Introduction

Arif Ahmed

Philosophical Investigations is thought by some to be the greatest philosophical work of the twentieth century. It shatters certain images of man that are both deeply embedded within the Western mind and utterly familiar to it. It profoundly alters one's conception of thought, consciousness, sensation, linguistic understanding and the self. It is probably the most powerfully disturbing work of philosophy to have been written since Hume's *Treatise*. It is among the intellectual monuments of our age.

In it Wittgenstein returns to the themes that had dominated his earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), i.e. logic and language. That work was largely constructed during the First World War but it was built upon intellectual foundations that had been laid during Wittgenstein's initial study of philosophy, under Russell at Cambridge from 1911 to 1913.

The *Tractatus* has correctly been described as amongst the strangest books ever written (Coffa 1994: 140). To judge by the space devoted to these questions in the book, it is primarily an attempt to explain the nature of logic and linguistic representation. To *these* questions we may summarize Wittgenstein's answers thus: sentences represent reality in an essentially pictorial manner (*TLP* 2.1ff.). Logic does not itself describe features of reality; rather it is an inevitable by-product of the pictorial mechanism (*TLP* 6.124). But what made the book peculiar as well as notorious were the sweeping conclusions that Wittgenstein drew about the nature of reality (i.e. its composition from atomic substance: *TLP* 2.021), the unstatable truth expressed by solipsism (*TLP* 5.62), the necessarily otherworldly application of ethical and aesthetic claims (*TLP* 6.421) and of course the non-sensicality in *some* sense of the *Tractatus* itself (*TLP* 6.54).

Having completed the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein left philosophy for ten years before returning to it, and Cambridge, in 1929. At first he sought merely to remedy what then appeared to be very local defects in the *Tractatus* (for instance in the treatment of colour-exclusion at *TLP* 6.3751) but soon the entire edifice began to crumble. The fecundity of his thought

1

during the subsequent 'middle period' (1929–36) is evident from his writ-ings of the time. These have been published as *Philosophical Remarks*, *Philosophical Grammar*, *The Big Typescript*, *The Blue Book* and *The Brown Book*.

Schulte (in *PU*) distinguishes five versions of the text of Part I of *Philosophical Investigations*. Of these the most significant are the Early, Intermediate and Late Investigations.[1] The first part of the Early *Investigations* was written during the time that Wittgenstein spent in Norway between autumn 1936 and December 1937: its first part contains material from which *PI* 1–188[2] is drawn. (The rest became Part I of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.) The Intermediate *Investigations* was put together in 1942–4 and contains (in addition to a slightly revised version of the first part of the Early version) about half of what we now know as *PI* 189–421. Much of what was new in the Late *Investigations* was cannibalized in 1945–6 from a typescript (TS 228) that had itself been compiled from earlier writings (Baker and Hacker 1980: 6).

The editors' note to *Philosophical Investigations* states that '[i]f Wittgenstein had published his work himself, he would have suppressed a good deal of what is in the last thirty pages or so of Part I [that is, *PI* 526–693] and worked what is in Part II, with further material, into its place' (*PI* p. vi). Part II (TS 234) consists of fourteen 'chapters' of greatly varying length (from half a page to thirty-six pages) dealing largely with topics in philosophical psychology, of which some are already discussed at Part I (e.g. kinaesthetic sensations at II, viii; cf. *PI* 621f.) and others are hardly mentioned there (most notably aspect perception at II, xi; cf. *PI* 74). In a way its title 'Part II' is somewhat misleading: certainly there is no reason to think that Wittgenstein intended it to follow Part I in its present form. 'Part II', then, is not a sequel to Part I: it is simply a collection of material that might have been, but never was, integrated into the final 170-odd sections of the latter.

Philosophical Investigations is in its own way as strange as the *Tractatus*. But it is about as resistant to summary as is possible for a philosophical monograph: the best answer to the question 'What does it mean?' would be 'Read it again'. But perhaps one could summarize its approach if not its message: philosophical questions about meaning are best approached not

---

[1] This paragraph summarizes the discussion in Stern 2004: xi f. See also Stern 1996: 465.

[2] References to *Philosophical Investigations* Part I (here abbreviated '*PI*') are (except where indicated) by *section* number, not by *page* number. A succeeding letter indicates a paragraph within the section. References to Part II are by page number.

through sweeping general theories of linguistic representation but through careful attention to the way in which language is actually used. 'Let the use *teach* you the meaning' (*PI* p. 212). Partly in consequence of this new approach, its style, tone and organization differ greatly from those of the *Tractatus*.

The *Tractatus* is written in a highly technical style. In many places Wittgenstein appears simply to have expected the reader to recognize and understand the terminology of (say) Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*.[3] On the other hand, *Philosophical Investigations* is written in lucid and idiomatic prose evincing a studied and characteristic refusal to use technicalities. 'The philosophy of logic speaks of sentences and words in exactly the sense in which we speak of them in ordinary life' (*PI* 108. See also *PI* 97, 120).

The *Tractatus* takes a dogmatic tone throughout. Only very occasionally in that book (e.g. at 5.633) does Wittgenstein even consider objections to the views that he states there. On the other hand, Part I of *Philosophical Investigations* is practically a dialogue: again and again Wittgenstein's interlocutor raises objections and queries that Wittgenstein treats with patience (e.g. at *PI* 398) and sometimes a degree of sympathy (e.g. at *PI* 187).

Philosophical Investigations is much more loosely organized than the *Tractatus*. As already indicated, the earlier work attempts to draw quite general conclusions about the nature of reality, the meaning of life etc. from a highly focused investigation of the nature of linguistic representation. But in the later work Wittgenstein jumps from one topic to another in ways that do not always exhibit any very evident logical connection – indeed this is why he says that the book is an album of sketches rather than a systematic treatise (*PI* p. ix).

In fact many more subjects than the six listed in Wittgenstein's own Preface to it get treated in *Philosophical Investigations*. They include (in rough order of first appearance): (1) the Augustinian conception of language, (2) language games, (3) family resemblance, (4) the nature of philosophy, (5) the nature of truth, (6) rule-following, (7) private language, (8) mental images and mental processes, (9) the self, (10) consciousness, (11) the phenomenon of meaning something, (12) induction, (13) linguistic meaning and inference, (14) the will and (15) aspect perception (Part II).

The following essays do not attempt to discuss all of the fifteen topics that are roughly distinguished here. But between them they do discuss ten,

---

[3] For instance the distinction between operations and functions described at *TLP* 5.251 makes little sense unless we understand 'function' to mean Russell's propositional functions. See Hylton 1997.

i.e. (1), (2), (3), (4), (6), (7), (9), (11), (13), (15). Most of the essays attempt by a close analysis of Wittgenstein's highly compressed remarks to get closer to the truth – or at least further from certain widespread errors – about what he meant. Others take the text as a starting point for developing, and seeing what is defensible in, doctrines that it can be, or has been, thought to propound. Together these approaches reveal something of the depth of his thought as well as the breadth of his influence.

Hanna attempts to reconstruct Wittgenstein's argument for the connection between meaning and use stated at *PI* 43. Hanna locates this argument in the first twenty sections of Part I. For him Wittgenstein's starting point is the inadequacy of the 'Augustinian conception' of language as illustrated in the opening quotation. According to that conception – to which both Russell and the *Tractatus* had subscribed – a sentence consists of names whose meanings are identical with their bearers. Wittgenstein's objection to this picture in *Philosophical Investigations* is essentially that it is too static. When it comes to accounting for the role that linguistic expressions play in our lives – for instance in the context of an order – the machinery of reference is an idle wheel. The thesis of *PI* 43 now appears as the best alternative account of such a role. 'In this way', says Hanna, 'the Augustinian theory of language leads directly … to human action.'

Luntley's essay also discusses the 'Augustinian picture' but offers a wholly different reading of Wittgenstein's treatment of it. According to Luntley there *is* no critique of any Augustinian picture: rather, it functions as the starting-point for philosophical investigations of a more exploratory character. If anything, Augustine appears 'more in the guise of hero, than villain of the piece'.

One of the respects in which this is so is Augustine's anticipation of Wittgenstein's third-person epistemology of 'inner' states. Luntley invites us to compare Augustine's remark that '[His elders'] intention was shown by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples' with *PI* 244a.

But more important for Luntley is that by speaking of a 'natural language of all peoples' Augustine is recognizing that one needs to bring certain equipment to the learning of one's *first* (non-natural) language. Such learning is effected by what Wittgenstein distinguishes from explanation (including ostensive definition) with the label 'training' (*PI* 5–6). And what that training demands of us (unlike, say, ostensive definition) is a non-conceptual or pre-conceptual capacity that Luntley identifies with human agency. 'Wittgenstein's own description of the learning in s6', he says, 'does not make sense unless we acknowledge that the training is a tuning of agency.'

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes of 'the one language that alone I understand' (5.62); in the *Investigations* this gives way to an irreducible multiplicity of *language-games*. Accordingly the objects which in the *Tractatus* necessarily stood at the bottom of all language (*TLP* 2–2.0272) give way to a variety of items that *happen* to play analogously fundamental roles for particular language-games.

Jacquette's chapter is a close reading of Wittgenstein's illustration of this transition at *PI* 50: the discussion of the metre rod in Paris. There Wittgenstein says that that rod is the one thing of which one can say neither that it is, nor that it is not, one metre long. But, he continues, this is 'not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game'. Jacquette sees Wittgenstein's remark about the length of the metre bar as analogous to his remarks in the *Tractatus* about the existence of objects (*TLP* 4.1272). Jacquette describes and evaluates Wittgenstein's ground for the initial (non-ascription) claim and then asks just what this 'peculiar role in the language-game' amounts to. Finally he attacks Kripke's alternative reading of this passage and the criticism of Wittgenstein that Kripke bases upon it.

That move, from one language to many language-games, prompts the interlocutor to protest (at *PI* 65) that in making it Wittgenstein loses, and does not replace, the *Tractatus* account of the essence of language and the general form of the proposition (as specified at *TLP* 6). Wittgenstein replies that there is no one feature that is responsible in all cases for our describing linguistic phenomena as such: 'language' like 'game' (*PI* 66) expresses a *family-resemblance* concept.

Forster's essay discusses Wittgenstein's idea of family-resemblance concepts in connection with its first emergence in Wittgenstein's writings from the early 1930s. Forster offers a precise definition of the concept that distinguishes it from various other characteristics of concepts with which it tends to get confused (even by Wittgenstein himself), such as vagueness, and indicates its negative bearing upon a Platonic thesis about concepts.

Forster asks whether the existence of family-resemblance concepts would not violate a certain plausible general conception of the nature of concepts, central to *Philosophical Investigations* itself, according to which they are constituted by rules. Forster argues that there can indeed be such concepts, and that in particular they need not violate that general conception.

Finally he discusses two of the more important philosophical implications of the existence of family-resemblance concepts. In particular it may help to relieve us of (what Wittgenstein regarded as) the error of thinking that psychological concepts must pick out 'inner' or 'brain'-states just

because there is no one behavioural state, feature or event common to all of their instances (*PI* 36). It also implies that certain concepts are in one sense reducible to others: for a family-resemblance concept applies to something in any particular case in virtue of other features applying to it.

Glock's essay embeds a discussion of family resemblance concepts into a wider discussion of five Wittgensteinian theses about concepts. These are answers to the following questions: (a) What are concepts? (b) How are they individuated? (c) What is it to possess one? (d) What is the role of a concept? (e) Which of questions (a)–(d) is the most fundamental? Glock extracts and evaluates Wittgenstein's answers through consideration of a wide range of sources and finds that whereas some of his views are defensible – for instance the answer to (c) that concept-possession is an ability – others are not – for instance the answer to (a) identifying concepts with techniques or rules. Glock suggests that Wittgenstein's contribution to the study of concepts is 'important – though not definitive'.

Philosophical Investigations section 79 is of course well known as the source of the 'cluster version' of descriptivism about names. In that section Wittgenstein imagines that I have several beliefs about some individual called 'N'. He goes on: 'Asked what I understand by "N", I should enumerate all or some of these points, and different ones on different occasions.' This appears to say that names have a character analogous to family resemblance.

Both this passage and the official 'family-resemblance' doctrine have been taken to constitute Wittgensteinian anticipations of the modern doctrine of *contextualism*, according to which the meaning of an utterance is shaped in far-reaching and uncodifiable ways by the context in which it is uttered. Indeed, in the view of Charles Travis, the best-known proponent of this line of interpretation, Wittgenstein's *chief concern* in *Philosophical Investigations* is to bring out the importance of context sensitivity for understanding language and thought; for Travis, more or less everything Wittgenstein says in the book is to be read in that light.

Bridges's paper assesses the contextualist interpretation of the *Investigations*. His verdict is negative. Although it is true that Wittgenstein is concerned to draw our attention to the 'particular circumstances' in which uses of language take place, he argues that the point of these appeals is rather different from what the contextualists suppose. The intended purpose of these appeals is to bring out the hopelessness and superfluity of attempts to provide constitutive philosophical explanations of meaning and related phenomena. And according to Bridges, semantic contextualism of the sort promoted by Travis and his allies counts as just such an attempt. It casts an

utterance's meaning as constitutively dependent upon the 'point' of that utterance.

'The proposition and the word that logic deals with are supposed to be something pure and clear-cut' (*PI* 105). Here Wittgenstein evokes a philosophical spirit for whom the family-resemblance character of everyday concepts is an irrelevant distraction. Wittgenstein's response to that spirit is critical: and at *PI* 89–135 Wittgenstein presents this criticism in the context of saying what *he* sees the philosophical task to be. Rorty's essay, and Horwich's (which replies to it), focus not on the detailed exegesis of this material but on the question of what there is in it, and also in the book containing it, that is of philosophical value. In particular, Rorty distinguishes two visions of philosophy in *Philosophical Investigations*: the therapeutic and the pragmatic. The issue between him and Horwich is not over which of these positions *Wittgenstein* took: it is over which of them one *should* take.

According to the therapeutic view – attributed to Wittgenstein himself, as is well known, by such scholars as Conant and Diamond – both philosophical questions and the theories we construct to answer them are really nonsense; the illusion that they are not is a deep and enduring fact about human nature; so the *true* philosophical task – of exposing these illusions of sense – is both valuable and unending. Wittgenstein's expression of this perspective at *PI* 89–133 recapitulates the vision of philosophy presented at *TLP* 6.5–6.54.

According to the pragmatic vision, philosophy should aim to improve our theories with a view ultimately to 'creating a better human future'. Just as the *Investigations* is of value for presenting (what Rorty calls) a 'social-practice' theory of language that improves upon that in the *Tractatus*, so more generally what is valuable in philosophical work is not that it 'cures' us of our puzzlement but that it improves our theories. On this view *PI* 89–133 is an unfortunate excrescence that only obscures what is of value in the rest of the book.

Rorty favours the pragmatist vision whilst Horwich favours the therapeutic one. Rorty's arguments against the therapeutic view are (a) that it has not been shown that philosophical terms are meaningless; (b) that it is highly intuitive that they are not meaningless; and (c) that there is in any case a better explanation of philosophical puzzlement than a persistent human tendency to see sense where there is only nonsense. Horwich's response on behalf of therapism is not to reject these arguments; instead he seeks to construct a recognizably therapeutic doctrine that lacks the commitments to which Rorty so powerfully objects.

Wittgenstein's famous discussion of rule-following has received such fundamentally opposing interpretations that it is hard to characterize its drift in anything approaching neutral terms. For instance Kripke's notorious monograph (Kripke 1982) represents Wittgenstein as arguing for the sceptical thesis that meaning is an illusion. The gist of the rule-following material is (on that view) an argument that nothing *could* meet the conditions that a 'dead' sign – a mere ink mark, say – must meet to count as a meaningful symbol (for further discussion see my 2007: chs. 4–5). After all, *any* object ('inner' or 'outer') can be interpreted to mean anything you choose – so how could *it* be the bearer of meaning? Others (most notably McDowell 1984) argue that this interpretation of that part of *PI* commits just the error that Wittgenstein was there trying to expose. In searching for the artichoke of meaning we divest it of its leaves and find ourselves empty-handed. But this does not mean that there never was an artichoke. What is as clear as anything to do with this subject is that Wittgenstein's contribution to it was profound – even if its depth is just the depth in us of the delusion that it seeks to extract.

That delusion consists in a certain way of thinking about meaning, understanding, intention, and other phenomena that are associated with rule-following. It gets expressed as follows. Suppose that you have intentionally carried out the steps demanded by some rule. Then even though you didn't think *in advance* of all of the steps that it mandates, still by virtue of the fact that you were all along intending to follow *this* rule, it must be the case that your mind 'as it were flew ahead and completed all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one' (*PI* 188).

An overly blunt conception of what he objects to in this picture can make it seem that Wittgenstein denies that meaning, understanding etc. are definite states at all. In the first part of McDowell's essay he considers a set of passages, mainly around *PI* 154, that can easily give that impression. But he goes on to urge that the picture looks considerably different when we take account of passages towards the end of Part I, where Wittgenstein considers the topic of remembering occasions on which one arrived at an understanding (a past-tense counterpart of 'Now I can go on', his topic in those earlier passages).

The discussion of private language in the *Philosophical Investigations* is one of the last parts of the book to have been drafted. Most of it was written between 1937 and 1945, after the first 190 remarks of Part I of the book had almost reached their final wording. The post-1936 writing on private language that leads up to the final version of 243–412 represents a fresh start, both in wording and in conception, on the pre-1936 material. Almost

none of the post-1936 writing is a direct reworking of the previous material, and while it discusses many of the same topics, it approaches them differently.

However, Wittgenstein did repeatedly discuss the idea of a language that 'only I myself can understand' (*PI* 256) throughout the 1929–36 period. One strand in the 1929–36 discussion of private language that *is* directly taken up in the *Philosophical Investigations* is the proposal that 'If I were to reserve the word "pain" solely for what I had hitherto called "my pain", and others "L.W.'s pain", I should do other people no injustice, so long as a notation were provided in which the loss of the word "pain" in other connections were somehow supplied' (*PI* 403). However, the discussion in the *Philosophical Investigations* is far briefer and less elaborate than previous writings on the topic in such texts as *Philosophical Remarks*, *The Big Typescript*, and *The Blue Book*.

Stern's essay, 'Another strand in the private language argument' looks at the relationship between these earlier discussions of reforming pain-language and the discussion in *PI* 403, not only with the aim of mapping out the earlier development of a particular thread of argument in the *Philosophical Investigations*, but also as a way of exploring the principal continuities and discontinuities in the development of Wittgenstein's approach to private language.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had regarded logic as the absolutely inevitable by-product of the pictorial mechanism of representation. By contrast, his later conception was thoroughly anthropocentric. The rules of logic are for *us* to lay down; they are autonomous in the sense that they are not responsible to a kind of meaning that is not a rule. At *PI* 547–70 Wittgenstein explores one conception of what somebody who believed in this other kind of meaning might take it to be. My essay argues that considerations parallel to the rule-following arguments justify rejection of such meanings. It then argues that Wittgenstein's alternative position – according to which rules are, in the sense just stated, autonomous – faces a difficulty in accounting for the fact that we can discover novel rules of inference. The chapter concludes by arguing that Wittgenstein's position is defensible once we appreciate the role that aspect perception plays in the epistemology of logical deduction.

In *PI* 633–93, and in related passages elsewhere, Wittgenstein discusses a series of cases in which, on the face of it, we have immediate knowledge of our past intentional states and properties. For example: knowing what you were going to say when you were interrupted; remembering that, for a moment, you were going to deceive someone; knowing what you meant

when you uttered an ambiguous remark; reporting that, while someone else was speaking, you thought they meant this rather than that; remembering that I should have been glad to stay longer; knowing that, when I gave someone the order 'add 2', I meant him to put 1002 after 1000. Child's contribution concludes the volume by exploring Wittgenstein's treatment of such cases.

On a common-sense understanding of these cases, there is a fact of the matter about my past attitude, meaning, etc., independent of my subsequent belief or report about it. So if my retrospective report is true, there is something about how I was at the time that makes it true. But some commentators take Wittgenstein's discussion to suggest a form of anti-realism about the past; on this view, what makes it true that I was going to say such-and-such when I was interrupted is simply that that is what I am retrospectively inclined to believe I was going to say.

Child disagrees. For him, Wittgenstein's target is not the realist view of past attitudes etc. itself, but only a particular way of construing or justifying the realist view. For Wittgenstein, what makes it true that, at the time when I said 'Napoleon', I meant the victor of Austerlitz, is not my subsequent belief that that is who I meant; nor is it anything that was going through my mind at the time; it is, rather, something about the abilities and dispositions I had at the time.

It should be clear from these summaries – if it were not already from the title of the volume – that the following essays represent a genuinely *critical* engagement with *Philosophical Investigations*. Together they bring us closer to settling not only what Wittgenstein means but also how much of it is true. Their connection of so much of Wittgenstein's work to more recent concerns also illustrates its enduring relevance. It is only just half a century since *Philosophical Investigations* was published. But that is not too soon to predict that it will remain of importance for as long as philosophy does.

www.cambridge.org