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Nota Bene

by Daniel Hutto

Report on the Eighth Lecture of the Ludwig Wittgenstein Lecture Series



On *Certainty and the Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* given by Professor Martin Kusch on 8 May 2012

The two most seminal readings of *On Certainty* – those offered by Marie McGinn in *Sense and Certainty*, 1982 and Danièle Moyal-Sharrock in *Understanding Wittgenstein's On Certainty*, 2007 – stress the non-propositional, non-intellectual, non-justificatory character in which Wittgenstein viewed our basic certainties. For McGinn 'what lies at the foundations of our ordinary practice' is not something that admits of justification or, indeed, stands in need of it. Thus, what grounds our practices 'is a practical certainty, a confident "taking hold", which does not spring from the possession of good reasons, but is an expression of our accomplishment in the employment of our techniques of description' (p. 160). At the core of Moyal-Sharrock's reading we find the claim that 'Wittgenstein subverts the traditional picture of basic beliefs. They are not indubitable or self-justified propositions, but animal certainties' (p. 8).

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to members of the BWS, on a regular basis, in order to draw attention to updates on the website, or to share as yet unpublished news.

Both of these so-called non-epistemic views take it that mathematical practices are not founded on propositions. Such practices are not based on knowable truths. Hence, there is no question of any ultimate justification of the foundations of mathematics. In the end, mathematical knowledge rests upon and revealed in applications not propositions, hence its foundations are content-less. And precisely the same is true of basic certainties or hinges – they too exhibit the features just mentioned. Hence the non-epistemic views see a parallel between Wittgenstein's views about mathematics and basic certainties. In Kusch's words they assume these domains are analogous in the relevant respects.

Yet Professor Kusch did not come to Hertfordshire in order to praise Caesar. Throwing down the gauntlet, in a compelling and charmingly delivered lecture, he argued that the radically anti-intellectualist and non-epistemic views that these readings seek to promote are, in fact, absent from Wittgenstein's later and final writings. In contrast, Kusch claimed that on close inspection we find that Wittgenstein, in line with his avowed anti-essentialism, was not advancing any global and definite claims about what lies at the roots of mathematical practices and the nature of our basic certainties. Reminding us of Wittgenstein's Shakespearean ambition to 'teach us differences', Kusch argued against the idea Wittgenstein was

advancing any 'one size fits all' view of the non-epistemic character the foundations of mathematics or hinge certainties. In a bid to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's views on these topics are more variegated and nuanced than the non-epistemic readings make out, he drew attention to thirty six passages from the *Lectures of the Foundations of Mathematics*, the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, and *On Certainty*. On close examination, he claimed, if anything, we find more support for some variant of the epistemic reading. Thus, he concluded, we have good reason to re-think the way in which Wittgenstein understood the way in which the two domains are analogous. As might be expected, the ensuing discussion period was occupied by picking over and question the details of Kusch's way of reading the core claims of the so-called non-epistemic views (which was especially enlightening since Moyal-Sharrock was present) as well as challenging the specific claims made about how best to read the individual passages from Wittgenstein. There is no doubt that it will take time to evaluate the force of Kusch's challenge and that responding to it will take the debate on these topics to new level. Those who did not manage to attend will surely 'think themselves accursed they were not here'.

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Obituary

Professor Frank Cioffi who enjoyed an international reputation in Wittgenstein studies died after a long illness on 1 January 2012. He was 83.

Like most of us, I first met Frank Cioffi through his work. I was stunned by the man, the humanity, that pierced through the writing. Reading Frank was like sitting across from him, peering into his luminous black eyes, and hearing him passionately, noisily, forcefully voice the sentences that are going to flow into your bloodstream. For I did get to meet the man (though I was told it wouldn't be easy), and he became one of my most cherished friends. When new friends I visited at Canterbury learned I was doing a PhD on Wittgenstein, they said they knew Frank Cioffi, but that he was somewhat of a recluse. Still, having persuaded them to give me his address, I immediately wrote and invited him to contribute to a volume I was working on at the time: *The Third Wittgenstein*. An enthusiastic type-written reply came in the post, and Frank's wonderful 'The Riddle of Life' resulted from that. Meeting Frank 'live' came later. When, in spite of his reluctance to travel, he agreed to be on the jury for my PhD. I remember spotting him from afar in the hotel lobby, a tall man in loose hanging jeans and a navy sweat shirt who, upon seeing me, leapt forward to give me a bear hug as if we'd been old and close friends. Frank was nothing if not passionate. But it was the fusion of passion and intelligence that made him. His intellect was immense, and it was served by an acute sensitivity and an exceptional memory. Frank knew, *intimately*, literature, philosophy, psychology, and he also knew how to call on them, interweave them, and present them in such a way that his lectures and papers were like tapestries of humanism. No recluse, Frank; he was at heart a thinker, but a thinker who loved life and exuded life. His presence will always loom large in my own life and work.

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock

[Obituaries by Cioffi's nephew and by Edward Greenwood are on the website.](#)

His lecture in the BWS Lecture Series 'Was Wittgenstein Right to call Science a Trap?' is on video [on this link](#) and a digest of the lecture is in [Newsletter No. 9](#).

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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. Please register for the conference as soon as possible as places are limited. To register, please go to [BWS Conference Registration](#).

Confirmed speakers are:

[Colin Allen](#) (Indiana)
[Dorit Bar-On](#) (UNC-Chapel Hill)
[Ned Block](#) (New York University)
[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)

Conference proceedings to be published in a special issue of *American Philosophical Quarterly*.

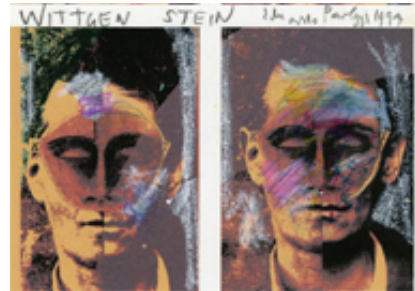
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Wittgenstein postings

Wittgenstein – Philosophy and Photography Exhibition

Two important Wittgenstein exhibitions: 'Wittgenstein and Cambridge' and 'Wittgenstein and Photography' are taking place at LSE on 8 May- 29 June. They were first shown at Clare Hall and at PandIS, the Photographic and Illustration Service of Cambridge University ([see our video of it](#)). It features portrait prints of Wittgenstein by Eduardo Paolozzi (see right).

[More information on the LSE website.](#)



You can Listen Again to

[BBC Radio 4 Series 26: Great Lives Ludwig Wittgenstein](#)

which was first broadcast on 13 December 2011 at 4.30 (you may have to scroll through to find it). Wittgenstein was chosen by the writer Raymond Tallis. With biographer Ray Monk, he brings alive this most enigmatic of men and his singular life. And to make sure that they don't get lost in Wittgensteinian thought, presenter Matthew Parris brings along a whistle to blow whenever he feels in danger.



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Videos

Videos of speakers at the 5th BWS conference, Wittgenstein and the Swansea School 2011, are now online and can be watched via Vimeo of these links:

[Welcome](#)
[Lars Hertzberg](#)
[Michel le Du](#)
[Cora Diamond](#)
[James Conant](#)
[Brian Davies and Andrew Gleeson](#)
[Mikel Burley](#)
[Anniken Greve](#)
[Rai Gita](#)
[Olli Lagerspetz](#)
[Photo memoirs related to DZ Phillips and the Swansea School](#)

Please note that the videos are created by Dr C Athanasopoulos, FHEA, for the use of BWS members and friends of the Society. The videos are copyrighted and remain the property of BWS and C Athanasopoulos. No alteration of the video or audio contained in them is allowed, and they should only be used for educational purposes and never on the basis of a fee or other financial gain. For any information and question in relation to the videos please contact: Dr C Athanasopoulos, FHEA at cathanas@hol.gr and ca356@cam.ac.uk.

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The lecture series

The next two in the BWS lecture series are:

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

Date to be announced

[14 May 2013: Dr Ian Ground](#)
Listen to the Lion: Wittgenstein and Animal Minds

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.



Housekeeping

Your web editor (possibly mistakenly) thought Wittgenstein would have enjoyed language games with numbers in 2011 when there lots of palindrome dates - in fact the newsletters all came out on a palindromic date - the last one being the sparkling 11.11.11. There were four newsletters last year (normally we send three).

This year too is a good year for palindromes with almost every month in this year, 2012, capable of being rendered as a palindrome (depending where you live and how you write it). The exception is October, which has instead 10.11.12 .

Subscribers please note that there are 15 books available for review. All you have to do is request the book - and *write something about it*. Long critical notices or short reviews are equally acceptable. Books available are listed on the [reviews page](#).

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

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BWS Executive Committee



Dr Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, *President*
 University of Hertfordshire
 Hatfield, Herts AL10 9AB



Dr Ian Ground, *Secretary*
The University of Sunderland
Sunderland
SR1 3SD



Prof. Daniel D Hutto, *Treasurer*
University of Hertfordshire
Hatfield
Herts AL10 9AB



Dr Constantinos Athanasopoulos, *Editor*
Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies
Wesley House, Jesus Lane Cambridge, CB5 8BJ

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

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