Reviews

Wittgenstein and the Creativity of Language
Edited by Sebastian Sunday Grève and Jakub Macha
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It is not easy discern a common theme among these essays. In a sense they are all on topic, but then, the topic is a wide one: they all involve references to Wittgenstein, and as for 'creativity of language', that theme is so accommodating that almost any text dealing with questions of language and meaning in an interesting way can be said to fall under it. The disparity of subjects is not necessarily a drawback, however, provided the essays are of interest, and many of them are.

Stephen Mulhall discusses the relation between reading poetry and reading philosophy, with reference to a poem by William Empson and a passage in Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*. Unfortunately, I found his line of thought somewhat elusive. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock writes about the problem of idealism: how does language attach to the world, given that it does not follow an outline given in the world itself? Following Ilham Dilman, she proposes to solve the problem by distinguishing between empirical reality – the reality of particular objects, facts and concepts – and formal reality – the product of our attempts at ordering reality, involving concepts like 'physical object', 'the past', etc. Formal reality is a linguistic creation. Moyal-Sharrock (rather abstractly) discusses the role of literature in language, arguing that 'through literature, [language] extends itself and reaches new forms'. Here one would ask: does this happen only through literature? And besides: when does a form count as 'new'? It could be argued that the elasticity of language means that the line between 'same' and 'different' is itself elastic. Along similar lines, Garry Hagberg lucidly and interestingly criticizes the misconception that Wittgenstein's view of language excludes linguistic creativity; on the contrary, he points out, it enables us to view the growth of language-games as analogous with the expansion of expressive possibilities in art.

Charles Altieri and John Hyman also discuss issues in aesthetics. Hyman writes about the relation between Wittgenstein and Adolf Loos, reflecting on analogies between Loos's views on values and Wittgenstein's as embodied in the *Tractatus*. Altieri wishes to

contrast the sort of insight art can bring, which is also central in our attempts to characterize and respond to human action, with the type of knowledge that involves criteria, an idea which he connects with Wittgenstein's proposal, in *On Certainty*, that there can only be talk of knowledge on matters concerning which there may be doubt. In this context, he wishes to draw attention to the concept of display which, he says, 'proves central to any sense of participating in a practice because we react to what others display and we try to make manifest the qualities of our own involvement'. Here it would have been helpful if Altieri had provided one example or two of how his concepts work. One might also like to know how display is related to the concept of seeing aspects. On the whole, Altieri's essay is hampered by a degree of abstractness which in places made it very hard indeed for me to follow his line of thought.

Maria Balaska and Ben Ware in their thoughtful essays address questions of life. Balaska links Wittgenstein's idea about 'running up against the limits of language' with Cora Diamond's concerns in her essay 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy'. She suggests that certain extraordinary experiences may bring on a dissatisfaction with meaning. We may be tempted to respond to these by either giving the experience a transcendent meaning, or explaining it away as a grammatical illusion. These temptations cause us to miss the opportunity for linguistic creativity that experiences like these provide. Ben Ware explores the ethical import of Wittgenstein's notion of aspect-seeing, connecting this with the effort of *Philosophical Investigations* to make us see the everyday anew.

I found three of the essays particularly instructive. Alois Pichler writes about Wittgenstein's compositional strategy under the title 'Wittgenstein and "Us Typical Western Scientists"'. Wittgenstein himself uses the word 'criss-cross' in characterizing the form of *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*. According to Pichler, the use of this form was not, as some have argued, dictated by Wittgenstein's inability to write in a linear fashion, but rather a considered choice dictated by the nature of the activity itself. He asks why Wittgenstein abandoned the project he began in *The Brown Book (BrB)*. This seems a natural question to ask: after all, examples are at the centre of Wittgenstein's method, and *BrB* is wholly made up of examples. It is also more accessible and less aphoristic than *PI*. Nevertheless, Pichler argues, Wittgenstein was dissatisfied with *BrB*: it had a linear rather than a criss-cross form. In fact, Pichler points out, *BrB* was the sole deviation from a conception he had formulated even earlier, for instance in the 1930 sketch for a foreword included in *Culture and Value* (9e).

Now, it is important to distinguish criss-cross writing from what the linguist Hanspeter Ortner calls puzzle writing, which consists in solving one puzzle after another; Ortner argues that Wittgenstein's method constitutes a paradigm example of this method. Pichler disagrees. Puzzle writing, he claims, is close to linear writing, while criss-cross composition is something altogether different. The issue here is not just about forms of presentation, but about different ways of doing philosophy. What characterizes criss-cross writing (and thinking) as I understand it, is the realization that all the different elements of a text hang together and impact one another, rather than, as in linear writing, forming a logical order. As for the aphoristic elements of *PI*, which were lacking in *BrB* (e.g. 'The confusions which occupy us arise when language is, as it were, idling, not when it is doing work.'; 'What is your aim in philosophy? – To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.', etc), these are obviously meant to make the reader take a step backward and take note of the nature of the investigation being carried out, thus coming to reflect on the way it differs from the conventional form of philosophical discourse, conceived under the paradigm of scientific investigation.

Wolfgang Kienzler and Sebastian Sunday Grève, in a joint essay, present a close reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on Gödelian 'in-completeness', in Part I, Appendix III of the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. They argue that Wittgenstein's critique of Gödel's theorem – which has often (even by Gödel himself) been taken as proof that Wittgenstein did not understand or pretended not to understand Gödel's reasoning – is as stringent and tight-knitted as the central parts of *PI*, and that its implications are more radical than has been believed: Wittgenstein aims to show that the Gödelian con-struct of a string of signs cannot be given a useful function in math-ematics. In order to show this, they carry out an exceptionally thorough reading of the Gödel appendix. The problem about Gödel's proof, if I catch their drift, arises from the way in which formal proof and comment are intertwined. The upshot is that Gödel was right in asserting that Wittgenstein did not understand his proof – but this was because he had shown that it *could not* be understood. The authors conclude by suggesting that possibly Wittgenstein had understood Gödel better than Gödel understood himself.

Rupert Read has contributed an essay with the title 'Metaphysics is Metaphorics: Philosophical and Ecological Reflections from Wittgenstein and Lakoff on the Pros and Cons of Linguistic Creativity' (long titles is a recurrent feature of this collection). The

essay is astute, but Read is attempting to cover much too much ground in the available space. The central part of the essay is a critique of the Chomskian notion of linguistic creativity. Chomsky famously said that the task of generative grammar was to explain how speakers can learn to make infinite use of finite means. Read argues that it is radically unclear what 'finite' and 'infinite' are supposed to mean here. For one thing, since a sentence cannot be infinitely long, it is not literally true that we can make up an infinite number of sentences out of the finite means of vocabulary and syntax *in any interesting sense*, even on Chomsky's terms. Besides, the idea that the resources of language are finite is itself an artefact, due to our limiting our attention to written language. As Read points out, the resources of spoken language, including fine nuances of tone, etc., cannot be said to be finite. It would, however, be more fruitful to talk about the expressive resources of language in terms of openness rather than infinity – a concept which, as Read argues, tends to be confused with the idea of something huge. Altogether, Read makes a number of interesting observations about infinity and creativity. He points out that Chomsky misuses the word 'creative' in speaking about language learning, and he argues that it is senseless to call human beings finite unless one makes it clear what the contrast is. Read ends by observing that we are emotional beings who are in need of inspiring language. There is a rhetoric that lies and a rhetoric that leads us to political sanity. A worthwhile form of rhetoric is one that manages to reframe the issues (rather than 'puts a spin' on them), rather as Wittgenstein managed to reframe problems of philosophy. (Perhaps one might add that a form of rhetoric is honest when it *presents itself* as an attempt at reframing.)

In sum, this volume is rich in content, but several of the essays are not a quick or easy read (in fact, I have brought along the book on travels to three continents, and still feel that, time permitting, I ought to start over once more). I cannot help regretting what seems to me a kind of over-sophistication in the style of presentation on the part of several contributors: a high level of abstraction, a lack of directness in the argument. With a fitting metaphor, Wittgenstein worried that his way of writing was not homespun enough. Some of today's philosophers on the contrary seem to be afraid of being too homespun.

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