

Dr Carl Humphries – Review

Józef Bremer, Josef Rothhaupt (eds.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein – “Posted to Cracow” (Ludwig Wittgenstein – “Przydzielony do Krakowa”/“Krakau zugeteilt”)*, Wydawnictwo WAM, 2009, 590 pp., ISBN 9788375053456 (pbk.)

This volume is a substantial collection of articles by authors – predominantly from Poland, but also from Austria, Germany, Norway and Portugal – linked, to a greater or lesser extent, by their seeking to shed light on substantive issues in Wittgenstein’s philosophy through setting it in the context of the relevant historical, cultural and biographical backgrounds. With the exception of one text in English, all are presented in both Polish-language and German-language versions. A significant number share a more specific focus on putative links between the formative stages of Wittgenstein’s philosophical career and his time spent in Cracow – and in what was, at that time, the Polish city of Lvov – while serving in the Austrian army during the early years of the First World War. This explains the title of the volume. Given that many English-speaking readers with an interest in Wittgenstein may be able to read German but not Polish, the collection may be valuable, at least in part, as way of making indirectly accessible to the Anglophone world some of the more interesting examples of recent Wittgenstein scholarship in Poland, thus giving more than a glimpse of the current state of reception of the philosopher’s ideas there. The articles cover a range of general topics that feature in Wittgenstein’s reflections, such as the meaning of life and the nature of logic, truth and certainty, while also exploring connections with other philosophers (Leibniz, Nietzsche and Russell) and writers (Kraus, Tolstoy, Trakl and Emerson).

In what amounts to an introductory piece, the Polish co-editor of the volume, Józef Bremer, paints an anecdotal portrait of the young Wittgenstein’s encounter, in Cracow in 1914, with an eccentric Polish translator of English, Michał Dziwicki, whose interest in Russell’s work is recorded by Wittgenstein and led to conversations between the two men. The account serves as a neat biographical frame for those subsequent texts in the volume that also focus on this period of the philosopher’s development.

In ‘Wittgenstein’s solipsism and philosophy of psychology’, Katarzyna Gurczyńska-Sady presents a cogent and, I think, essentially accurate, overview of the *Tractatus*’s distinctive take on solipsism, and of the various senses in which it may be seen to anticipate Wittgenstein’s later critique of the idea of an autonomously conceptualisable private inner realm of thought and experience. The common position she discerns in both earlier and later phases of Wittgenstein’s thought – and which she labels ‘solipsism without the *I*’ – consists

essentially in the idea that a subtraction of the first-person subject of epistemological solipsism (and, in some less basic sense, that of epistemologically inspired psychology, too) from our intuitive conception of the world itself is required to arrive at a proper sense of how that world is. This then implies a loss of substantiality on the part of the 'I' of epistemology, which she is inclined to construe as entailing a loss of *referential* meaning for that concept, but not a loss of meaning altogether. Gurczyńska-Sady's analysis of the commonalities between Wittgenstein's earlier and later thinking in this area is certainly helpful. However, some elaboration of what, exactly, a change in the *nature* of the meaning of the concept of 'I' in the direction of non-referentiality could amount to in the context of the later Wittgenstein's understanding of the relationship between concepts and linguistic practices would have made the article still more illuminating, as would a consideration of the various positions taken up in relation to this by other philosophers influenced by him (the obvious example, in this case, being Anscombe).

Walter Methlagl, in 'Texts of Wittgenstein and others, viewed in the context of the beginning of the Great War', embarks on a comparative analysis of how the experience of the early years of the war impacted on the sensibility and writings of Wittgenstein, Trakl and Rilke. Referring closely to the historical documentation offered by the correspondence these figures and their acquaintances were engaged in, he sets out to reconstruct, as systematically as the available sources allow, the elements of a common historical context. In particular, Methlagl sees this context as shedding light on the fact that each of these authors, around this time, produced material in which a critical shift of relationship to language is announced, centred in each case on a moment of irreversible confrontation with the perceived limits of what language can convey. The author concludes his article by asking whether these points of convergence, taken together with what he describes as the new 'form of life' represented by the early days and months of the war, amount to a manifestation of a historical turning point – the unique moment when a particular existing set of artistic and philosophical paradigms can be seen to give way to a new one.

In 'The place of Wittgenstein in the Platonic-Leibnizian metaphysical tradition', the late Jerzy Perzanowski does exactly what the title of his article suggests, seeking to locate the *Tractatus* within a tradition of metaphysical theorizing stretching back through Leibniz to Plato. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Perzanowski has little to say about the later Wittgenstein, and his straightforwardly metaphysical understanding of the earlier one seems likely to arouse the antipathy of proponents of the 'new', 'robust' sorts of reading of the closing passages of the *Tractatus* to an even greater degree than more familiar variants of the 'classical' reading.

Nevertheless, it reflects a distinctively Polish tradition of assimilating Tractarian ideas into mainstream metaphysics and ontology that should not be ignored, seeking as it does to work out the implications of the idea that possibility, as a modality, is itself grounded in ontological rather than purely logical considerations. (Perzanowski's work may thus prove of some relevance to readers whose interests extend to include the logic and semantics of possible worlds.) For good measure, his article is followed up with a synoptic diagram (inserted at the end of the volume) designed to enable the reader to visualize the various currents of influence in Western philosophy relevant to a contextual understanding of the place of the *Tractatus* when understood in these terms, itself supported by a fairly detailed and informative commentary.

Alois Pichler and Christian Erbacher, in their article entitled 'The *Wittgenstein MS 101 from September 1914 project* and the Wittgenstein Archive at Bergen University', present an informative overview of the various stages in the complex history of attempts to edit and publish the many handwritten and dictated notes and sketches left behind by Wittgenstein. This provides a background for their analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the *Bergen Electronic Edition* of Wittgenstein's texts. This edition, much used by Wittgenstein scholars now, is compared and contrasted with a subsequent project involving the presentation of MS 101 (containing the philosopher's notes from 1914), in a somewhat different electronic format offering a more flexible range of access options for scholars. Their discussion will certainly be of interest to anybody concerned with the close exegetical study of Wittgenstein's unpublished manuscripts. What was missing here, though, was a counterbalancing acknowledgement of the interpretative pitfalls potentially opened up by this sort of enhanced access to the Wittgenstein *Nachlass*, given that the philosopher's ideas are, arguably, at their most intelligible when viewed in the light of the sharp distinction Wittgenstein himself made between material that was, or was not, deemed by him to be sufficiently representative of his views to merit publication. (At the very least, one feels, commentators should attempt to take account of the difference of status attaching to material Wittgenstein actually approved for publication, material he might have approved for publication (if he had lived longer), and material he could have approved for publication, but chose not to do so.)

In 'Wittgenstein's "philosophical acupuncture" by means of "remarks"', Josef Rothhaupt (who is the German co-editor of the volume) takes as his starting point a consideration of the stylistic implications of the philosopher's chosen form: the 'remark' or *Bemerkung*. Rothhaupt shows how Wittgenstein's use of this form as both a stylistic and a

structuring device may serve as an illuminating point of reference for making sense of the many and rich connections linking his thought to the literary and philosophical figures who exerted an influence upon him. He addresses the issue of the extent to which Wittgenstein may be thought of as continuing an existing literary tradition of aphoristic writing, or a more specifically Romantic tradition of the literary fragment. The range of historical personalities discussed here is, without doubt, exceptionally wide, including as it does not only those whose importance for Wittgenstein has been noted by others (e.g. Kraus, Loos, Nietzsche, Novalis, Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Augustine) but also many others, whose significance in this context has yet to be fully explored by Wittgenstein scholars (e.g. Lichtenberg, Grillparzer, von Ebner-Eschenbach, Nestroy, Kierkegaard, Hamann, Pascal, Francis Bacon, Morgenstern and Wilhelm Busch). Even readers already familiar with the broader intellectual and cultural background to Wittgenstein's development will find their grasp of his position within the German-language intellectual-literary tradition significantly enriched by the account given here.

Wojciech Sady, in 'What kind of theory of knowledge do Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* suggest?', offers a cogent overview of the salient features of what is now taken, at least by some, to be a distinct third stage in the philosopher's intellectual evolution. The author sets significant store on the idea that the remarks contained in *On Certainty* constitute a move away from the focus on therapeutic dismantling of generalities typified by the *Investigations*, in the direction of a willingness to re-engage with positive theory-making. At the same time, in this respect he points to continuities between the two putative phases, discerning the tentative outlines of a positive theory in comments drawn from the earlier of the two texts. Starting with Wittgenstein's response to Moore, Sady outlines what he takes to be the important elements of the new position: the difference of function between ordinary empirical statements and statements manifesting the usually unspoken commitments that, relative to a contextually given framework of understanding, play the role of norms or rules of description; similarities and differences between the latter and Kant's notions of analytic and synthetic a priori truth; the role that an implicit world-picture plays in defining the limits of sense for empirical propositions and thus, also, of scepticism about the knowledge conveyed by these, etc. (One significant omission here is any attempt to relate Wittgenstein's invocation of the notion of what in effect shows up in Sady's account as an essentially procedural *rule* or *norm* of description to what is, for many, the crucial account of rule-following presented in Part One of the *Investigations*.) Sady neatly expounds Wittgenstein's distinctive conception of a world-picture as something sustained and constituted by our

practices and our way of life rather than by any notion of conformity to a reality independent of these, where this is supposed to give sense to the thought that, relative to a given context of human practices, such a picture (or the commitments it expresses) can regulate the limits of applicability of the traditional epistemic concepts of knowledge, truth and justification, instead of being subject to them. Within Sady's account, at least, where this leaves one in relation to the age-old universalism-relativism dichotomy is hard to pin down, but if the accompanying quotations from *On Certainty* about what is involved when rival frameworks of overarching commitment come into conflict are taken as a guide, this is, most probably, an inherent feature of Wittgenstein's position. Nevertheless, a more nuanced weighing up of both continuities and discontinuities between *On Certainty* and the more overtly therapeutic, anti-theoretical stance of the *Investigations* could, I feel, have been helpful here. Without this, Sady's characterisation of *On Certainty* as the beginnings of a positive 'theory of knowledge' does not seem so very meaningful, in that it begs a lot of questions regarding the extent to which the traditional philosophical significance of the concepts 'theory' and 'knowledge' has, for better or worse, been altered out of all recognition in the context of Wittgenstein's later thinking – even when still invested by him with some kind of positive sense.

In 'Wittgenstein and the correspondence theory of truth', Maciej Soin gives a perceptive and carefully researched account of how the philosopher's conception of truth evolved towards the position of the *Investigations*, elements of which are already identifiable in manuscripts dating from the early 1930s. He argues that the latter position should not be seen as entailing the sort of outright rejection of the notion of truth as a correspondence relation often ascribed to the later Wittgenstein. Soin contrasts his reading with two earlier phases in the evolution of Wittgenstein interpretation pertaining to this issue: firstly the notion (popularized by Rorty) of a straightforward transition in Wittgenstein from an early-period position favouring truth as correspondence to a form of general relativism, and secondly the 'official' (Baker and Hacker) view that his later position endorses the redundancy theory of truth and so is avowedly deflationary. Soin partly sympathizes with Gerald Vision, who argues that it makes no sense to ascribe a redundancy theory of truth to the later Wittgenstein, given the philosopher's overall hostility, by this stage, to philosophy as positive theory-construction, but nevertheless thinks it wrong to elevate this into an equally generalized, 'nihilistic' interpretation of Wittgenstein on the concept of truth. Instead he stresses Wittgenstein's characteristic concern to do justice to the diversity of uses the concept of truth may play in different areas of our lives – in different sorts of language game. The idea is that the notion of a correspondence relation between statements and the world can

then still be accommodated in Wittgenstein's mature later philosophy, construed as a relation internal to the grammar (in Wittgenstein's sense) of particular language-games. Soin reinforces his 'diversity thesis' persuasively by exploring the contrasting implications of Wittgenstein's views about the nature of rule-following for the applicability of the notion of truth in the sphere of ordinary language-use on the one hand, and in that of formal mathematics and logic, construed as rule-constituted systems rather than as constructed on the basis of axioms and proofs, on the other. This all seems like a highly reasonable, balanced and well-informed reading of the implications of the various relevant developments in Wittgenstein interpretation to date. Yet it tells us remarkably little about why it would still matter to participants in a given language game, in the absence of any overarching external framework of commitments about relations between statements and the world they purport to describe, that they can deploy the concept of truth as correspondence. What seems lacking here, as with so many interpretations of this philosopher's ideas, is the sort of engagement with concrete examples that would enable us to determine how far they have really succeeded in making sense of what actually goes on in our lives.

Ilse Somavilla, in 'Authorial tone: Wittgenstein on Trakl, Emerson and Tolstoy', uses the philosopher's more personal writings from the period of his time in Cracow as a starting point for exploring possible connections between his sense of authorial tone and the three figures mentioned in the title of her article. Somavilla stresses the common ground between Wittgenstein and Emerson in respect of the importance both thinkers place on the sense of amazement at the existence of the world, and on everyday forms of understanding. She identifies an important role for the concept of veracity of tone in both thinkers, and goes on to explore the extent to which Wittgenstein's exposure to the poems of Trakl at this formative stage of his development may have furnished an important model for his own approach as a writer in this respect. Somavilla links the role played by authorial tone in Wittgenstein's writings, as a way of conveying our basic intuitions about human existence that, in its immediacy and directness, would seem to be closer to a form of 'showing' than of 'saying', to the sense of the interdependency of ethical and aesthetic values that emerges in his more philosophical writings from this time and which finds its way into the *Tractatus*. She also points to connections with the significance of music and gesture for Wittgenstein – something that emerges as important for understanding some aspects of his later work. Somavilla's discussion of the role played by Tolstoy's writings in shaping Wittgenstein's religious sensibility is made especially interesting by her consideration of this in the light of the fact

that, as his private diary remarks reveal, the philosopher was also strongly influenced at this time by his readings of Nietzsche.

In ‘The Sprachkritik of the Viennese modernists: the aphorisms of Karl Kraus’, Dorota Szczeniak considers the influence upon Wittgenstein of Kraus’s aphoristic style, his conception of language as something larger than and prior to the thoughts expressed through it, and his moral mission to purify the linguistic culture of the time of everything inessential or ambiguous. These issues have already been charted elsewhere, but Szczeniak brings to bear her expertise as a German philologist in an interesting way when contrasting the approach of Kraus with that of another leading literary figure of the time, Hofmannsthal. What emerges from her account, I think, is a sense that the considerations that, for Kraus, imbue language with its overriding moral and cultural importance relative to the individual, leave less room for the philosophical significance that the idea of running up against the limits of language is supposed to have within the *Tractatus* than does Hofmannsthal’s account, in his fictional “Letter to Lord Chandos”, of the individual who, in an obviously more personal and epiphanic way, experiences a radical breakdown in their relationship to language when faced with something like modernity.

‘Wittgenstein on Nietzsche and Solipsism’, by Nuno Venturinha, is the one article in this collection in English. Venturinha engages in close textual analysis of the relation between the well-known and much discussed remarks on solipsism in the *Tractatus* and their precursors in texts such as the *Prototractatus* and the notebook manuscripts from the start of the war (and so, more or less, from the time when Wittgenstein was in Cracow). His aim is to establish a basis for an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s Tractarian position on solipsism that contrasts with the traditional approach of Hacker in stressing its ethico-religious rather than epistemologically theoretical character, but which is also distinct from the significance that Wittgenstein’s remarks take on in the context of ‘robust’ readings such as those of Conant and Diamond. The influence of Schopenhauer inevitably looms large in this account, but what makes it interesting is the way Venturinha employs detailed analysis of the textual sources to trace a significant thread of influence back to the impression made on Wittgenstein at the outbreak of the war by his reading of Nietzsche. (Unfortunately the numerous quotations used by the author to make his case only appear in the original German. Someone reading this text in English who is unfamiliar with that language will therefore be obliged to retrieve translations of the relevant passages for themselves.)

In ‘The say-show distinction in Wittgenstein’s late philosophy’, Heinrich Watzka explores how the distinction mentioned in the title of his article figures not only in the

*Tractatus* itself, but also informs the philosopher's later thinking. He seeks to accomplish this against the background of a reading of the *Investigations* that, somewhat in the manner of Bernard Williams, stresses its continuities with Kantian transcendental idealism – something that perhaps not everyone will find uncontroversial. Watzka's treatment of the issues is a nuanced one, spoilt only by the occasional use of certain concepts that may not quite retain their familiar meanings once reconsidered in the light of Wittgenstein's later philosophy itself. It is unclear what is meant, for example, by a characterisation of Wittgenstein's later approach to language as *physicalistic*, given that the very idea of physicalism tends to derive its philosophical implications from the Cartesian dualist paradigm that the philosopher eschewed at this stage in his development. One might say the same about the author's suggestion that Wittgenstein's later philosophy sets out to displace laws of nature with the *normativity* of rules as the basic point of reference for making sense of human affairs. In one sense, of course, this correctly captures a central point about his thought. Yet if one reads the rule-following considerations as implying the absence of any gap between rules and their particular applications, is this best put across by invoking, as so many commentators do, the concept of a *norm*? The very idea that there is something we can isolate worthy of this name itself implies a disjunction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic perspectives on reality of a sort that is, arguably, foreign to the thrust of the rule-following considerations themselves.

Jan Woleński is a distinguished figure in the Polish philosophical world, whose studies of the history of philosophical developments connected with logic are already well known in English-speaking countries. In 'Wittgenstein and Russell' he considers the origins of logical atomism, focusing on the question of the extent to which these two figures may have had divergent views, from early on in their relationship, about certain core tenets of that doctrine. Woleński's article connects up with the texts in this volume by Perzanowski mentioned earlier, exploring as it does, amongst other things, the implications of a modal interpretation of the *Tractatus* for our understanding of the relationship of Wittgenstein's views concerning logic to Russell's.

In the final article in this volume, '*Live happily! A margin-note to Wittgenstein*', Ireneusz Ziemiński offers an interpretation of the brief remark from the philosopher's early wartime notebooks quoted in the title, exploring, in a philosophically penetrating but exegetically rather loose way, its implications when taken as an imperative addressed to human beings generally. Ziemiński examines a cluster of interconnected Wittgensteinian thoughts connected with the idea of the perfectly fulfilled life as one unburdened by concern for the possible eventualities associated with temporal change – a life lived radically in the

present and for its own sake, rather than one treated as a problem to be resolved instrumentally by seeking any external purpose. Drawing upon the Tractarian distinction between the empirical subject and the metaphysical subject that is a condition for the possibility of the world itself, Ziemiński distinguishes this train of thought from otherwise related ideas in Nietzsche, and on this basis gives an acute analysis of the sense in which it should be understood as subsuming a specifically moral understanding of what is good and bad in human life into an overriding metaphysical conception, thus distancing the position from amorality. He also notes, if only in passing, what may be considered the most problematic feature of such a conception, which is the difficulty – if not impossibility – of extrapolating from it any specific practical implications for the conduct of the ‘empirically situated’ subject.

Although there is not a great deal in this volume that explores, directly or in depth, the controversies (over rule-following, private languages, robust readings of the *Tractatus*, anti-scientism, etc.) that have dominated discussions of Wittgenstein’s philosophy in Anglo-American philosophical circles, there is, all the same, much worth reading, both for students getting to grips with the Austrian philosopher’s work and for those with a more specialized interest. Indeed, given the current polarization in attitudes towards Wittgenstein, this may be extremely healthy, since it permits a more balanced picture of this inherently controversial historical figure to emerge than might otherwise see the light of day – a picture of an exceptional individual whose intellectual development and philosophical ideas are worthy of serious investigation independently of whether one is fundamentally sympathetic to them or not.

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