

CRITICAL NOTICE

Wittgenstein

Hans Sluga, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011, pp. 168, £ 17.99

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Advertised by the publisher as an illuminating and thought-provoking account of the life and work of one of the most original and influential thinkers of the twentieth century, one which offers new and ground-breaking insights into Wittgenstein's mind, Hans Sluga's book forms a further welcome addition to Blackwell's series on *Great Minds*. The series is evidently not confined to philosophers, strictly speaking, because in addition to *Mill*, *Sartre* and *Kant*, for example, it also currently lists the titles *Charles Darwin* and *Shakespeare's Ideas*. The publisher states that one of the main aims of the present work is to introduce Wittgenstein's ideas to readers unfamiliar with his thought. From this perspective it ought to be regarded as yet another introductory volume from a year offering an extensive list of publications on Wittgenstein, to include Chon Tejedor's *Starting with Wittgenstein* (Continuum), and William Child's *Wittgenstein* (Routledge), both of which fall into the same general category.

Another feature of Hans Sluga's new book, mentioned by the publisher, is that it includes a discussion of the social and political background to Wittgenstein's ideas, together with an assessment of their contemporary relevance. In his Preface Sluga makes a passing reference to his previous volume about Heidegger (*Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1993), in which he sought to understand the philosophy against the social and political context of its period. Looking at Wittgenstein's work from a similar perspective, Sluga sees both thinkers, in his estimation the two most original and decisive figures in 20th century philosophy, as writers who produced their works within a context of what he refers to as social, political and cultural endangerment. Believing that all great philosophy arises from this kind of historical situation, Sluga takes the 'crisis of modernity' which arose during the lives of both philosophers to be integral to their ideas, albeit that it affected their thinking in different ways. Accepting that Wittgenstein's thought did not take place in a vacuum, therefore, it seems only natural to attempt to understand

it against the background of the 'historical, political and personal conditions' from which it emerged (Preface vii).

Although Sluga's aim is to make Wittgenstein's thought transparent to readers who are as yet unfamiliar with it, he makes it clear that his exposition will in general bypass what the 'experts' have had to say, in order that he can present Wittgenstein's thinking very much from his own personal point of view. Believing that 'our deepest and most pressing problems must concern the conditions and the possibility of our human social and political existence', Sluga is particularly interested to find out not only how Wittgenstein's ideas relate to the historical context in which they arose, but also how they may help us to face the peculiar social and political problems that are presented to us today (*Ibid.*).

This is the topic of the book's final chapter 8, 'what is the use of studying philosophy?' The title, in fact, is taken from Wittgenstein's question, as recounted in Norman Malcolm's well-known *Memoir*, whether there is any point in studying philosophy if it does not improve one's thinking about the important questions of everyday life (*Ibid.*, 133). This question followed what Wittgenstein evidently believed to have been Malcolm's rather naive assumption in 1939 that the British were too 'decent' to make an assassination attempt on Hitler, an assumption which at the time made Wittgenstein explode with anger. There is surely a certain irony in the fact that because the pendulum of popular opinion has now swung in the opposite direction, were a Malcolm of today to make the same assumption, we may rather be inclined to sympathise with his naivete: we now live in an age in which the majority of people have become sufficiently cynical - or plainly realistic - to take it for granted that our governments and security services, are regularly up to all kinds of underhand methods, 'dirty tricks', in pursuit of their aims. This belief has been fostered not only by many popular fictional tales of espionage, produced for the most part during the Cold War, but also by the wealth of privileged information from government archives and other sources that over time has gradually filtered through to the public domain. From this point of view, Wittgenstein may be taken to have been ahead of his time, at least as compared to Malcolm, insofar as it is true that during the Second World War attempts to assassinate Hitler by the British, although not of course by them alone, were secretly undertaken.

Whilst stressing that 'Wittgenstein lacked an eye for political matters', and that he 'was certainly in no way a political thinker' (*Ibid.*, 132), Sluga finds inspiration in the work of Hannah Pitkin (*Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought*, Berkeley, 1972), for the idea that his thinking may nevertheless have relevance to social and political questions, and also in the thought that 'the important questions of everyday life' already referred to may themselves turn out to be directly social and political in nature:

The question poses itself because we can see today - more clearly perhaps than Wittgenstein - how deep the knives of twentieth century politics have cut into the flesh of the human condition. Does it not look increasingly as if the blood of the whole modern era was running into the gutter ? And with it perhaps also what has given life and vitality to modern philosophy ? And so we find ourselves forced to ask: has the moment not come when philosophy can no longer afford to evade the question of politics ? (*Ibid.*, 134)

If this has the appearance of tilting at windmills, Sluga freely admits that he will have to leave it to another occasion to reveal in detail 'how it might actually be possible to construct a political philosophy with the help of Wittgenstein's methodological considerations' (*Ibid.*, 135). This is to admit that Wittgenstein's thinking could be relevant to political matters only to the extent that it can effect *how* we think and speak about them, and certainly not how it could effect *what* normative principles we ought to espouse. Citing Schmitt, Arendt and Foucault as philosophers whose work embodies 'essentialist and reductive formulas' (*Ibid.*, 138), Sluga believes that the relevance of Wittgenstein's thinking to political matters lies elsewhere:

Wittgenstein's thought is bound to make a significant contribution to political philosophy with the realization that the basic concepts of politics are likely to be family resemblance concepts. Neither Schmitt, nor Arendt, nor Foucault seems to have considered that possibility (*Ibid.*, 137).

Sluga also takes Wittgenstein's relevance to political thinking to lie in his realisation that

whilst human beings may entertain different world pictures, they can come to understand each other because their language exists always and only in a socially created public world, and not 'in the folds of an individual consciousness' (*Ibid.*, 139). This is a point he makes in criticism of Arendt, who in his assessment leaves a gap between 'world views and their commensuration' that she is quite unable to fill. Because, in Sluga's estimation, 'there exists in us perhaps also a shared repertoire of biologically coded behaviors and behavioral responses', which can be 'worked up' by us into different world views, the great distances which may obtain between different world views can always be traced back to their shared roots in these primitive responses (*Ibid.*, 141).

Believing with followers of Peter Winch that a Wittgensteinian outlook on social and political science inevitably denies the possibility of achieving in these fields the kinds of precisely formulable laws associated with explanatory sciences like physics, Sluga predictably concludes that explanations in these areas will 'have to remain narrative and descriptive in nature, offering in essence the sort of informal explanations and predictions of human behavior with which we are familiar in everyday life' (*Ibid.*, 146). Sluga connects this familiar point with his already stated view that Wittgenstein's ethical outlook, and so presumably the outlook he would have adopted with regards to politics, is 'visionary' rather than 'prescriptive or normative' (*Ibid.*, 147). With Rawls specifically in mind, Sluga concludes by questioning what he sees as the poverty inherent in a conception of *Justice* divorced from certain distinctively human values:

Justice is an important political virtue, but is it the only one ?
Conceived by itself, it is the virtue of a cold, heartless world
in which the only remaining issue is what I owe you and you
owe me. Is that how we want to understand our political lives ?
That we are inclined to see political [*sic.*] in these terms today
shows only too clearly how impoverished our vision of political
life has become (*Ibid.*, 148).

Whilst this is surely fair comment, this final chapter with its exploratory tone may nevertheless be thought, as Sluga would no doubt freely admit, to raise more questions than it solves. The same cannot be said for the first chapter about 'the situated thinker', which provides a reasonably concise biographical account of Wittgenstein's life and work, set against the personal, cultural and historical 'crossroads' that Sluga identifies as being very much the same as our own, so making his thinking highly relevant, indeed 'crucial' to us today. Sluga finds one of these crossroads to lie at the point where secular and religious cultures meet, making reference to the Jewish element in Wittgenstein's ancestry jettisoned by his great-grandfather in the adoption of the Christian faith, and in the conversion of the family name from 'Mayer' to 'Wittgenstein'. A second crossroad is found by Sluga at the point where scientific/technological and philosophical cultures meet, and here there is a certain ambivalence insofar as Wittgenstein was not merely trained as an engineer, but was familiar with the work of Mach and Boltzmann, only to reveal an extreme pessimism, albeit at a later stage, concerning the prospects for scientific/technological civilisation. Sluga discovers a third crossroad at the meeting-point of Wittgenstein's Viennese background and his links with the academic world of Cambridge during the first half of the 20th Century, finding in the rise of the analytic tradition in philosophy a move away from the cultural dominance of German and European philosophy which reflects the upheavals of the 20th Century. Wittgenstein is said to be attempting to bridge this divide time and time again throughout his work, making him once again a man at a crossroads where clashing philosophical traditions meet. This is at best misleading, even if we accept with Sluga that the divide between 'Analytic' and 'Continental' philosophy is not as sharp as is often made out, because there is very little to be gained from making claims at such a high level of generality, claims clearly difficult to substantiate (*Ibid.*, 4).

On the other hand, readers familiar with Wittgenstein's biography will find little to quibble over in these pages, which additionally raise the familiar question whether there are two, three or more phases in Wittgenstein's thinking, whilst alerting readers to the ambivalent and paradoxical stance Wittgenstein adopted towards philosophy itself (*Ibid.*, 13), a stance which almost

inevitably makes his standing within academic philosophy uncertain (*Ibid.*, 15). At this point Sluga draws our attention to the difficulties that commentators encounter in classifying Wittgenstein's oeuvre. We see the *Tractatus* solely as a contribution to logical theory, only at the expense of ignoring Wittgenstein's insistence on the ethical purpose of his work. We read the *Philosophical Investigations* as a contribution to the theoretical study of language, only at the cost of neglecting its avowedly therapeutic intent. We see Wittgenstein as a sceptic, only by neglecting the naturalistic tendencies in his writing, or as exploring questions of truth and meaning only to forget that he may find questions of this kind to be ultimately without sense. Interpreters can concentrate on Wittgenstein's evident solutions to familiar philosophical problems, even discovering a coherent system in his writings, only to forget that this does violence to the texts, neglecting what may be truly important in them, his unique manner of engagement with these problems and his method of practising philosophy. These familiar oppositions will play a role in subsequent chapters where Sluga will go on to discuss the various stages in the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy (*Ibid.*, 16).

It is interesting to note that at a later point in the book (*Ibid.*, 131) Sluga returns to the historical and biographical record in his claim that Wittgenstein emerged from the First World War as a 'debilitated and disillusioned veteran', suffering even up to the point at which he returned to philosophy ten years later, from what is diagnosed as 'post-traumatic stress syndrome'. Evidence offered for this conclusion in a footnote (*Ibid.*, 148, Ft. 2) is said to lie in the austerities of his life after 1918, his pessimism and anguish, and his need to withdraw for long periods to remote regions of Norway and Ireland. But it is clear that these facts may be taken to point more towards inherent features of Wittgenstein's personality without need of any further explanation, especially if we remember the relish with which he is said to have engaged with enemy fire, so that he earned a number of commendations for bravery and medals of honour (*Cf.* the biography of Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Duty of Genius*, Jonathan Cape, 1990, Chap. 7). Returning to Sluga's biographical chapter 1, there are, unusually, missing prepositions on lines 6 and 18 of page 13.

Chapter 2, 'the world and its structure', is the first of two dedicated to the *Tractatus*, and is concerned with what Sluga refers to as the first of the two broader issues he is pursuing throughout his book, *viz.*, Wittgenstein's 'pluralism' as expressed in the philosophy of logical atomism. The second issue that concerns him will follow in the next chapter about 'the limits of language' (*Ibid.*, 20). Sluga sees Wittgenstein's contribution to logical atomism as his clarification and substantial modification of a view that Russell had arrived at well before Wittgenstein himself, *viz.*, the doctrine that 'the structure of the logically analyzed sentence mirrors the structure of reality' as expressed in the 'picture theory of meaning'. Sluga also regards Russell's version of logical atomism as the creation of a theory advanced in direct opposition to Bradley's 'logical monism', as only the latest manifestation of a fundamental confrontation that can be found in the clash between the Monism of Parmenides who believed that 'Being is indivisible, continuous, unchanging, and uniform', and the Pluralism of Democritus as expressed in the view that 'in order to understand change we must assume that there exist unchangeable elements which can enter into various combinations' (*Ibid.*, 29).

Sluga importantly points out, however, that the world of the *Tractatus* is not one of processes, forces, or streams of energy, but is concerned solely with objects and their configurations, a point which reflects directly on what the *Tractatus* has to say about language. Comparing what is said by Wittgenstein in his *Notebooks* to what is said by Leibniz in his *Monadology*, Sluga quotes Wittgenstein's dictum that the notion of the *simple* is already contained in that of the *complex* in such a way that it arises as a matter of logical necessity quite apart from the issue of their being any *examples* of simple objects (*Ibid.*, 31). This purely formal characterisation of objects as items that can only be named, Sluga relates to Wittgenstein's unwillingness to identify objects as items directly accessible to us in experience. Albeit that in the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein thinks of points in the visual field as examples of simple objects, he finally opts for a purely formal conception of objects as the necessary end points of analysis, as distinct from Russell's epistemological identification of them with sense-data (*Ibid.*, 33).

Sluga emphasises that the *picture* conception of language cannot be properly stated because any attempt to state it would involve comparing a fact with a proposition, and this relation is not something we can ever look upon from *outside*, as it were: it is something we can only realise in a *picture* (*Ibid.*, 23). On Sluga's view there is a great deal of obscurity in the presentation provided by Wittgenstein of his picture of the world, as instanced, for example in the claims that material properties are first formed by the configurations of objects (TLP, 2.0231), and that the configuration of objects forms the state of affairs (TLP, 2.072). Not only is it unclear whether Wittgenstein would have been able to resolve these difficulties, which contribute to the enigma that commentators identify as central to the *Tractatus*, but Wittgenstein famously throws doubt on the entire metaphysical enterprise when he claims (TLP, 6.53) that anyone who wants to state something metaphysical has failed to give meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Sluga reflects on the deep tension between the beginning and the end of the book that is generated by its final remarks, a tension that he will discuss more fully in the following chapter.

The final section of this chapter is entitled 'The Critique of Logical Atomism', and begins with the reflection that from the mid 1930's Wittgenstein began to question the notion of *simplicity* on which the doctrine of logical atomism can be understood to rest, coming finally to the conclusion that his very idea of *simple objects* had been an illusion generated by regarding words like 'world' and 'thought' as in some way expressing *super-concepts*. But if words like 'language', 'experience' and 'world' are to have a use, this use must be as humble as the use of words like 'table', 'lamp' and 'door' (*Philosophical Investigations* § 97). There follows an account of Wittgenstein's reasons for rejecting the entire metaphysical edifice of the *Tractatus* with its doctrine of *real* names, for if the meaning of a word is its use in the language (*Ibid.*, § 43), then, as is ordinarily the case, the name for an object that has ceased to exist will retain its meaning and there will be no need to postulate simple non-perishable objects as the correlates of real names (*Ibid.*, 34).

Stressing furthermore that there is no such thing as absolute simplicity or complexity, independent of some accepted standard or measurement, Wittgenstein states that there is always the right to ask what is meant by 'composite' (*Investigations* § 47). Similarly, the notion that there *must* be something indestructible and simple because everything composite can cease to exist, is abandoned: one only needs to reflect on the fact that in saying 'My broom is in the corner' there is no question that this might *ordinarily* be a statement about a composite in any *metaphysical* sense outwith a specific context in which one might have a reason for pointing out that the broom is in fact made out of parts. To think otherwise is to be confused by a picture (*Ibid.*, §§ 59 - 60).

These familiar points bring this discussion of some of the changes in the orientation of Wittgenstein's thinking to a close, although Sluga argues that despite the cogency of Wittgenstein's later critique of these earlier views, logical atomism is far from having lost its charm for philosophers today: he sees its recent reincarnation in 'Possible Worlds' semantics and metaphysics, which is 'committed to the idea that every possible world consists of objects to which certain properties are assigned in each of these worlds' (*Ibid.*, 35). But this means that the objects themselves, conceived across worlds, are 'colorless and simple'. Whether philosophers who use the concept of *rigid designation* will find themselves committed to this conclusion is, however, another matter.

Sluga's main point is that Wittgenstein came to reject the assumptions on which all forms of logical atomism are built, having moved, by the time of *On Certainty*, from a metaphysics of logical atomism to a pragmatics of world pictures (*Ibid.*, 36). Instead of the fixed structure of the world proposed by logical atomism, the 'logical order of the world' is created by language-games. The world from this perspective is a field of 'overlapping similarities that shade off in all kinds of directions, and it is on this wide-open field that we impose the more or less precise grid of our language' (*Ibid.*) The 'pluralism' of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is of an entirely different and deeper character than that espoused in the *Tractatus*.

The next chapter on the *Tractatus*, 'the limits of language', begins by taking up again the important question earlier left unanswered concerning the reaction that commentators ought to have

towards the passage in which Wittgenstein regards his propositions as elucidatory insofar as they are recognised to be senseless. The famous 'throwing away the ladder' passage (TLP, 6.54) Sluga regards as quite incompatible with Wittgenstein's claim in his Preface that 'the *truth* of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive', and describes three different possible reactions to the problem, to be found in the subsequent secondary literature. One simple answer is to accept that Wittgenstein does provide a 'full-blooded theory' of logical atomism in the book, and that his later puzzling apparent retraction of it should just be ignored. A second reaction is to adopt a 'transcendental' reading which accepts that the propositions of the book are 'senseless' whilst believing that what cannot be *said* can nevertheless be *shown* (TLP, 4.1212). Feeling that this assessment, although circumventing the radical conclusion of the book, yet fails to diffuse it, Sluga provides a third 'resolute' reading according to which the beginning of the *Tractatus* is intended to espouse metaphysical 'nonsense' of the kind that Wittgenstein wishes to 'dismantle'. However, not only does this reading simply fail to tally with the assertive tone of these initial passages, but if taken literally it would paradoxically render 6.53 itself senseless, and is just not in keeping with so much that Wittgenstein has all the appearance of asserting in the book to be the case. This is quite apart from the fact that in 1930 Wittgenstein reasserts logical atomism with the proviso that his earlier statements were intended to be 'elucidations' and 'circumscriptions' (*Ibid.*, 41).

Sluga's own assessment of the status of metaphysics in the *Tractatus* is that 'metaphysics fails to appreciate the nature of categorial distinctions and tries to make comprehensive statements about items that belong to different logical categories' (*Ibid.*, 43). But categorial distinctions can show themselves only in 'the differential functioning of our words'. They cannot, as Sluga puts it, become subject to substantial theoretical assertions. Speaking about the world 'in its totality' for example, forces metaphysics to bypass the boundaries of categorial distinctions. This would suggest that even in the course of saying, for example, that 'the world is everything that is the case', there is a recognition on Wittgenstein's part that he is using words like 'world' and 'everything' in a context which, in Sluga's terms, is in conflict with the logic of our language (*Ibid.*).

This almost sounds like an echo of the more familiar view, identifiable in the later philosophy, that metaphysical assertions masquerade as statements of fact in circumstances in which they cannot be statements of fact, because they are asserted outwith any ordinary contexts in which they could have a proper application. A classical example is the would-be *metaphysical* statement that 'people other than myself have conscious thoughts and sensations just as I do'. If this is not the specific claim that in my present circumstances, the people around me are not unconscious, that they are not, for example asleep, it is not in Wittgenstein's view saying anything because it does not make sense to place in question the *framework* within which we ordinarily ask and answer questions of this day-to-day kind. Yet that 'placing in question' as something that makes *sense*, is what the would-be statement as an *answer* to a philosophical problem about the existence of 'other minds' in its *metaphysical* guise would have to take for granted; and that this can be taken for granted is the assumption that, because he sees it as misguided, Wittgenstein explicitly rejects.

Sluga connects these considerations with his broader theme about the understanding of our social and political situation, when he reflects that 'Conceptions of social and political life are frequently justified by appeal to some metaphysical view or other' (*Ibid.*, 47). Yet if Wittgenstein is right, as Sluga believes, these appeals can carry no real weight, and can act as nothing more than restatements of certain social and political attitudes that are often used as rhetorical tools in social and political struggles (*Ibid.*).

Within a section headed 'The Self, The Subject, the I', Sluga discusses amongst other things the claim in TLP, 5.5421 that there is no such thing as the soul, and the claim in TLP, 5.62 that what solipsism *means* to say is correct, only it cannot be *said*, but shows itself. Whilst suggesting that it would be easy to dismiss all of this as 'metaphysical nonsense', Sluga concludes that because the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* speaks of language in the abstract, with no consideration of who speaks it, of how it has been acquired, or of how it is used in human intercourse, it is easier to see the remarks on solipsism as expressions of Wittgenstein's inability in this period 'to come to terms with the reality of our language' (*Ibid.*, 51). It will according to Sluga be some time before he comes to recognise this fact.

The chapter ends with a section entitled 'Ethics', which concerns itself with the separation between fact and value intrinsic to the first proposition of the *Tractatus*: 'the world is everything that is the case'. Quoting the famous letter to von Ficker, in which the *Tractatus* is referred to as a book in two parts, Wittgenstein makes the rather paradoxical claim that its more important part is the one that is *not* written. Connecting this with his earlier view that Wittgenstein's ethics is 'visionary' rather than 'normative', Sluga finds a similar outlook in Schopenhauer, one which identifies ethics not with the provision of moral imperatives but with what it is to live well or, in more general terms, with 'the meaning of life'.

This is closely connected to the content of Wittgenstein's famous 'Lecture on Ethics' from 1929 in which he expresses the view that to even try to talk genuinely about Ethics or Religion is to run against the boundaries of language. Sluga argues, surely correctly, that this throws light on what Wittgenstein means by talking of matters 'metaphysical' which can be *shown* only they cannot be *said* (*Ibid.*, 55), a point reflected in the fact that the solution to the problem of the meaning of life is found in the vanishing of the problem, so that someone who has 'solved' this problem will inevitably be unable to *say* in what the solution consists. Sluga reflects that throughout the rest of his life, Wittgenstein was motivated by a profound moral seriousness expressed in the claim that 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent (*Ibid.*)

He begins the next chapter about the reorientation that took place in Wittgenstein's thinking after 1929, 'the prodigious diversity of language games', by expressing his view that the *Blue Book* is a highly creative achievement, one which deserves to be put side by side with the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. The most significant feature of this work is that ordinary language is no longer measured by the standards of an artificial notation. Sluga also notes that Wittgenstein shows no sign of being preoccupied any longer with the ethical and existential questions that surface in the *Tractatus*, and surmises that these have now become sublimated in such a way that they 'show' themselves in our 'practices, uses and behaviors' (*Ibid.*, 58) and especially in the way in which we use and abuse language.

The remainder of the chapter begins by stressing that Wittgenstein's new concept of *use* is so multifaceted, open-ended and undefined, that it cannot be intended to express a 'use theory of meaning'. Sluga elaborates on this point in his treatment of the colour exclusion problem, in which 'A is red' and 'A is green', whilst not appearing to be logically complex propositions, cannot both be true because A cannot simultaneously be all over both red and green. But if these are elementary propositions, they contradict the Tractarian doctrine that elementary propositions are logically independent. Sluga sees this as the catalyst that led to the idea that a *system of propositions* is laid against reality like a ruler in saying that 'A is red', so that A is not green, *etc.*, and this develops into the notion that there are multiple systems of propositions, like propositions of colour or number, which are logically independent, an idea expressed in the *Blue Book* in terms of the existence of multiple language-games. Originally conceived as 'primitive forms of language or primitive languages', the concept matures into that of the prodigious diversity of language games (*Investigations*, II,xI, 224) that we find expressed in Part I, § 23.

In the course of describing the move from the notion that under its varying surface appearances, language has a single underlying structure, to the idea that the diversity of language-games so described is expressive of what it is to be human in the most general terms, Sluga cites *Investigations* § 2 and the language of the builders as 'impoverished and almost sub-human', the language of a group with 'a single form of life'. He neglects the possibility that this is only one way in which to take the builders passage, a point reflected in *Zettel* § 99. Sluga then reiterates just how diverse our language-games are as the expression of multifarious human needs and interests, and goes on to explore this idea in what remains of the chapter as it relates to religion, the mind-body problem, mathematics, myth, science, culture, the human capacity to see reality under different aspects, and in terms of different world-pictures (*Ibid.*, 62).

This is a lot of ground to cover in just under 14 pages. The section on 'Mind and Matter' is concerned largely with the *Blue Book's* treatment of the solipsist, who is now importantly regarded not as someone who has discovered a new *metaphysical* 'fact' about reality, but as someone who is

irresistibly tempted to use a certain form of expression (*Blue Book.*, 60). This presentation is already approaching the idea we find in the *Investigations* that what is troubling the philosopher when he adopts a view like solipsism is that he is being confused by a *picture*. Only one page is devoted to 'Mathematics and Other Sciences', in which the major point to which Sluga draws our attention is the manifold applicability of mathematics, so that it is, as Wittgenstein expresses it, 'a MOTLEY of techniques of proof' (*Ibid.*, 65). Arguing that Wittgenstein would surely have extended this idea to the natural sciences, and that he would have opposed any belief in the unity of science, a view he believes to be in accordance with the outlook of Thomas Kuhn, Sluga concludes this section with the claim that science, mythology and religion all 'speak about the world' in ways that employ different and incommensurable language-games. But this is clearly much too quick, appearing as it does to confirm that Wittgenstein's work has relativistic tendencies of the kind often criticised by philosophers of an empiricist bent. The genuine point is rather that if we can come to understand the roles performed by different language-games in these various disciplines, then we will come to see that it is the very idea that they each 'speak *about* the world' in different ways that leads us astray when doing philosophy.

This point is to some degree confirmed in 'Science, Myth and Religion', where the topic is Wittgenstein's treatment of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and the evidently mistaken assumption on Frazer's part that magical and religious rites are assumed on the part of the natives to have a certain causal efficacy, when they are in fact a genuine expression of veneration. Sluga connects this with Spengler's influence on Wittgenstein *via* the idea of a 'morphology of world-history', and there can be little doubt that Wittgenstein was intrigued by Spengler's ideas about cultural birth and decline, reflected in his observations about the 'progress' of our civilisation. However, Wittgenstein does not admire Spengler's ideas without implicitly subjecting them to the criticism that what may be an important methodological *tool* in coming to understand societies in general, is misconceived if it is thought to provide realistic historical portrayals of social and cultural evolution. Spengler's ideas cannot be thought to have any kind of genuine *causal* role in an explanation of the phenomena.

The next section on 'Seeing Aspects' discusses the familiar 'duck-rabbit' and other related themes, including perceiving or failing to perceive the similarity of two faces, or seeing a drawing as either a two or three dimensional representation. According to Sluga, Wittgenstein is drawing our attention to the fact that in seeing something *as* something, one is seeing its relation to other things, and so is master of a technique. Furthermore, far from its now being true that a picture depicts a particular fact in view of some kind of structural relationship with that fact, Wittgenstein now sees that the role of a picture together with how and what it represents, depends entirely on how it is used. This point is expanded in the next section on 'World Pictures', where the discussion moves to the topics of *On Certainty*. Sluga emphasises that the picture we inherit of the world did not evolve from some kind of ratiocination (*Op. cit.*, § 475), and was in fact instilled in us during childhood so that 'at the beginning was the deed'. He closes by emphasising what once again may be thought to be the relativistic tendencies consequent upon the thought that since all reasoning takes place within a system, it follows that we cannot use one system to undermine another (§ 611). Consequently, if the belief of the natives in the power of the gods, for example, is not functioning in any particular case as a genuinely verifiable hypothesis, as it certainly is not in those cases where nothing can be taken, experimentally, to show the belief to be false, then we are naturally given to conclude that their beliefs can *never* change. The reason for this is that there is nothing *within* their belief-system which could serve to support the radical alteration in their approach that would be required to completely alter their world-view to one, say, of a scientific kind.

If the reader by this point in the chapter has already gained the impression that he is being provided with a brief 'Cook's Tour' of Wittgenstein's philosophy, this impression is confirmed in the final major section, 'The Inner and the Outer', which effectively begins by quoting the famous *Investigations* § 580 with its claim that an 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria. Sluga also mentions § 304, finding in it the crucial point that in order to repudiate both dualism and behaviourism, Wittgenstein relies on the principle that we must make a radical break with the idea that language always functions as a means of conveying thoughts, which may be about houses,

pains, good and evil, or anything else you please. The significant point here, though Sluga does not present it in exactly this way, is that in emphasising that words do not always function as a means of 'standing for something', Wittgenstein is rejecting the *picture* of an opposition between 'the mental and the physical' as two different kinds of *entity* in its *metaphysical* guise, a picture that really does no more than accompany the *practice* of attributing thoughts and sensations to ourselves and to others. Yet it is the practice that provides the setting in which we are granted our understanding of the difference between 'the inner and the outer'. The discussion is extended in a final paragraph devoted to Wittgenstein's 'private language argument'. Quoting 'the beetle in the box' passage, § 293, as a means of showing the inapplicability of the 'inner object' picture, he ends by remarking that the notion of a private language is incoherent because 'it would have no criteria for determining whether one has properly identified a sensation or not' (*Ibid.*, 73). But in the context of a treatment of what, historically, has been the most frequently discussed topic in the *Philosophical Investigations*, this is clearly much too perfunctory, and begs too many questions that even someone previously unfamiliar with these passages and approaching them for the first time, is almost bound to raise. Nevertheless, Sluga in his summing-up sees Wittgenstein's later picture of the human world as a field of utter diversity, as something which suggests an entirely new way of looking upon the human condition (*Ibid.*, 74). This, he concludes in reminding us of one of the main purposes of the book, has a significant bearing on our understanding of social and political phenomena.

The following chapter 5 on 'families and resemblances' begins by placing the notion of family resemblance in its proper context as a reaction to what Wittgenstein came to see as the misguided Tractarian search for 'the general form of the proposition', a point reflected in *Investigations* § 65. Sluga then characteristically points out that the notion of family resemblance may also play a useful role in social and political theory, where the tendency is to think of concepts like race, class and culture as concepts susceptible to explanation in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. In fact, Sluga wishes to appropriate the notion for his own purposes whilst sub-dividing it because it applies to what he refers to as clusters, *e.g.*, games, and to causal groups, *e.g.*, human families with biological origins,

finding Wittgenstein's existing use of the notion of family resemblance 'systematically ambiguous' because it fails to make a distinction which is essential to our understanding of social and political phenomena (*Ibid.*, 87). Sluga's discussion here is rather more focussed than in the previous chapter, and provides a comprehensive treatment of the notion of family resemblance, discovering the first use of the concept in the early 1930's, where it is said that Spengler might be better understood if he is regarded as *comparing* different cultural epochs with the lives of families who exhibit this kind of resemblance. Sluga also sees the notion at work in Wittgenstein's treatment of 'Moses' in § 79, finding that the various descriptions associated with the use of a proper name by different speakers, descriptions some of which can in fact be discovered not to apply after all to the bearer of the name, give new life to Frege's doctrine of sense and reference.

Wittgenstein's treatment of family resemblance in the *Blue Book* is also found by Sluga to bear comparison with Nietzsche's view that 'concepts are constructed on the basis of our perception of similarities' (*Ibid.*, 81), and because of this shared understanding of the origin of concepts, he concludes that whilst Nietzsche argues that our thinking is 'through and through metaphorical', Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book* regards it as 'everywhere analogical' (*Ibid.*, 82). Sluga stresses the affinity between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein because both are led by their shared outlook to reject metaphysical theorising, and this is connected in his view to Wittgenstein's recognition in the *Blue Book* that 'the misleading effects of certain analogies' (*Ibid.*, 83) lie behind major philosophical problems about, for example, the nature of the reality of time and the relation between body and mind. In order to break the spell of these analogies, the *Blue Book* suggests the introduction of 'ideal languages' or 'symbolic notations', as Sluga puts it, which will reveal differences hidden in ordinary language, thus loosening 'mental cramps'. Sluga is careful to point out that talk of analogy is less prominent in the *Philosophical Investigations*, although he does not emphasise Wittgenstein's references to misleading *pictures* to which the philosopher in us has a tendency to become attracted, (e.g., § 119, §§ 422-425, and Part II, vii, 184) references which are unaccompanied by any apparent requirement for the *Blue Book's* 'ideal languages'. What remains of this idea may, of course, always

be found to lie in those 'primitive kinds of application' referred to in § 5, *e.g.*, the language of the builders. The later treatment in any event is clearly more sophisticated.

In a section entitled 'The Human Form of Life', Sluga asks firstly whether there is any limit to the concepts we might form on the basis of our recognition of a similarity, and secondly how we get from recognition of similarities to classificatory concepts. Remarking that Wittgenstein says nothing on this second topic (*Ibid.*, 86), we can perhaps come to understand why if we look at how Sluga answers his first question, for he is content to say that one person may see a similarity whilst another may not, just as we can come to see similarities which previously have gone without notice. The discussion then jumps to the quite separate question why we have one concept rather than another, or why we have one language-game rather than another, and the answer provided is firstly that language games 'depend on how things are', secondly that there are human needs which vary, and thirdly that 'there is how we see things and that also may change over time' (*Ibid.*) In answer to the second question, we are told that 'our readiness to classify things into discrete units is grounded in human need or, more generally speaking, in the human form of life'. The reader is left with the impression that something has gone distinctly wrong here. If Wittgenstein does not ask how we get from *recognition* of similarities to classificatory concepts, the reason is surely that if this is a genuine question, it must be empirical in nature, in which case it is of no concern to him. On the other hand, if this recognition of similarities is understood to be inherently conceptual, in which case it is already a recognition of *kinds* of items distinguishable in the environment, it would for Wittgenstein normally be taken to involve the prior use of a previously learned language.

Later in the chapter, Sluga emphasises Wittgenstein's resistance to historical, *i.e.*, developmental and causal explanation, and sees it as a consequence of the way he thinks about human action (*Ibid.*, 90). According to Sluga, Wittgenstein in the *Blue Book* sharply distinguishes reasons from causes because our knowledge of the chain of causes which has no definite limit is hypothetical, whereas our 'knowledge' about the 'chain' of reasons for our actions is immediate and certain. The discussion then jumps to *Zettel* § 608 as an example of Wittgenstein's most pointed

rejection of the possibility of providing causal explanations of human action. But this is once again much too quick, and neglects the possibility that *Zettel* §§ 608 - 610 is concerned solely with rejecting a certain misleading *picture* of the relationship between the mental and the physical. (Cf. *PI* § 412).

Furthermore, whilst Wittgenstein offers examples of the difference between providing a reason for an action as distinct from providing a cause, *e.g.*, in his painting a red patch on being told to do so *because* this colour happens to come to his mind on hearing the word 'red' (*Blue Book*, 15), as distinct, say, from painting a red patch *because* at just this point on the canvas he believes this colour to evoke the right aesthetic response, philosophers often feel justified in disassociating the concept of human *action* from the concept of *cause* altogether. It would, for example, be quite normal to think of human actions as performed for particular reasons or motives, whilst finding the *causes* of these actions solely in certain physical factors underlying those bodily movements which can express quite different actions. Raising one's arm, for example, whilst a bodily movement, can be the expression of many different actions, like trying to halt the traffic, say, or attempting to draw attention to one's self. It will then follow that someone who believes that there are *really* ultimate *causes* for all human actions will be someone who is subject to a *picture* in which the chain of causes can be imagined to go on indefinitely in a particular direction. Towards the end of the chapter, Sluga draws a distinction between *similarity* concepts and *causal* concepts. Using the example of the family tree provided by Indo-European languages, he indicates how in this case 'our grasp of the phenomena becomes firmer when we think not only in terms of similarities but also in the richer and more suggestive vocabulary of a causal order' (*Ibid.*, 93). The notion of a *cause* can from this point of view be regarded as having many different kinds of application in different contexts.

Chapter 6 on 'our unsurveyable grammar' is largely occupied with the consequences of *Philosophical Investigations* § 122. Sluga finds the crucial philosophical difficulty of the passage to lie in the claim that 'our grammar lacks surveyability' (*Ibid.*, 98). Regarding the existing Anscombe translation as unsatisfactory (though the new Hacker/Schulte rendering would clearly be more to his liking), Sluga may nevertheless be thought to make rather heavy weather of the passage in

subsequent pages before coming to the following conclusion:

...our capacity for using words, the command we have of our grammar, our ability to participate in the human form of life cannot be due to our possession of a surveyable representation of the use of our words...There are no such representations to be had. We acquire our linguistic capacities and our ability to participate in human life rather by imitation and habituation, by drill and practice (*Ibid.*, 107).

Consequently, in order to use language in normal day-to-day intercourse, the kind of understanding that would accrue from acquiring a 'perspicuous representation' (Anscombe) or a 'surveyable representation (Sluga) of our use of words is simply not required. However, for particular purposes, of which for Wittgenstein the ability to penetrate to the source of philosophical confusion is clearly one, the introduction or invention of those *intermediate cases* to which Wittgenstein refers can help us to *command a clear view* of the use of our words. Again, the language of the builders is an example, although, as Sluga remarks, 'we must remain alert to the fact that such constructions can, in turn, give rise to new philosophical confusions' (*Ibid.*, 108).

Sluga extends this idea beyond a mere concern for language when he sees Wittgenstein's treatment of Frazer as a matter of providing a proper understanding of religious practices and rituals in terms of a 'surveyable representation' of the 'grammar' of these activities in their cultural setting; and here he is clearly offering an account of why, say, we might come to understand the native rituals *not* as a primitive and ineffective attempt to have some (causal) effect on the weather, but as an expression of reverence for the gods. This point is further extended into the political and social arena where Sluga introduces the notion of *hyper-complexity* to describe those 'unsurveyable totalities' like human culture and civilisation, and the 'form of human life as a whole' (*Ibid.*, 110). At this point, Sluga's text is perhaps not quite as clear as one might wish, for he appears to be suggesting that whilst social theorists remain committed to achieving a 'synoptic view of human life', their attempts to do so must remain problematic because they fail to realise that they are

dealing with 'unsurveyable totalities' of 'hyper-complexity'.

This raises the question whether what he says about social theorists might be extended to religious and philosophical views about mankind in general, for he may be understood to be implying that whilst it is just not possible to achieve a 'surveyable representation' of human life and culture as a whole, this has certainly not prevented thinkers throughout history from believing that they had in some sense 'achieved' such a 'surveyable representation' of Man and his place in the Universe. But, if Sluga is right, attempts to do so will inevitably be doomed before they begin.

It is interesting to note that this connects, however indirectly, with Wittgenstein's puzzling question at the end of § 122, *viz.*, 'Is this a "Weltanschauung"?' Sluga's position then becomes even more difficult to fully grasp, for he appears to suggest that in order to act out a political role, agents require a 'comprehensive view' of the political system, itself a 'hyper-complex totality', when it has already been implied that this cannot be achieved. Such a view will be 'synoptic' in character. Here the reader is left to reflect that those, *e.g.*, political parties, who offer opposing overviews and assessments of the 'hyper-complex totality' that is the 'political system' in the course of judging what is the 'right' way forward, will each feel that they have achieved a 'surveyable representation' of the field in which they are operating.

Chapter 7, 'visible rails invisibly laid to infinity', as the title suggests, is a treatment of Wittgenstein on rules and rule-following, in which Sluga asks three questions about rules that he takes Wittgenstein to be raising, *viz.*, about their inexorability, their generality, and their 'normative' character. Believing that the term 'norm' is best restricted to rules involving sanctions, and seeing that the 'generality' of rules depends on the regularity and constancy of certain features of the world around us, he feels that the inexorability of rules is a complex question to which he is unable to do full justice, referring the reader to the voluminous secondary literature surrounding Saul Kripke on rules and private language. He does, however, locate the central problem in Wittgenstein's reference in § 219 to the thought that 'all the steps are really already taken', as if (§ 188) they were in some *unique* way predetermined or anticipated, because in Sluga's view there is something inherently

problematic in this kind of claim:

But he tries to show through a multiplicity of illustrations how questionable that claim really is. The difficulty is only that to deny it would seem to lead us to the equally unacceptable conclusion that 'no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule (PI 201) (*Ibid.*, 120)

Claiming that interpreters since Kripke have vigorously debated how to resolve the paradox that Wittgenstein discovers at the heart of rule-following, and remarking that whatever his resolution of it might be, it forms part of a long-term project to strip terms like 'necessary' and 'must' of their metaphysical aura, Sluga in quoting § 190 and § 201 fails to conclude that he has actually supplied all the ingredients for the 'resolution' that Wittgenstein provides. Wittgenstein shows that the 'paradox' is actually of our own making, because it results, when doing philosophy, from viewing rules outwith those ordinary contexts in which they find their natural expression. What seems queer, in a passage Sluga quotes (§ 197), only becomes queer when we are led to think that the future development of the series must in some way *already* be present when we grasp the rule, 'and yet isn't present'. Yet we certainly understand the word, and its meaning lies in its use. That, after all, is the point of the famous second and third paragraphs of § 201. The remainder of the chapter expands upon our understanding of rules in relation to 'intentions' and 'interpretation', and concludes with a discussion of 'Contested Rules' the interpretation of which one might, for example, find argued over in a legal context. Sluga remarks at one point that 'the everyday language of highly trained philosophers differs naturally from that of everyday men and women' (*Ibid.*, 129), referring in a footnote (Fnt. 9, *Ibid.*, 130) to Ernest Gellner's *Words and Things* (Gollancz, 1959). It is not entirely clear whether this statement is made with ironic intent.

There can be little doubt that Hans Sluga has produced a thought-provoking and in a number of respects original contribution to our understanding of Wittgenstein. Only too aware, as he

puts it, that 'knowledgeable readers will come to understand very quickly that the selection of topics and the emphases I have chosen in this book are very much my own', Sluga has picked as one of his central themes the relevance of Wittgenstein's thought to 'the peculiar problems of our contemporary social and political existence' (*Ibid.*, vii). Yet he is equally aware that in a conventional sense Wittgenstein was simply not politically orientated in the way in which, for example, Russell may be said to have been, because he evidently despised the superficial sentimentality he took to lie behind, for example, Russell's liberalism and his sympathy for the general suffering of mankind. He therefore tended to share with Schopenhauer the kind of pessimism which finds its expression in rather conservative conclusions. Therein lies the paradox that makes Wittgenstein's relevance to political thinking a highly complex issue, one which Sluga is to be thanked for having brought to our attention. In this respect at least, his book is in accord with the Series Editor's requirement that the thought of its 'Great Minds' should be shown to be relevant to 'the way we think and live today' (*Editor's blurb*).

Generally speaking, of course, a straightforward linear progression through the texts of the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, providing an exegesis in the manner of Baker & Hacker amongst others, has proven to be a most suitable means, especially for the reader new to these works, for gaining at least a preliminary understanding of them. There are already in existence so many volumes dealing with these books either individually or collectively, with more appearing every month, that it now seems almost unfair to recommend some rather than others. It is worth pointing out that Sluga's own recommendations for 'Further Reading' provided at the end of a number of his chapters seem unnecessarily limited. Where Sluga's book does score well, even allowing for his rather unorthodox championing of the *Blue Book*, almost at times as if it is a 'better' introduction to the later thought than the *Investigations*, is in providing a new perspective on Wittgenstein's thinking to someone already to some degree familiar with it.

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.