

From: British Wittgenstein Society [bws@herts.ac.uk]

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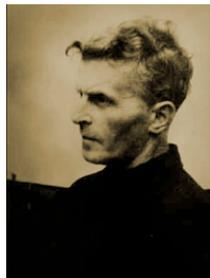


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BWS Newsletter Issue no 11

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Nota Bene

Report on the Sixth lecture of the BWS Ludwig Wittgenstein Lecture Series

by Ian Ground

Professor Sandra Laugier on

'The Importance of Importance: Cavell and Diamond on ethics'

*University of Hertfordshire, UK
9 May 2011*



How does what we think or find to matter in life connect with the ethical? How does it determine our philosophical and personal quests? And are we to be wary of what is often our distorted sense of importance? Rejecting what earlier philosophy had deemed important, Wittgenstein asks: 'Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems to destroy everything great and interesting?' (PI 118). So what account of the connection between the important and the ethical should we glean from the reception of Wittgenstein's thought?

Is it a matter, as mainstream ethics has maintained, of merely enlarging the vocabulary of ethical theory, in the hope that philosophical puzzles about moral judgement and values will drain away? Or is something much more radical required and perhaps with far less comfortable and comforting outcomes?

About BWS

BWS is a British focal point for research and exchange of ideas among Wittgenstein scholars and students throughout the world.

This Newsletter will be sent exclusively to members of the BWS, on a regular basis, in order to draw attention to updates on the website, or to share as yet unpublished news.

This paper presented the case for pursuing the latter option. Part of a larger project of providing a Wittgensteinian interpretation of 'care' based ethics and drawing principally on the work of Cavell, Diamond and Murdoch, Professor Laugier attempted to tease out the often highly nuanced implications of a radically particularist approach to what is important in life and the manner in which its importance strikes us or may be hidden from us.

A point of departure for Professor Sandra Laugier's reflections was the thought that moral thinking is not the name of some particular point of view on our lives, lying alongside say the economic, or political or personal. For then, we might ask, why on earth should we bother to take up such a perspective which is often irksome and not infrequently dangerous to our apparent interests? Rather

moral thinking should be understood as the name we give to our thinking, as a whole, about our lives and the world as a whole, and how they actually are.

Laugier's treatment of this and other cases made clear that film (seen through the eyes of Cavell) and literature (as read by Murdoch and Diamond) should not be understood merely as a source of examples to provide the moral philosopher with some grit for their pearls of principle, in lieu of real cases. (There surely is something odious about a theory of ethics that that treats say, the way someone deals with the loss of a child as an example. But then that very sentence does that so what are we to do?)

Nor even do they serve primarily as particularist correctives to the dominant consequentialist and deontological models. Rather it is reflection on the way in which we engage with these artistic media that provides the relevant insights into how we both succeed and fail in making sense, of "telling", what matters. What was particularly striking about the thinking discussed was the particularist emphasis on our failures to see what is important, the seemingly inevitable way in which our very search for what is important in our lives renders it hidden. The case was well made with reference to a scene from *The Philadelphia Story* – a film which so much enthralled Cavell.

Discussion raised questions about the autonomy of the moral, the adequacy of Cavell's stance towards film, the differences between film and literature, the relation between the ethical and the aesthetic, and the question of whether if philosophy were able to fully embrace the particularist stance asked of it by Diamond, it would be setting itself the impossible ambition of becoming literature.

The final impression that lingered with this member of the audience was the rather unwelcome thought that actually finding what is important in one's life might turn out to be a source of pain and regret. We should not expect, it seems, that the rough ground, to which Wittgenstein urged us to return, will be always or indeed perhaps ever, comfortable under foot.

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Committee

We are delighted to welcome [Prof Jane Heal](#), Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge as an Honorary Committee member.

Jane studied for her first degree in Cambridge, reading History for two years and then Philosophy (or 'Moral Sciences' as it was called in those days) for another two years. She also took her Ph.D. at Cambridge, working on problems on the philosophy of language. After two years post doctoral study in the US (at Princeton and Berkeley) she was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Having taught there for several years she moved back to Cambridge. She was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1997.

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The BWS Theatre Outing

Twenty-two members of the BWS gathered on 20 April for a group outing to see *The Crooked Roads* by William Lyons, directed by Nick Blackburn at the Riverside Studios, London. The play was a world premiere of a drama celebrating Wittgenstein's life and his relationships with fellow philosophers, notably Russell and Moore. A small cast of five managed to create a sense of activity and bustle in a series of short scenes which referenced famous moments in the philosopher's life. The small, but energetic young cast was augmented by pre-recorded set pieces on flickering screens. This was a complex and challenging script and the director varied the pace. Rob Heath, who played Wittgenstein, relied a little too much on an angry staccato, but this seemed suitably in keeping with his character.



A full review is at <http://londonist.com/2011/04/theatre-review-wittgenstein-riverside-studios.php>

The Director wrote to our President afterwards saying: 'I just wanted to say how much we enjoyed meeting your members who attended the Wittgenstein production at Riverside Studios last night. It was fascinating talking to them afterwards. I think the cast were a bit nervous of the group's likely erudition before they got to the pub but we left wishing you could come every

night.'

The playwright, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin stitched in a number of quotations. After the outing he said: 'It was great to meet you and the members of the BWS on the 20th April – this has been a highlight for both me and the cast. It is not often one gets to talk to really knowledgeable and enthusiastic and kind members of an audience. And thanks, of course, for the support for our unusual enterprise that your en bloc presence indicated. This is greatly valued by us.'

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BWS Wittgenstein's 60th Anniversary Competition

There's still time to enter our competition - deadline 15 June. We've already received some ingenious entries.

Write an essay or a poem of no more than 1500 words on the theme: 'Wittgenstein Sixty Years On'. It can be a personal view or you might like to try your hand at a little pastiche of Wittgenstein's writing - look at <http://stevepetersen.net/personal/wittgenstein-fog.html>. You could outdo Michael Frayn by producing your own affectionate tribute along the same lines: a piece that reads like Wittgenstein whilst evidently being something wittily different.

The winner will be invited to attend the BWS annual conference in Gregynog (see Conference box) where they will read out their essay, poem or pastiche. A selection of entries will also be published on the website.

Please send entries as email attachments to bws@herts.ac.uk. Entries will be judged by the Executive Committee. Results will be announced by end of June. (Prize includes conference registration fee, accommodation and all meals. Should the winner have already registered for the conference, s/he will be fully refunded.)

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BWS annual conference 2011

Last call for the [Fourth BWS Annual Conference](#), on 'Wittgenstein and the Swansea School' at the University of Wales' [Gregynog Conference Centre](#) on 16-17 July. After 15 May places cannot be guaranteed.

Updated information with all the speakers' links:

Organisers: [Professor David Cockburn](#) (Lampeter) and [Mario von der Ruhr](#) (Swansea)

Speakers:

[Mikel Burley](#) (Leeds)

Mounce and Winch on Understanding (or Not Understanding) an Indigenous Society

[James Conant](#) (Chicago)

Wittgenstein's Methods

[Brian Davies](#) (Fordham) and [Andrew Gleeson](#) (Flinders)

DZ Phillips on God and Evil

[Cora Diamond](#) (Virginia)

Criticism of a form of thought from 'outside' (Dilman, Winch)

[Michel le Du](#) (Strasbourg)

Wittgenstein & Winch on nature and convention

[Rai Gaita](#) (Kings College London; Australian Catholic University)

R.F. Holland on Absolute Value

[Anniken Greve](#) (Tromso University, Norway)

Reading after Wittgenstein

[Lars Hertzberg](#) (Abo Akademi)

Rhees and conversation

[Olli Lagerspetz](#) (Abo Akademi)

Peter Winch on Political Legitimacy

[Chryssi Sidiropoulou](#) (Bogazici University, Istanbul)



Ilham Dilman

The BWS conference will be immediately followed by a one-day meeting of the [Welsh Philosophical Society Programme](#) here. This will end at 4.30 pm on Monday 18 July. You can register for it on the same [registration form](#).

For information about Gregynog Hall, including how to get there, see their website: <http://www.wales.ac.uk/en/UniversityConferenceCentre/GregynogHall.aspx>

There is a good rail service to Newtown, from which we will arrange a connection to Gregynog (a 15-minute drive). If there is any demand for this, we will aim to co-ordinate transport from London, through a mini-bus or car pool. If you are driving and have room in your car for other participants, please let us know.

The Conference Proceedings will be published in a special issue of *Philosophical Investigations*.

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The lecture series

The next two in the BWS lecture series are:

[Autumn 2011: Professor Bernard Harrison](#)
Title: Wittgenstein, Reality and the Novel

[Spring 2012: Prof. Martin Kusch \(University of Vienna\)](#)
Title: *On Certainty* and the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*

All lectures will be followed by a wine reception. These are complimentary, but advance registration is required once the announcement has been sent, so do check back to the website for details.



Publishers' discounts

Ashgate joins OUP, Routledge and Wiley-Blackwell by offering members of the British Wittgenstein Society a 20% discount off Philosophy titles. See our [Recent Books](#) page.

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Housekeeping

BWS now has over 300 members. Please let us know when you change your email address, as we're getting some bounces when we do the mailings

To unsubscribe or inquire about posting news please email bws@herts.ac.uk.

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Indexing

If you need a professional indexer who studied Wittgenstein under Norman Malcolm and Max Black at Cornell University, try www.nancygerth.com.

Nancy Gerth enjoys indexing volumes in the history of philosophy, analytic and linguistic philosophy, and twentieth century philosophy. She wrote her own dissertation on Hegel comparing his ideas to those of conceptual analysts of the twentieth century. Formerly married to Richard McDonough, she also worked with him on the early stages of *The Argument of the Tractatus* (Sunny Press 1986).

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The BWS website is designed and maintained by [Jane Dörner](#).

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