scriptures.....Yet, these themes are crucially important to appreciate Wittgenstein's philosophical teaching. For him, philosophy does not impart information, it does not offer knowledge. What Wittgenstein seeks from philosophy is nothing less than the redemption of his body and soul. (17)

The irony here is that this is precisely what Wittgenstein knew that philosophy *per se* could not give him, a point reflected in *Tractatus* 6.52, where what he says about providing the answers to scientific questions mirrors what he would have said about 'answering' those *philosophical* questions with which he is preoccupied. The point is reflected in the last sentence of his Preface to the *Tractatus*, remarking that the value of his work '.....consists in the fact that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved '. It is also integral to the significance of the Nestroy motto for the *Investigations*, where 'It is in the nature of all progress that it looks much greater than it really is', a motto which Tanesisi relates to Wittgenstein's disdain for technological and scientific progress, when it is clearly, if indirectly, about the inability of philosophy *per se* - what the *Investigations* is *about* - to solve the riddle of life that, throughout his life, *really* mattered to him. (18)

Tanesini rounds off her chapter by asking why philosophers are so ardent in their attempts to try to paraphrase Wittgenstein's images out of existence, and answers by saying that this is because they cannot avoid doing so in their attempts to find *philosophical* theses in his work. It would perhaps be better to say that in the course of employing a methodological strategy which eschews any attempt to present *philosophical* theses, he cannot yet avoid the appearance of becoming a *philosopher* in the course of revealing why the *pictures* to which in philosophy we become captive, have no *application*. The parables, jokes and aphorisms are part of a methodology which rejects, for example, the kinds of ontological distinctions making an opposition between *behaviourism and dualism* the basis for a *genuine* philosophical problem; yet in the course of allowing us to uncover *why* these *pictures* are inapplicable, cannot avoid becoming in turn part of a *philosophical* strategy which appears to grant to them the kind of *sense* incompatible with a methodology that by rights should brand all *philosophical* claims of this kind nonsensical.

Tanesini introduces her third chapter by presenting the *Tractatus* as an illustration of the crisis of modernity, another attempt to cure philosophers of aspirations to escape their finitude by transcending the human condition. This is accompanied by the now familiar claim that although this may seem far-fetched because there is little if anything in the text of the work to substantiate this claim, there is nevertheless a great deal of what may be termed circumstantial evidence in its favour from the *Notebooks*, from Wittgenstein's declaration to Ludwig von Ficker that the main point of the work is ethical - that its most important part is the one he has *not* written - and in general from Wittgenstein's evident concern throughout this period of his life with the problem of the meaning of human existence. (19)

What is particularly significant, however, is that following a discussion of the relatively new Diamond-Conant account of the *Tractatus*, and a further reiteration of her claim that the real gravitational centre of the book lies elsewhere, in an attempt to quieten the impulse to transcend human finitude - where Wittgenstein's *philosophical* aims are again misrepresented as part of an attempt to achieve something *else* (20) - Tanesini then gets down to the harder task of

discussing ethics in the *Tractatus* and of elucidating the nature of the limits of thought. At this point the discussion takes off in an interesting way, with Tanesini engaging directly with the *Tractatus*, so that the conclusions at which she arrives genuinely do have the appearance of illuminating the work in its own terms. She concludes, for example, that it would be a mistake to think of the limits of logic as a boundary separating the impossible from the possible, for to do so is to treat the logically impossible as the only accidentally impossible, and this cannot be stated in a coherent way. (21) Throughout her discussion she emphasises that the notion that there are *limits* to human thought, is misunderstood if it is taken to imply that there is something lying beyond what we can grasp. She reaches the now familiar conclusion that the limits of human thought are not boundaries beyond which lie thoughts that, because of our finite nature, we cannot think. Illogical thoughts are no thoughts at all: it is only in language that the limits of thought can be drawn.

The point is central to Tractatus §§ 3.03-3.032, and echoed in a quite different context in the *Investigations*, in passages like § 114 and § 381; and insofar as it is, there is a grain of truth in Tanesini's claim that even in the *Tractatus* we are to see Wittgenstein acting to cure us of an impulse to transcendence, revealed in the tendency to say that there are thoughts we cannot think, or that in relation to the *Investigations* there is a reality beyond our practices. But this way of expressing the results of her direct engagement with Wittgenstein's texts is a far cry from vindicating the distinctively *cultural* conclusions that she wishes to establish.

The following section 3.3 deals with The Loneliness of The Subject, and has all the appearance of a conventional commentary on the *Tractatus*, with Tanesini once again engaging with and unpacking particularly difficult sections as required. Coming to §§ 5.61-5.62 and the claim that 'the world is *my* world', Tanesini takes this to mean that there can be at most one metaphysical 'I', a conclusion for which she takes Wittgenstein to provide no argument, but one which she happily supplies as a *reductio ad absurdum* on his behalf:

> If there were two metaphysical 'I's, they would have to be distinguishable from each other.....metaphysical subjects cannot be distinguished in terms of the places they occupy in space and time. Further, this subject has no accidental features..... all of its properties would have to be shared by anything else which is also a metaphysical subject. It follows that there cannot be two (distinct) metaphysical 'I's. There can, at most, be only one.....(22)

Consequently, idealism for Tanesini leads to solipsism and the identification with an 'I' which is the only 'I'. This argument relies on the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. One could quibble with it on the grounds that something which is being presented as incoherent is also being granted a *sense* only because of the crossing of different *pictures*. One could also object to it on the grounds that, regarded from a wider perspective, it misreads Wittgenstein's intentions in making the claim that what solipsism *means* to say is correct (§ 5.62). On Diamond's interpretation, this implies that because ordinary language performs its function (*Tractatus* § 5.5563) in allowing us to talk about the experiences of others, then there is nothing in which our *either* having direct *or* indirect access to those experiences could be taken to consist. (23)

The significant point is that Tanesini's engagement with the text of the *Tractatus* in this, and in later passages where she considers the world of the happy man and the unhappy man (§ 6.43), and Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of the meaning of life in terms of his refusal to see it as a problem (§ 6.521) - so in her eyes confirming the thesis that a realisation of our finitude ought for us to be exhilarating (24) - is difficult to relate to her *general* thesis about his disillusionment with modernity. What emerges here is a *lesser* conclusion that, at a quite specific level, she directly extracts from the passages she subjects to analysis.

The chapter ends with a discussion of Simone de Beauvoir who, according to Tanesini, believes that '...one must transcend immanence and contingency; one must strive to

go beyond the limitations imposed on our freedom by human finitude.' (25) But it is hard to escape the conclusion that even the most casual reading of de Beauvoir would regard *her* concept of *transcendence* to involve, not an *escape* from human finitude, but a realisation of human potential through an exercise of responsibility involving a choice made by a free agent only too *aware* of her *finitude* in Tanesini's sense. Consequently, Tanesini's Wittgenstein who realises something that de Beauvoir does not, *viz*. 'If we could achieve complete independence of the world of empirical reality, we would be isolated from anything which could give meaning to our lives', (26) seems quite at odds even with her own description of de Beauvoir as an existentialist whose idea of a *subject* focusses on the individual capable of making autonomous choices. (27) Consequently, even if we feel entitled to view Wittgenstein's work from this strictly cultural perspective which, based on what can be extracted from his philosophical texts alone we surely have no reason to do, Tanesini's interpretation and criticism of de Beauvoir seems hard to justify.

The fourth chapter, 'A Picture of The Inner', is to all intents and purposes an interpretation of Wittgenstein on the inner and the outer, privacy and private language, combined later on with an assessment of his principle that the human body is the best picture of the human soul. (28) Readers familiar with the vast secondary literature on this subject will generally have no reason to quibble with her interpretation, excepting yet again for a tendency to superimpose upon the texts those claims about Wittgenstein's alienation from modernity that, at least to begin with, tend to intrude upon her readings. Her introductory paragraph is interesting:

> There is a picture of our inner lives to which Wittgenstein kept returning throughout his life. It is the view that mental life is hidden from view. This picture implies that we can at most infer or speculate about the thoughts and feelings of others, since these mental states are private. The same picture also implies that each one of us can instead peer inside himself or herself and

> observe what he or she thinks or feels. Wittgenstein shows
> that this view, although commonly held, is deeply mistaken. (29)

But, as Tanasini knows only too well, and as she mentions three pages further on in the course of reminding us that provided we are not misled by false analogies - and where else would we be so misled except when doing *philosophy* ? - this picture as described has elements in it which, as she presents it, are both right and wrong relative to the particular occasions in which we say what we ordinarily say. Depending on the circumstances, it would be a sound Wittgensteinian point to claim that some people can be a complete enigma to us, and in *that* sense we do often wish that we could uncover what is hidden from view in the dark recesses of their minds. Yet at the same time, as she reminds us, (30) Wittgenstein constantly points towards the fear we *see* in a face, where the emotion is an *expression* of what is inner, rather than the end result of an inference from what is outer to what is *hidden* inside.

The *real* enemy Tanesini shares with Wittgenstein, the one underlying all those passages she goes on to discuss about privacy, is not of course to be identified with the everyday *pictures* which may or may not *accompany* what we say. It is instead to be found in a notion of *privacy* strictly implying that the experiences of others are *logically* or *metaphysically* hidden. It is characteristic of this notion that, when doing *philosophy,* it is taken to imply that there is something *wrong* about the very idea that people other than one's self *really* enjoy mental states. Tanesini's task is then to analyse the relevant texts in order to show that, understood *philosophically*, it is Wittgenstein's intention to reveal that this picture is *misleading* relative to the *role* our statements play in the ordinary *practice* of talking about the mental states enjoyed by ourselves and others.

The further complication, however, is that even in the course of presenting this perfectly straightforward account of Wittgenstein's intentions, Tanesini wishes to attribute to him an additional *underlying* spiritual malaise which she describes in the following passage:

> We sometimes feel that despite being surrounded by things
> and other people, we are each one of us irremediably alone

> facing the world. When we feel this way, we think that there is a wedge between us and others. There is a sense in which each one of us is left alone with himself or herself independent of everything and everybody else. The view that the inner is logically hidden is a misconceived attempt to give a philosophical voice to this sense of acute loneliness. (31)

But why should this loneliness require to have a *philosophical* voice? If, as Tanesini believes, Wittgenstein attempts to show that this picture - presumably insofar as it can be *philosophically* articulated - cannot be coherently stated, then its origins in our culture, in our language, or in her sense of acute loneliness, is quite a *separate* question. It is hardly surprising, then, that the answer to *this* question cannot be directly derived from the texts devoted exclusively to solving the philosophical problem *per se*. Yet Tanasini remains wedded to the idea that this sense of alienation underlies and directs the *philosophical* discussion:

> But, of course, since the experience that generated it is genuine, we will nevertheless remain attracted to the incoherent picture. In what follows I present some of the considerations offered by Wittgenstein in support of the claim that the picture of the inner as logically hidden cannot be coherently stated. (32)

But in the course of doing this, and so engaging with the texts in their own terms, Tanesini's thesis that Wittgenstein is a philosopher alienated from his times becomes idle because it is then incidental to the interpretative task at hand. With this task under way, what Tanesini provides in her own terms is a cogent account of Wittgenstein's objections to a certain *philosophical* understanding of privacy, one in which the sceptic believes that he cannot have knowledge of the experiences of others in the way in which he can have knowledge of his own because he is subject to a misleading *picture* in which he takes our *understanding* of what it is to attribute those feelings to others to consist. First person sensation

ascription is criterionless, whereas third person sensation ascription demands the application of criteria, and it is for this reason that in the first person case the expression of uncertainty is *senseless* (*Investigations* §§ 246-7). Tanesini is not, however, afraid to charge Wittgenstein with not having proved at least one of the points he wishes to make:

> Wittgenstein takes this consideration to rule out the possibility that one might ever be mistaken when one sincerely utters the sentence 'I am in pain'. I do not think that his remarks establish this point. They do, however, show that we are not prone with regard to ourselves to the same kinds of error we make when we try to ascertain whether others are in pain or whether they are faking it. (33)

It may be true that one can imagine all sorts of circumstances in which someone in a delirium, for example, sincerely makes a claim to be in pain when it is evident to those around him that he is not ; and there may be other circumstances in which someone is sensitive to such fine gradations of feeling that he finds his language quite inadequate to distinguish between feelings he would and would not wish to describe as truly painful; but the point that Wittgenstein wishes to make is in essence a logical one: the asymmetry between first and third person use to which Tanesini points is captured in the thought that if someone who has a mastery of the English language claims in perfectly ordinary circumstances to be in pain, then he can be subject to error *not* because of an inability to discrimate features of his mental landscape, but *only* because he has said something *wrongly* through not bothering to think at all what he is saying.

This is a point that touches on Tanasini's treatment of private language, for if we take it that, on Wittgenstein's view, someone who persistently calls a current *pain* a *tingle*, when it is obvious to those around him that he is not making as slip of the tongue, would be regarded not as exhibiting a deficiency in his powers of inner observation, but of revealing his inadequate

command of the English language, then it would seem to follow that if this individual is then imagined to be using a language *privately* in the sense that Tanesini goes on to discuss, he would be isolated *in principle* from the public forum supplying the only context in which this possibility could have *meaning*. Here is Tanesini's interpretation of what is going on in *Investigations* § 258:

> .....we need to recall a crucial fact about the asymmetry between first- and third-person attributions of pain which prompted the philosopher to develop the picture of pain as logically hidden. The idea of making a mistake makes no sense when applied to first-person attributions. But it is perfectly possible that I might not know what the word 'pain' means. I might fail to apply it right on future occasions even if it seems to me that I am using it correctly. The same cannot be said of the mark 'S' in the philosopher's case. It makes no sense to say that I might not know what 'S' means. But if that makes no sense, then there is nothing that 'S' could mean. In other words, a mark, like 'S', functions as a word.....only if we can get a grip on the idea that somebody could use the word wrongly because she does not understand its meaning. (34)

If this argument is to be successful, it has to be proposing rather more than is captured in the thought that her private linguist would in the circumstances described have no way of *knowing* whether she was using a word *wrongly*, because she would be in no position to find this out. The reason for this is that it has already been stipulated that if someone has a mastery of English, then the only kind of error we would be willing to attribute to him when he sincerely says that he is in pain when he is not would be one that was entirely *verbal*. But in order to consider the possibility that someone who persistently calls a current *pain* a *tingle* is making the kind of mistake Tanesini allows for, we have to imagine someone, perhaps a foreigner or a child

in the process of learning the language, whose command of English is deficient. Once he is granted complete command of the language, on the other hand, there is no justification for saying that his isolation from a public context would disallow him from talking about his sensations. Indeed, there is nothing in the scenario imagined by Tanesini that comes even close to imagining what Wittgenstein is really talking about when he mentions a language that *in principle* could be used by no one other than himself. The most that the situation she describes would allow for is someone who is isolated permanently *in fact* from a public forum even although he originally learned to talk about his sensations in a normal context with other people.

It is, indeed, because we can imagine these possibilities, that Scott Soames is led to deny what he takes to be Wittgenstein's claims about a private language, for his argument would be that if we can imagine someone isolated in this way yet still being able to use a language, then surely we can imagine someone *inventing* a language for himself from scratch given that his sensations present themselves to him with the *representational contents* that tell him *via* their distinctive *qualitative feels* just what *kinds* of sensations they are. (35) But it would have been no part of Wittgenstein's intention to show that Soames's (and Ayer's, Blackburn's, Strawson's, Wilson's *etc.*) claims are incoherent: his point would be entirely methodological. It is simply that these claims make sense only because of the philosopher's prior mastery of a *public* language; and that conclusion is not, and indeed cannot be the result of a *reductio ad absurdum.* Soames's proposal is for Wittgenstein no more than the kind of tempting conclusion to which we are constantly subject in *philosophy* because we insist on viewing these possibilities in isolation from the normal circumstances in which we do indeed experience new and exciting sensations with those distinctly *representational contents* to which Soames refers.

In order to grasp what Wittgenstein's real target is in § 258, it is worthwhile returning to Tanesini's own claim that in § 258, Wittgenstein 'notices that the very distinction between *seeming* right and *being* right cannot get a grip in this case.' (36) The reason for this, however, is the one given in § 288, where we are told that by assuming the abrogation of the normal language

game in which we can express our sensations, we need a criterion of identity for the sensation, and with this comes the possibility of error. But that possibility of *error* is a consequence of no longer employing an ordinary public language in which first person sensation ascription is criterionless. Instead, it follows directly from the private *object* model that has no application to our ordinary sensation talk. In short, what Wittgenstein is denying in § 258 is not that there is something to which it might seem that in adopting the role of a private linguist we ought to attain but that is beyond our powers, *viz*., that we could identify and reidentify our sensations *correctly*, but that there is nothing in which - based on how this private *object* model relates to our ordinary (criterionless) sensation talk - this identification and re-identification could even be taken to consist.

Wittgenstein's point here is again methodological: either the so-called private linguist's claims make sense only because of his existing mastery of a public language, so that his notion of privacy is one we are already familiar with, or he is saying nothing at all. His *real* task as a private linguist is not so much that of attaching a sign to a sensation: it is rather that of confering *meaning* on his own private world; and this task is incoherent. For either he is tempted to say that his sensations are intrinsically meaningful - the point echoed by Soames - in which case this only makes sense against the background of his prior knowledge of a public language, or his world is entirely without conceptual content, in which case his claims are incoherent.

There is a sense, therefore, in which we could get Tanasini's presentation of § 258 to come out in favour of this way of looking at things after all, provided that we understood her private linguist to be operating with the wrong kind of *private object model* for her sensation talk ; but as she presents her case this interpretation is difficult to justify. There are other features of her presentation of Wittgenstein on privacy that are worth mentioning, including what she has to say - in a Malcolm-like way - about how we treat the concepts of numerical *v* qualitative identity in relation to colours and sensations, but these do not contribute quite so importantly as her treatment of § 258 to the overall discussion.

The chapter ends with an assessment of Wittgenstein's dictum that the human body is

the best picture of the human soul, but she uses this to come to a number of different conclusions, so it is not always as clear as it might be at any particular step just where the argument is leading and what particular point she is endeavouring to make. Referring first of all to Wittgenstein's examples in the *Investigations* about pots that talk (§ 282), having frightful pains and turning to stone whilst they last (§ 283), and children who are merely automatons (§ 420), she claims that the majority of commentators have failed to grasp the *real* significance of these passages, which actually lies in the way in which they give voice to a *fear* that we may ultimately be unable to distinguish between living human beings and lifeless automata. Wittgenstein, according to Tanesini, shows that we have no ultimate criteria by which to tell automata from human beings. But we do not *need* criteria of this kind:

> What is necessary is an acknowledgement of others,
> their pains and hopes. We do not need to have a special
> knowledge of what goes on inside them. Quite the contrary:
> the search for knowledge gets in the way of acknowledgement. (37)

But this is to put the cart before the horse. First of all, if there is a fear in this context, then the fear that we can never be certain whether some individual human being we come across is a lifeless automaton is surely one that would fit the bill. But, insofar as there are criteria for distinguishing between human beings and lifeless automata, then Wittgenstein's descriptions of the kinds of circumstances in which we do make these distinctions (§ 284) helps to show what these criteria are. But in that case, the claim that when these criteria are satisfied in *practice* we can still harbour a *fear* that someone is *really* an automaton is one that from Wittgenstein's point of view can have no genuine application. Like the scepticism that underlies doubt about the existence of *other minds*, it rests on a misleading *picture* which appears to encapsulate our *understanding* of what it is for another individual to be enjoying conscious states. But once we cease to be party to the *picture*, the problem completely dissolves.

The issue is complicated by Tanesini's claim that these criteria we do not *need*, are

supposed to lie, as she puts it, in a 'special knowledge of what goes on inside them'. But the criteria to which Wittgenstein would point (in § 420 for example) to show that these children are not automatons, have nothing to do with any special knowledge of what is going on 'inside them' in Tanesini's sense: they are perfectly ordinary behavioural criteria which we understand to express the fact that we are confronting human beings who are aware of what is going on about them in a quite ordinary way.

The real problem with Tanesini's account is that she is attempting to make space here for a Cavellian notion of *acknowledgement* that is not really operating at *this* level. The same is true of her introduction of the primitive *horror* Wittgenstein refers to in connection with the throwing of effigies into a fire, a horror she associates with Wittgenstein's reference to the *uncanny* feeling accompanying his attempt to think of the children in his presence as automata. This is taken to show that Wittgenstein is pointing to the real depth of scepticism we harbour about other minds, with an accompanying sense that our humanity is fragile, and that the monstrous and inhuman might always break through (38). But, based on the texts, this fear is Tanasini's and has little to do with Wittgenstein's treatment of the children. Indeed, his uncanny feeling comes not from the thought that they might *really* be automatons, but from the difficulty he encounters in even trying to make the attempt to violate the perfectly ordinary criteria the children evidently satisfy; criteria whose satisfaction puts *this* possibility quite out of the question.

Tanesini then considers the claim made by Wittgenstein that psychological concepts are applicable only to living beings, or to what resembles a human being (§ 281). She spends some time arguing that it was no part of Wittgenstein's intention to deny that ordinary thoughts and feelings might in appropriate circumstances be attributable to artificial entities or machines. But even if philosophers like Malcolm have appeared to interpret Wittgenstein in a too literal way that would have him apparently denying the obvious, (39) Wittgenstein's point is that human behaviour is the paradigm by which we judge by *analogy* that creatures which are not human enjoy experiences. Beyond that, the human imagination knows no bounds, and as Tanasini

indicates, our literature is replete with examples illustrating her point: in the child's bedtime story, teddy bears walk and talk; in popular fairy tales, pots and pans endowed with human features spring to life; in science fiction, the dead regularly come alive unknowingly as zombies; robots and androids behave and converse as human beings, computers indulge in meaningful conversations, and human brains, suitably disembodied, are connected electronically to speech outlets, betraying the 'fact' that they harbour an 'owner' who is struggling to regain recognition as a genuine person. In short, there is no limit to our indulgence in fantasy, and the extent to which any fantasy has some grounding in scientific reality is partly what the science fiction writer is normally intending to reflect. Wittgenstein claims that to say of a friend that he is *not* an automaton makes no sense in quite ordinary circumstances (*Investigations*, Part II, Sec. iv) ; but this statement would of course gain an immediate application in a science fiction tale in which the hero sees one friend after another undergo conversion through 'alien' intervention into a lifeless automaton.

A more serious point resides in Tanesini's reiterated claim that for Wittgenstein there is no *real* answer to scepticism over the question of 'other minds', that we instead *relate* to others *as* human beings, that we *acknowledge* them, a conclusion from which she infers that we do not need to *know* that they are not zombies, for to attempt to address the sceptical question would intrude on our ability to properly acknowledge them:

> These considerations are not an answer to scepticism,
> and Wittgenstein does not take them to provide one.
> Instead, his remarks show that we have *no* answer to
> sceptical questions about the existence of other minds.
> We do not, and cannot, have the sort of knowledge which
> would satisy the sceptic. (40)

But, as I indicated earlier on, this misconstrues Wittgenstein's outlook: the position of the sceptic has no application because it is based ultimately on a misleading *picture* of what it *means* to attribute thoughts and feelings to others, and this implies that whether we either

could or could have have the kind of *knowledge* about other minds craved by the sceptic makes no sense. Tanesini bemoans the extraordinary fact that the importance Wittgenstein attaches to the notion of *acknowledgement* has been almost completely ignored by philosophers:

> Essentially, apart from Cavell's work, there is no secondary literature on the subject. The oversight is not unexpected given the lack of interest many philosophers have had in understanding emotions. But philosophers' refusal to note the centrality that emotions play in Wittgenstein's picture of human lives also has another source. Wittgenstein here can be read as suggesting that whether each of us is given the opportunity to preserve his or her humanity is something which is beyond the individual's control. .....philosophers are typically bad at accepting such contingencies, and this is perhaps a reason why the importance of emotions in Wittgenstein's picture of a human life has been ignored. (41)

But as Tanesini points out, if emotional responses can be forthcoming, they can also be withdrawn. Consequently, when the response required from others is one of *acknowledgement*, (37) this notion can have an application only against a background in which there is an *existing practice* of talking about our own feelings and those of other people. *How* we manage this in practice is expressed though the *grammar* of the language, and it is only with this *already* in place that the notion of *acknowledgement* - or refusal to *acknowledge* -in Tanasini's presentation makes sense. That Wittgenstein might have grounded our *understanding* of ourselves as persons amongst other objects and persons on anything other than our *practices* - and this includes our linguistic practices - would for him have been an idea that could have no application. It is, after all, against this background that the claims of *Wittgenstein's* sceptic are seen to rest on a misleading *picture* ; just as it is against this background that what *truth* there is in scepticism for herself and Cavell rests on the sense that other people are closed off within their own circle of experiences:

> Nevertheless, as Cavell points out, Wittgenstein does not think that these considerations provide a refutation of scepticism. Rather, they bring out the truth which finds its metaphysical expression in scepticism about other minds. This truth is, according to Cavell, the problem of the other. It is borne out of the sense that others are 'closed off from me, (within, as it were their own experience)'.....(42)

But this form of metaphysical scepticism would for Wittgenstein have been the expression of a form of *philosophical* confusion. If there is then a 'truth in scepticism' of the kind to which Tanesini, echoing Cavell, correctly points, then it cannot arise at a level where the practice of talking about one's own feelings and those of others is not *already* in place. It may indeed be true that we can *choose* to acknowledge another individual's anxiety, or dismiss this in a surly manner as of no concern to us ; but that we could similarly *choose* either to be or not to be a person amongst other persons speaking a common language in an objective world is something that makes no *sense*. Wittgenstein certainly does occasionally refer to the primitive responses underlying a certain tendency to react naturally to another in pain, or to the 'agreement in judgements' that appears to *underlie* our use of language, or the constancy in results of measurement that appears to *underlie* the notion of *measuring*. (§§ 240-242). But this agreement or constancy makes no *sense* without our use of language being *already* in place. The very idea of a framework *condition* itself requires, in a familiar sense, that the truths which Wittgenstein almost cannot avoid echoing here are in this way *shown* insofar as they gain their *sense* from the roles they play in *gesturing* towards a framework against which we use a language *already* established - they are not intended to be functioning as verifiable hypotheses.

Tanesini's final chapter turns to politics, and to what she refers to as the 'deconstructive paradox' of political community, expressed in the principle that since all

forms of consensus are based on acts of exclusion, this has the consequence that a condition of the possibility of a political community is at the same time a condition of the impossibility of its complete realisation. Since it is difficult to see why anyone should feel attracted to this proposition in the first place - although construed as a statement reflecting *historical* fact it might seem to have a good deal of truth in it - and since the quotation from Jacques Derrida in which he says that ' the condition of possibility of those effects [of signature] is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity' (38) is, in this context at least, hardly enlightening, it may be thought that there is little in this chapter worth arguing about. In fact, Tanesini uses it to expand upon the message she receives from Cavell, in the course of 'deconstructing' the paradox:

> In conclusion, the lesson to be learned from Wittgenstein and Cavell is that communities require acts of acknowledgement, and that these involve accepting responsibility for the actions of one's group, both its successes and failures. The further, related lesson is that when we say 'we', we are not necessarily pointing to an opposition between 'us' and 'them'. Instead, we might use this expression to indicate to others that they are entitled to make claims on us. (43)

In the final analysis, Tanesini has provided a book which at every level invites, and indeed demands a debate over what Wittgenstein is really about. It might perhaps have been more aptly subtitled *Interpretation by a Feminist*, and it might in retrospect have been considerably more circumspect in its interpretation of how Wittgenstein's *philosophy* relates to his *own* assessment of his relationship to his times. But often a writer does not know whether an approach is going to work until she makes the attempt, and even when that attempt only too conspicuously fails, this does not at all mean that it was not worth making.

ENDNOTES

(1) Tanesini, 1.
(2) Tanesini, 2.
(3) Tanesini, 7.
(4) Tanesini, 2.
(5) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H.Von Wright, Translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1980).
(6) Erich Heller, 'Wittgenstein: Unphilosophical Notes', originally *Encounter*, 13, No.3, 1959 and in *Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy*, ed. K.T.Fann, (New York: Delta, Dell Pub.,1967), 89. *Cf.* Erich Heller: *The Disinherited Mind*, (London: Pelican, 1961), his study of German Literature.
(7) Heller, *Ibid*., 94.
(8) Heller, *Ibid*., 91.
(9) Heller, *Ibid*., 93.
(10) Tanesini, 2.
(11) Tanesini, 3. This attitude is not uncommon in the literature, See, for example, Kevin M. Cahill: '*Bildung* and Decline', *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 32, No. 1, January 2009, Footnote 6, referring to Ray Monk, *Wittgenstein, The Duty of Genius*, (London, Vintage, 1991), 304.
(12) Tanesini, 4 *et seq*.
(13) Tanesini, 14.
(14) Tanesini, 38.
(15) Tanesini, 40 and note 15.
(16) Tanesini, 40.
(17) Tanesini, 41.
(18) Tanesini, 19, Note 43, referring to Nestroy, and Baker & Hacker's implication that progress refers to *Wittgenstein's* progress, and not to progress in Western culture. *Cf.* Cahill on progress (Note 11).
(19) Tanesini, 54.
(20) Tanesini, 59.
(21) Tanesini, 69.
(22) Tanesini, 78.
(23) Cora Diamond: "Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in His Box? " in *The New Wittgenstein* (Routledge: London, 2000), 278.
(24) Tanesini, 82.
(25) Tanesini, 84.
(26) Tanesini, 85.
(27) Tanesini, 85.
(28) Tanesini, 89.
(29) Tanesini, 89.
(30) Tanesini, 92.
(31) Tanesini, 92 *et seq*.
(32) Tanesini, 93.
(33) Tanesini, 100, Note 1.
(34) Tanesini, 103.
(35) Scott Soames: *Philosophical Analysis in The Twentieth Century*, Volume 2, *The Age of Meaning* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) 37. The view that our sensations are intrinsically meaningful is a commonplace in the literature of all of these philosophers referred to.
(36) Tanesini, 103.
(37) Tanesini, 105.
(38) Tanesini, 106.
(39) Norman Malcolm,'Knowledge of Other Minds', in Pitcher ed. *Wittgenstein The Philosophical Investigations,* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1966), 376.
(40) Tanasini, 113.
(41) Tanasini, 119.
(42) Tanasini, 128.
(43) Tanasini, 138.

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.