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Contents

Nota Bene

14th BWS Annual Lecture
Report by Tom Joyce.
Constantine Sandis -
Wittgenstein & ‘Friends’ on
Action and the Will

[W]hen ‘I raise my arm’, my
arm rises [hebt sich mein Arm].
And now a problem emerges:
what is left over if I subtract the
fact that my arm goes up from
the fact that I raise my arm?
((Are the kinaesthetic
sensations my willing?)) (PI
§621).

What did Wittgenstein mean by this remark? Are we
to take it at face value? That is: does Wittgenstein
take it to be a well-conceived philosophical question
that we should try to answer?

Many contemporary philosophers of action have
thought that he does, and have gone on to try to
answer it. Most Wittgensteinians, including Professor
Sandis, think that he doesn’t; yet many of them, again
including Sandis, have gone on to answer it anyway.
And this second point seemed to be what most
interested him. There is a kind of standing temptation,
he suggested, to respond to Wittgenstein’s question as
though it were in good order, even when one knows it
isn’t.

Focussing on that question may therefore have influenced subsequent philosophers of action, shaping the terms of
the debate. To the extent that the question has been misunderstood – or is somehow irresistible – that influence
has not been especially productive, since the resulting debate has at least partly been about how to answer a very
bad question that we ought not to be asking.

Professor Sandis wove his talk around a long list of quotations, reproduced on the handout. In talking us through
them, he described the way philosophical thought about the relation between action and the will has developed
over the last century or so. He began with some of the philosophers to whose thinking the later Wittgenstein was
responding, for example Arthur Schopenhauer and the earlier Wittgenstein, since, as Sandis argued, you cannot
understand Wittgenstein unless you understand who he is responding to Schopenhauer holds a dual-aspect view,
whereby bodily movements are not caused by acts of will, but the same event ‘given in two entirely different
ways’ (WWR, I, 100 & 108). And the early Wittgenstein has it that ‘The act of will is not the cause of the action
but the action itself’ (N 1916; 87-8).

Those contemporary philosophers who have in turn responded to Wittgenstein have often asked what we need to
add to my arm moving to make it a case of me moving my arm. But Sandis noted that William James, writing before Wittgenstein, had answered this question with kinaesthetics – the feeling of moving my arm – the implication being that positions like James’s had moved Wittgenstein to ask the question in the first place: perhaps Wittgenstein’s question deliberately evokes such positions in order to cast doubt on them.

Contemporary action theorists divide roughly into two camps: volitionists and anti-volitionists. Most of those in both camps seem to take it that Wittgenstein’s question is in good order and worth trying to answer. Volitionists think that the answer is something like ‘willing’. It turns out that there is a surprising variety of volitionist positions, united only by the belief that a mental act causes a bodily movement. Anti-volitionists think the answer is ‘nothing’: some cases of my arm going up are cases of my raising it. But they themselves divide into two groups: those who think that what we have is a bodily movement with a cause (in Davidson’s case an intention); and those, like Hacker and Schroeder, who think that all we have is bodily movements in a particular context.

Professor Sandis noted, on the basis of textual evidence that he provided, that the non-causal anti-volitionists, among whom he counts himself, are frequently found trying to answer Wittgenstein’s question in this way. The worry is that these are the very same people who think that it is a bad question, that nobody should try to answer it, and that Wittgenstein is simply drawing our attention to a way of thinking that he does not endorse.

According to Sandis, Wittgenstein’s main concern when discussing these issues is captured in remarks like these: ‘There is not one common difference between so-called voluntary acts and involuntary ones, viz. the presence or absence of one element, the ‘act of volition’ (BB, 151f). ‘[V]oluntary movement [die willkürliche Bewegung] is marked by the absence of surprise’ (PI §628). ‘[M]ovements with their normal surroundings of intention, learning, trying, acting’ (RPP I §776). The danger is that in emphasising the variegation of cases we can be led to the general claim that voluntary action is just a bodily movement in a certain context – and that already looks like an answer to Wittgenstein’s question.

The mistake is to think that willing is something I do with my mind which causes my body to move. For if willing is to be anything at all it cannot be a mental act which causes a bodily movement. Professor Sandis urged us instead to ask ourselves why we are asking this question on any given occasion. What is the context? What are we trying to achieve? For these and other factors will affect what it is correct to say about any given case.

Tom Joyce received his PhD from the University of Reading, completed under the supervision of Jonathan Dancy, in 2008. He currently teaches and writes for the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

New BWS Website

We are delighted to announce the imminent launch of our new BWS website at www.britishwittgensteinsociety.org

Our new website offers a fresh look, improved accessibility, better handling on mobile devices, online society registration, a members area, with facilities to enable you to update your details with us and improved functionality for notification of news and events.

In the last few months, we have been working hard to transfer our content from the existing to the new site. As the site beds down and we develop further, we hope to open up sections to members to allow submission of Wittgenstein-related news, events and links. We believe that the new site will be a terrific platform for the further development of BWS activities online, for managing our real world activities, offering greater benefits to our members and to everyone interested in Wittgenstein studies.

When the new site goes live, our existing site will redirect you. Please then update your bookmarks and check the site regularly for news and updates. There will no doubt be a few teething problems along the way and we appreciate your patience as we develop and enhance the new site.

Our first and existing site has been an enormously valuable asset to the Society and the BWS owes great thanks to its creator and editor, Jane Dorner. BWS President Danièle Moyal-Sharrock says ‘The British Wittgenstein Society, and I personally, would like to thank its friend and webmistress, Jane Dorner, for the splendid work she has done for the Society ever since its founding. Jane conceived, created and maintained the BWS website with flair, ingenuity and enthusiasm. She conceived the Newsletter and implemented it. Her input, suggestions, skill and availability have been vital to the success of the Society.'
Her generosity, and personal friendship to me, enabled the BWS to have a website, and therefore a life. It is with an immense debt and deep gratitude that the BWS say goodbye to an inestimable friend.

Eighth BWS Annual Conference: Wittgenstein, Ethics and Religion

Tuesday 6th - Wednesday 7th September 2016
at Hinsley Hall, 62 Headingley Lane, Leeds, UK
Conference organiser: Dr Mikel Burley (University of Leeds)
Downloadable poster

Speakers

Sophie-Grace Chappell (Open University)
Gabriel Citron (Toronto)
John Haldane (St Andrews)
Stephen Mulhall (Oxford)
Wayne Proudfoot (Columbia)
Duncan Richter (Virginia M.I.)
Genia Schoenbaumsfeld (Southampton)
Michael Scott (Manchester)
Chon Tejedor (Hertfordshire)
Rowan Williams (Cambridge)

Registration

To register, or to request further information, please contact the conference organiser, Mikel Burley (University of Leeds): m.m.burley@leeds.ac.uk

Lecture Series

Spring 2016
15th BWS Ludwig Wittgenstein Lecture
Speaker: Dr John Heaton
Title: The Interface between Wittgenstein's Philosophical Therapy and the Empirical Psychotherapies

Autumn 2016
BWS Ludwig Wittgenstein Lecture
Speaker: Dr Katherine Morris (Oxford University)
Title: Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty on 'lifeworld á prioris'

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.

venue: The Bloomsbury Institute, 50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, in the Conservatory

Wittgenstein-related Publications

The BWS is delighted to announce that the new second edition of Portraits of
Wittgenstein published by Bloomsbury this month in hardback and e-version. With portraits from more than seventy-five figures, Portraits of Wittgenstein brings together the personal recollections of philosophers, students, friends and acquaintances.

Details will be available for registered members on the new BWS website. The BWS encourages its members to ask their institutional libraries to buy a copy.

Portraits is available at a discount of 50% on the list price of £250 for BWS members. In order to make use of the discount, members need to use the code WITT50 when they checkout on the Bloomsbury website at http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/portraits-of-wittgenstein-9781474260190/

The discount is available until the 1st January 2016. The discount is available for individual purchase only and cannot be used for institutional orders. If you experience any issues obtaining the discount, please contact Colleen.Coalter@bloomsbury.com.

BWS welcomes links and flyers to new Wittgenstein-related publications to post here, in the Newsletter, as well as on the Publications or Postings pages of the website.

Review copies

Available for review

There are always new books are available for review. If you would like one of them sent to you for an in depth critical appreciation, or for a shorter review, please contact Dr Constantinos Athanasopoulos. Below are the latest books available.


For books published in 2012, see the reviews page.

Honorary Committee

We are delighted to welcome two new members onto our Honorary Committee.

Prof. Paul Standish is Professor of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. He is concerned in his work particularly with questions in ethics and education. Author of the excellent Beyond the Self: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the limits of language (Ashgate 1992), Professor Standish is interested in the relation between Analytical and Continental philosophy and the productive tensions of that relation.

Dr Mikel Burley is Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at the University of Leeds, where he teaches courses both in philosophy of religion and in religious studies (including Hindu and Buddhist traditions). He is especially interested in developing interdisciplinary methods that draw upon ethnographical and biographical literature in order to enrich a philosophical understanding of religious forms of life.
BWS Executive Committee

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