

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

Subject: Newsletter no.13 Sponsored by Shell

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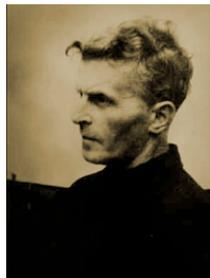


11.11.11

BWS Newsletter Issue no 13

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Nota Bene

by Ian Ground

Report on the Seventh lecture of the BWS Ludwig Wittgenstein Lecture Series [Wittgenstein, Reality and the Novel](#) given by Professor Bernard Harrison on 18 October.



Throughout his distinguished career, Bernard Harrison has maintained that dominant accounts of the relation of language to the world make it impossible to understand a great number of things: mind and perceptual experience, ethics and religion. His theme was that such accounts also make it impossible to understand why, and how, great literature should matter.

Professor Harrison argued that on the view of language as, essentially, an instrument for describing the nature of empirical reality, it becomes mysterious that writers of literary art should do anything other than let the world shine through their prose. On this view, just how the writer achieves such a feat of invisibility may be a matter of technical interest but it is one to which we should be aesthetically and morally indifferent. The main task of the author is to get out of the way. But on another dominant view of language - as an autonomous realm of always displacing meanings - it will be equally mysterious that we should be, as it seems we are, centrally interested, morally engaged and emotionally moved both by what an author reveals about the world in which we live and how that revelation is achieved.

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to members of the BWS, on a regular basis, in order to draw attention to updates on the website, or to share as yet unpublished news.

According to Harrison, the two views, which purport to be rivals, have much more in common than their advocates ever concede. The problem with thinking that language stands in some dyadic relation to the world, mediated by correspondence between truth functional statements and facts, is that it assumes that our enlanguaged souls could have become so removed from reality as to be in need of that mysterious relation to connect them back to it. But this assumption, that what we say and take ourselves to mean might never connect with the world itself, is the same view held to be true and indeed worthy of celebration by *les incontournables* of post-modernism. Both the hair shirt Anglo-Empiricist and his louche continental cousins think it conceivable that we could as it were, be detached from the real. The only difference is that the former rides reference to our rescue, whilst the latter revels in the heroic isolation.

Harrison, following Wittgenstein, and building on work published with Patricia Hanna, argued that we are in need neither of describing nor proscribing that referential relation. Instead we are, 'always already' in the world through our active involvement in those activities and practices that come with the human territory and it is in and through these practices that language engages with reality. To misquote Cavell, asking how we get from language to the world is like asking how to get from Paris to France. If that is your question, you really are lost.

The great strength of Professor Harrison's interpretation of Wittgenstein was the immediate implication for the question of how literature engages with the imagination and so why great literature should matter to us. Demonstrated in detail and with some marvellously vivid readings from Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, Harrison showed that what great writers do is deploy their mastery of language in making manifest the practices and attitudes, the affective and conceptual worlds in which language moves and has its life. The art of literature, neither describes nor preterms the real. Rather, by letting particularities of world, deed and character, speak through particularities of word, phrase and linguistic colour, literature is capable of expressing, not that things are, but how things are for us and it is through this that it gains its unique importance.

In the lively discussion, questions and comments soon found the way to the heart of the paper. One interlocutor worried that the speaker's account of fiction as a kind of sociological science was on the wrong side of Wittgenstein criticism of Frazer's account of 'primitive' rituals as a kind of natural science. Others worried that Harrison's interpretation of the concept of a practice involved a conflation of Wittgenstein's concepts of language game and form of life. The questions evolved into a worry about whether the proffered account of the triadic relation between word, world and practice gave sufficient attention to the natural in human life and whether the Fregean insistence on truth-conditionality, in the background of the speaker's account, was ill-suited to his more strategic aims. Professor Harrison gave spirited chase to all these points until all sides were able to reach agreement that the discussion might best continue over a glass of wine. One can only think that Dickens would have been pleased at that.

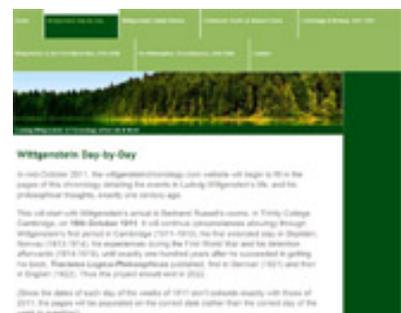
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Wittgenstein postings

Wittgenstein Day-by-Day

John Preston is charting accounts of Wittgenstein's thoughts and activities, exactly one hundred years after the event. See www.wittgensteinchronology.com

He hopes his postings might be of interest to people who want to follow Wittgenstein's intellectual development (up to the publication of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, at least). Preston is trying to include what is known about his activities on every day where we know what he was doing (from his own letters, Russell's letters, Wittgenstein's notebook entries, etc.).



Wittgenstein's Trails in Iceland

In September of 1912 Ludwig Wittgenstein visited Iceland with his friend David Pinsent. Pinsent kept a detailed diary of their travels that give a great insight into the life of Icelanders in the beginning of the 20th century, but also portrays Wittgenstein's genius along with his famous eccentricity.

On September 14th, 2012, exactly one hundred years later a group will follow their trail, visiting many of the most famous places in Iceland like, Þingvellir, Geysir and Gullfoss. The group will meet the grandchildren and grand grandchildren of the some of the people that hosted Wittgenstein and Pinsent a century ago.

Click for [Tour description](#)



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Home from home

Home from Home

Ludwig Wittgenstein's Norwegian retreat at Skjolden no longer exists, but his presence among the fjords is still felt 60 years after his death. An article by Lesley Chamberlain published in [Standpoint magazine](#) 11 October 2011, pp54-55 explains. The pdf version (1 Mb) is available [on this link](#) with the magazine and the author's permission.



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Wittgenstein and photography

The Wittgenstein and Photography Exhibition, which formed part of the 60th anniversary celebrations at the University of Cambridge from 27 April-15 August gave rise to a discussion between Michael Nedo and Michael Potter which has been recorded on [video by Dr Constantinou Athanasopoulos](#). There is also a [pdf file on this project](#) (5 Mb).

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The lecture series

The next two in the BWS lecture series are:

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



[Autumn 2012: Professor Paul Standish](#)
On Being Resolute

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.



The next BWS Conference

Fifth BWS Annual Conference: Wittgenstein - Enactivism and Animal Minds

To be held 7-8 July 2012, at the University of Hertfordshire.
 The conference will be organised by Daniel D. Hutto and Daniele Moyal-Sharrock.

Confirmed speakers so far are:

[Colin Allen](#) (Indiana)
[Peter Carruthers](#) (Maryland)
[Hans-Johann Glock](#) (Zurich)
[Daniel D. Hutto](#) (Hertfordshire)
[Jose Medina](#) (Vanderbilt)
[Daniele Moyal-Sharrock](#) (Hertfordshire)
[Alva Noë](#) (Berkeley)
[Michael Tomasello](#) (Max Planck Institute)



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Housekeeping

There are two new pages on the website:

[Journals](#) which are now being listed separately from books.

and

[Postings](#) which announces items of interest to Wittgensteinians. New postings are all put into the newsletters and the page is an archive of all of these.

New items on the site include the [Expressive Communication and Origins of Meaning \(ECOM\) research group](#) which is on the Wittgenstein main page.

We also announced an event at the [Free Word Centre](#) in Farringdon which has a programme of events about translation with the aim of de-mystifying the process and linking translation to other fields, including art, music, philosophy and diplomatic relations, among others. Readers might like to see what other events they are holding.

And, as usual, there are several new books and reviews.

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

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

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