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## Introduction

### *Seeing Aspects in Wittgenstein*

William Day and Victor J. Krebs

To see and describe aspects in Wittgenstein (aspects of insight, of perspicuity, of profundity, etc.) is what any discussion of his writings, and in particular of the enigmatic *Philosophical Investigations*, attempts to do. It would be a cute pun, but a sad excuse for a book, if this volume of new essays offered simply the promise of “seeing” and describing “aspects” in Wittgenstein’s discussion of aspect-seeing. Having invited and then discussed the essays in the present volume with our contributors over a handful of years, we find that they offer more than that simple promise. At a minimum, they bring out a range of connections between Parts I and II of the *Investigations* that should interest Wittgensteinian scholars whose central concerns would otherwise seem untouched by the discussions of aspect-seeing in the *Investigations* and elsewhere. More than occasionally these essays open up novel paths across familiar fields of thought to anyone for whom, for example, the objectivity of interpretation, the fixity of the past, the acquisition of language, or the nature of human consciousness remain live issues. But a recurring discovery in the chapters that follow is that there is something to be found in his remarks on aspect-seeing that is crucial to, yet all but overlooked in, the reception of the later Wittgenstein. And since the fate of the reception of the later Wittgenstein remains tied to one’s reading of the *Investigations*, however broadened by the publication of subsequent volumes of his later writings, it matters that these essays also have something to contribute to that perennial, and perhaps most pressing, question in

understanding the later Wittgenstein: What does it mean to *read* the text called *Philosophical Investigations*?

### 1. WHY SEEING ASPECTS NOW?

In 1989, in an essay entitled “Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture,” Stanley Cavell wrote: “Even when the acceptance of Wittgenstein as one of the major philosophical voices in the West since Kant may be taken for granted, it is apt to be controversial to find that his reception by professional philosophy is insufficient, that the spiritual fervor or seriousness of his writing is internal to his teaching, say the manner (or method) to the substance, and that something in the very professionalization of philosophy debars professional philosophers from taking his seriousness seriously.”<sup>1</sup> He thus recorded his sense of the general situation in the secondary literature on Wittgenstein at the end of the 1980s, and it proved to be a fateful pronouncement.

The following decade marked a noticeable change in the spirit of Wittgenstein’s reception, which started to open up a series of issues previously excised from the familiar focus of attention. A telling instance of this is the volume of scattered remarks from Wittgenstein’s personal journals that appeared as *Culture and Value*. First published as *Vermischte Bemerkungen* in 1977, it was revised against the editor’s original judgment that they “do not belong directly with his philosophical works” (CVPreface), because, as the editor admitted reticently seventeen years later, that judgment “might appear controversial to some” (CVR xiii). It is in this changing spirit that the 1990s witnessed a significant proliferation of books and a renewed vitality in Wittgenstein scholarship.

Ray Monk’s biography of Wittgenstein,<sup>2</sup> published in 1990, was the first in a line of books from that decade that set a new tone in the literature surrounding his work. It took on the task of bringing together the philosopher’s life with his philosophical concerns, and thus broke with an implicit (and sometimes not so implicit) resistance

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cavell, “Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture,” in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Living Batch Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

to addressing the kinds of issues Wittgenstein's own texts seem to demand. The consequence of this decision was that many of the central philosophical themes in the literature came under reassessment. Language-games, family resemblances, the possibility of a private language, and other loci in the text that until then had been considered discrete topics were supplemented in Monk's work by the significance of such features as "seeing connections" (*PI* §122), "the morphological method" inherited from Goethe, and the battle of "soul and heart" against the speculative mind of science. Monk's account made possible a reshuffling of priorities in assessments of the Wittgensteinian corpus that found echo in many books published during the years that followed. Stephen Mulhall's *On Being in the World*,<sup>3</sup> published that same year, established significant connections between Wittgenstein and the Continental tradition that were explored further in books that appeared during the next several years. Gordon Bearn's *Waking to Wonder* (1997)<sup>4</sup> examined the connections between Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, and Richard Eldridge's *Leading a Human Life* (1997)<sup>5</sup> developed the continuities between Wittgensteinian and Romantic themes. Other authors contributed to this change of tide by exploring new areas of Wittgenstein's thought: Frank Cioffi and Louis Sass explored connections with psychoanalytical issues,<sup>6</sup> Garry Hagberg with issues in art and aesthetics,<sup>7</sup> and Paul Johnston with issues in morality.<sup>8</sup> A propitious space was thus opened during the 1990s for a reevaluation of Wittgenstein's thought and of his conception of philosophy.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of edited volumes advancing this reevaluation of Wittgenstein's concerns and methods in the face of the growing availability of, and attention to, his *Nachlass*. And so it can seem that "the spiritual fervor

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon C. F. Bearn, *Waking to Wonder: Wittgenstein's Existential Investigations* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> See Frank Cioffi, *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Louis A. Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Garry Hagberg, *Art As Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning, and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (London: Routledge, 1993).

or seriousness of his writing” has begun to find a critical mass of interpreters. The contributors to *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy* (2001)<sup>9</sup> argue for the unusual, if not singular, significance of this philosopher’s life (and way of life) to his philosophy. *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics and Philosophy* (2004)<sup>10</sup> and *The Literary Wittgenstein* (2004)<sup>11</sup> focus on Wittgenstein’s writings and lectures on aesthetic matters, and develop readings of their significance for his philosophical outlook and writerly concerns. And *The Third Wittgenstein* (2004)<sup>12</sup> devotes itself to Wittgenstein’s last writings – those contemporaneous with Part II of the *Investigations* – in which concepts like “experiencing meaning” and “patterns of life” take on the importance that “following a rule” and “family resemblance” had in earlier remarks.

The present volume takes this changed understanding of Wittgenstein’s work as its starting point and seeks to draw renewed attention to what is, in its sustained development and wealth of instances, already a central notion for Wittgenstein in the later texts, a notion which should contribute to a more coherent picture of his thinking than it has been credited with doing. The cumulative claim of the essays assembled here is that awareness of the importance of seeing aspects to Wittgenstein’s thought clarifies, and in many respects transfigures, our understanding of that thought.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEING ASPECTS

While the *locus classicus* for Wittgenstein’s aspect-seeing remarks is the longest section (Section 11) of Part II of the *Investigations*, other (and mostly earlier) remarks on aspect-seeing appear in *Zettel*,<sup>13</sup> in the two volumes published as *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*,<sup>14</sup> and in the two volumes published as *Last Writings*.<sup>15</sup> Related

<sup>9</sup> *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> *Wittgenstein, Aesthetics and Philosophy*, ed. Peter B. Lewis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> *The Literary Wittgenstein*, ed. John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> *The Third Wittgenstein: The Post-Investigations Works*, ed. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, *Z* §§155–225.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, *RPP* I §§411–436, 505–546, 860–890, 952–1137; *RPP* II §§355–391, 435–497, 506–557.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, *LWI* §§146–180, 429–613, 622–812; *LW* II 12c–19e.

remarks can also be found in *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, *Remarks on Colour*, *On Certainty*, and *Culture and Value*. One could argue further that the role of the concept of a picture in the early Wittgenstein – what came to be known as his Picture Theory of Meaning – anticipates his later concern with seeing aspects. If this is right, then the circle of relevant remarks expands to encompass nearly all of his writings. Indeed, according to the so-called “New Reading” of the *Tractatus*,<sup>16</sup> the attempt to bring the impulse to philosophize into vision-altering reflection on its own tendencies – a clear goal of the later method – is already present in this early work. The implication is that Wittgenstein’s later attention to the “hugely many interrelated phenomena and possible concepts” (*PI* 199d) of seeing aspects is merely the explicit articulation of one of his central and persistent philosophical concerns. In any case, it is a mistake to imagine that the remarks on aspect-seeing are a mere diversion, a sidestreet detour in the “long and involved journeyings” (*PI* Preface) of the *Investigations*. They are, rather, the expression of a theme whose figures and turns we might have been hearing, however faintly, all along.

One way to hear this more clearly is to take note of a common feature of Wittgenstein’s method of exposition: he introduces what one might think of as his “theoretical position” only *after* the reader has had to work through exercises that give her the relevant practical experience to ground his theoretical claims. This is nowhere more true than with the *Investigations*, where we are told nothing about his conception of the nature of philosophy until we are well into the first fifty pages. Saul Kripke may have been observing an instance of this approach when he claimed that the so-called “private language argument” articulated in *PI* §243 had already been introduced and elaborated in the previous several dozen sections of the book.<sup>17</sup> The same strategy determines the placement of the discussion of aspect-seeing: Wittgenstein introduces it explicitly only in the later set of remarks that was to become Part II of the *Investigations*, where it takes

<sup>16</sup> For a summary of the relevant actors in and features of the New Reading, see Victor J. Krebs, “Around the Axis of our Real Need’: On the Ethical Point of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (December 2001): 344–74.

<sup>17</sup> See Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 2–3.

on the role of providing theoretical articulation to what the book has, in practice, been dedicated to from the very beginning.<sup>18</sup> Just as we begin to see how to read the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* when we arrive at its closing sentences, we will be in a better position to grasp what is at stake in Wittgenstein's later thought as a whole if we read the *Investigations* in light of its closing preoccupation with aspect-seeing.

Consider in this regard the following moments early on in the *Investigations* where the trick, or the stumbling block, of Wittgenstein's new method lies precisely in the appeal to look at (or weigh or consider), not a new  $x$ , but a given  $x$  in a new way:

1. After introducing a language "meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B" consisting in the four words "block," "pillar," "slab," and "beam," Wittgenstein issues the instruction, "Conceive this as [cf. "See this as"] a complete primitive language" (*PI* §2).
2. The reader is asked to imagine someone falsely interpreting a script in which letters are employed not only phonetically but to indicate emphasis and punctuation; the interpreter reads "as if there were simply a correspondence of letters to sounds and as if the letters had not also completely different functions" (*PI* §4).
3. We are brought to consider that a foreigner "who did not understand our language" but who frequently heard the order "Bring me a slab!" might take "this whole series of sounds" as *one* word corresponding to his word for "building-stone"; and that, on hearing him pronounce the command oddly, we might surmise that "he takes it for a *single* word" (*PI* §20).
4. We are told to imagine a picture of a boxer in a particular stance, and are then invited to notice that "this picture can be used to tell someone how he should stand, should hold himself; or how he should not hold himself; or how a particular man did stand in such-and-such a place; and so on"; here the point is to

<sup>18</sup> As we know from the "Editors' Note" to the *Investigations*, the decision to place the aspect-seeing remarks in one of the later sections of Part II – let alone in a separate "Part II" – was not Wittgenstein's. But noting this is no excuse for overlooking his evident intention that these remarks should follow (as they frequently assume and occasionally echo and extend) the bulk of what we have as Part I of the *Investigations*.

see in this an emblem for Frege's thought that "every assertion contains an assumption" (*PI* p. 11, bottom; §22).

5. Wittgenstein observes that the necessity of our adding the word "number" to an ostensive definition of, for example, "two," "depends on whether without it the other person takes the definition otherwise than I wish" (takes it, for example, as the name for "this group of nuts") (*PI* §§28–29).
6. The reader is instructed to "point to a piece of paper," is invited next to point "to its shape," "to its color," "to its number," ... and is then asked to consider, if she imagines that she did something *different* each time, what that difference consists in (*PI* §33).
7. An interlocutor who suggests that a chessboard is "obviously, and absolutely, composite" – presumably by imagining it as composed of alternating black and white squares – is asked to consider whether we couldn't say as well that it was "composed of the colors black and white and the schema of squares," and so to reconsider whether she is still tempted to call it absolutely "composite" "if there are quite different ways of looking at it" (*PI* §47).

If these moments are not everywhere clear cases of *seeing* (#1 and #6 might be called cases of imagining; #3 is about a way of hearing; #5 is an illustration of someone making a wrong connection), it is also clear that the aspect-seeing remarks of Part II, Section 11 frequently wind their way through similar, non-seeing cases.<sup>19</sup> And if you recognize these moments in the opening pages of the *Investigations* as broaching the central concerns of those pages – the relation of "grammar" to human forms of life; philosophy's idealized picture of language; the notion that something "inner" must correspond to the way we utter a sentence; the multiplicity of kinds of sentence; when and how we can give ostensive definitions; what "pointing to an object" consists in; the idea that names signify simples – then you will have begun to see the ubiquity of the concept of "seeing an aspect" in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

This is not to deny that what the aspect-seeing remarks are about, in the most straightforward sense, is seeing (or noticing) aspects.

<sup>19</sup> Cf., for example, *PI* 201a, 202h, 206i–207a, 208c, 209c, 209e–g, 210b, 213c–e, and, of course, 214d and following (where the discussion turns to "the connection between the concepts of 'seeing an aspect' and 'experiencing the meaning of a word'").

Although Wittgenstein's use of "aspect-seeing" and its cognates shows it to be a kind of grab-bag category, he is firm in identifying "noticing an aspect" as an experience with, one might say, a double aspect. It is an experience in which, first, something changes – as it were before our eyes or ears – but in which, second, we know that nothing has changed, that is, we know that the change is not (so to speak) in the world, but (so to speak) in us. Because such an experience is, at the very least, like the experience of discovery that is characteristic of our interactions with works of art, it is not surprising that philosophers of art were among the first readers of the *Investigations* to take an interest in the aspect-seeing remarks. Thus it may have seemed until recently that the reception of these remarks had their heyday in the mid-1950s and 1960s, when Virgil Aldrich, Richard Wollheim, and others sought to "apply" the aspect-seeing material to aesthetics, as well as to the theory of mind.<sup>20</sup>

It was perhaps only after Mulhall's *On Being in the World* that the remarks on aspect-seeing began to be viewed widely as significant for more than their merely local exegetical interest. And yet Mulhall's work bears the imprint of Cavell's far-ranging exploration, in Part IV of *The Claim of Reason* (1979), of the significance of aspect-seeing to the problem of other minds and of philosophical self-knowledge.<sup>21</sup> One might conclude from this that Cavell's longest and most important book planted the seed for a reappraisal of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-seeing. If so, one should add that this reappraisal is not divorced from an interest in ways in which aspect-seeing bears specifically on aesthetics. Indeed, Cavell's development of the significance of aspect-seeing in *The Claim of Reason* is the product, in part, of his essays from the 1960s on Wittgenstein and aesthetics collected in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1969).<sup>22</sup> There is certainly no denying that Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-seeing helps to clarify what we do, or try to do, in our

<sup>20</sup> See Virgil C. Aldrich, *Philosophy of Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963) and "An Aspect Theory of Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 26 (March 1966): 313–26; Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 354ff.

<sup>22</sup> See "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy" and "Music Discomposed" in Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 73–96, 180–212.



critical appraisals of works of art. But such considerations, rather than “ghetto-izing” aesthetics, ought to help underscore the importance of aesthetic reflection to what Wittgenstein conceives as philosophy’s task. One could say – to preview a claim defended in several of the essays to follow – that Wittgenstein’s aspect-seeing remarks shed light on the mode of attention that his writing demands from his reader, and so help to clarify the intrinsic relation between his writing and the problem of philosophical self-knowledge. Or, put another way: these discussions of aspect-seeing reveal that Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy demands, not just a way of seeing, but – as Steven Affeldt argues below – a way of attending to, and a willingness to discover, the aspects of things that are most important for us (for us humans) but that, for some reason, we are driven to repudiate.

To indicate more generally what the aspect-seeing remarks are for, we might summarize three kinds of response that are offered in what follows, offered for the most part not in opposition to one another but as reflective of “the wide field of thought” (*PI* Preface) traversed by Wittgenstein’s investigations of the concept of aspect-seeing. First, as was apparent in the early reception of the *Investigations*, aspect-seeing is pertinent to describing and thinking through the central conundrum of aesthetic judgment – namely, how can an aesthetic experience that is not only prompted by, but (we feel) *attached to*, a publicly available object be had in full recognition that others may not, or will not, have it? (Hamlet: Do you see nothing there? Gertrude: Nothing at all, yet all there is, I see.) This is the puzzle that sets the goal of criticism; as Cavell words it, “The work of ... criticism is to reveal its object as having yet to achieve its due effect. Something there, despite being fully opened to the senses, has been missed.”<sup>23</sup>

Later in their reception, the aspect-seeing remarks came to be read by some as a figure for how philosophy has made Gertrudes of us all. According to this second way of reading the aspect-seeing remarks, what “has been missed” systematically by philosophy – namely, the ordinary conditions of our words meaning what they do and as they do – is the central topic of the *Investigations* as a whole. An

<sup>23</sup> Cavell, “Something Out of the Ordinary,” in *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 11.

early remark (alluded to above) from the *Investigations* brings out the connection: “Imagine a script in which the letters were used to stand for sounds, and also as signs of emphasis and punctuation. ... Now imagine someone interpreting that script as if there were simply a correspondence of letters to sounds and as if the letters had not also completely different functions. Augustine’s conception of language is like such an over-simple conception of the script” (*PI* §4). The first of these scenarios represents our normal relation to the words we speak, while the latter represents traditional philosophy’s reading of that relation. In Cavell’s formulation, “the ordinary is discovered not as what is perceptually missable but as what is intellectually dismissable, ... what must be set aside if philosophy’s aspirations to knowledge are to be satisfied.”<sup>24</sup> What Augustine’s description – and, by implication, traditional philosophy – lacks is a recognition of our life with words; it fails to see aspects of the work of words in the human form of life. Philosophy’s Augustinian failure is an explicit target of Wittgenstein’s discussion of aspect-seeing in *PI* II.xi. Late in that discussion Wittgenstein comes to suggest that the way we pick out and insist upon particular words is evidence of our ability to see (and feel) “the familiar physiognomy of a word,” and that this manifestation of our “attachment” to words is what would be missing from the meaning-blind, that is, from human beings who failed to see (and feel) a word as a “likeness of its meaning” (*PI* 218g). Something sensible or affective, something almost bodily, so to speak, is entwined in our conception of language, despite philosophy’s best efforts to deaden itself to it.

A third way to characterize these remarks, tied to the relevant particulars of Wittgenstein’s biography and to the stringent demands not only of what he wrote, but of how he lived, is that his extended consideration of aspect-seeing is Wittgenstein’s indirect meditation on the difficulties of receiving his (later) philosophical methods. His sense of these difficulties is expressed directly in other places, from the Preface to the *Investigations* (“It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely”) to a remark he made to Maurice Drury (“It is impossible for me to say in my book

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.