Wittgenstein: Lectures, Cambridge, 1930–1933, From the Notes of G. E. Moore
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Wittgenstein's Whewell's Court Lectures: Cambridge, 1938–1941, From the Notes by Yorick Smythies
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Ludwig Wittgenstein taught some 47 classes at Cambridge from Lent term (January–March), 1930, to Easter term (April–May), 1947. Wittgenstein did not like for students to take notes, and occasionally admonished them for doing so.

Despite this fact, we have fairly full notes from roughly 30 of the 47 classes he taught. Fifteen of them are covered in the notes from these two books. The best-known notes are those published as *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, from Lent and Easter terms of 1939. These are the lectures that Alan Turing attended. We have also long had *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930–1932*; *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932–1935*; and *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology: 1946–47*. And in addition, there are article-length editions of notes from various terms in 1936 and 1938 included in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*. These publications have given a good survey of Wittgenstein's lecturing over the years. His lectures differed from his writings in that he could take less for granted in his lectures, they were sometimes more straightforward, and he tended to lecture about a wider range of topics. One of Wittgenstein's students from 1945–1947 was Wasfi Hijab. Not only did Hijab attend lectures during that time, but he also met with Wittgenstein on a weekly basis to discuss the philosophy of religion. Hijab claimed that teaching was the only way Wittgenstein could adequately convey his thought. Whether or not that is true, his teaching, as we learn about it from lecture notes, is certainly a valuable supplement to his writing.

Professors will sympathize with Wittgenstein's qualms about note-taking. I have been dismayed to hear a student in office hours ask about a topic from lecture where the student's notes expressed exactly the opposite of, or something only tangentially related to, what was said in class. Wittgenstein's expressed concern was that he

did not want his spontaneous ideas to be taken as his considered opinions. (Of course, that would count against reading his notebooks as well.) But we can imagine he also wondered how accurate the notes would be. He once, in 1935, allowed a student who knew shorthand to take notes on condition that he check them afterwards. (Alonzo Church used to assign students to take notes of his logic class lectures and then grade them based on his corrections.) Wittgenstein was quite unhappy with the result – not because they were inaccurate, but because the student included every oath, pause and fragmentary false lead that came up. Indeed, reports about Wittgenstein's lectures often allude to their fragmentary nature. I.A. Richards, who attended briefly in 1931 and in 1932 recalled: 'Moore was in an armchair, at his elbow, taking down every syllable. When Wittgenstein would start a sentence ten times, Moore would write it on his pad ten times up to the point where he broke it off.' Alice Ambrose, after the first week of classes in Michaelmas term (October–December) 1932, wrote to a friend: 'He is extremely hard to follow… he forgets what he set out to say, rears ahead of himself – says *Whoa!*… settles down rigidly then and thinks with his head in his hands, stammers, says 'Poor Miss Ambrose', swears, and ends up with "It is very diff-i-cult".' So, while notes can badly mangle the content of a lecture, they can also clean up the flow of the lecture, as these notes apparently do.

But despite Wittgenstein's worries about note-taking, he did indicate his approval of note-taking by two auditors, who are in fact the source of these sets of notes, G. E. Moore and Yorick Smythies. Moore had known Wittgenstein since the latter's student days at Cambridge before the war, and was now at the time of these lectures the Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge. Smythies was a close friend. No doubt Wittgenstein felt he could trust them to have some understanding of what he was discussing and to be disposed to present the lectures in a sympathetic light. Both of them commented on how they attempted to capture his very words. We are left to wonder how much they cleaned up the flow. Smythies purported not to be doing so, but he seems to have done so, in spite of himself.

While Wittgenstein initially distinguished between the 'lecture' meeting earlier in the week, and the 'discussion' later in the week, the class meetings had a good deal of interaction between teacher and students. Some interventions are attributed to named students in Moore's notes: most familiar are Drury, five times, and Skinner, once. The student mentioned or named most often, though, is 'Ursell' (twelve times). Even long-time scholars of Wittgenstein may not have heard of him. Harold Ursell was a mathematician and a fellow of Trinity College at the time. At his death, many years

later, an obituary by the mathematician L.C. Young calls Ursell 'a close friend of Wittgenstein'. Ursell earns no mention in Monk's biography, and I had only ever heard of him previously when he is mentioned once in the 1938 notes from Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics in connection with Cantor's diagonal proof. Clearly, we have more to learn about Wittgenstein and his associations, especially with mathematicians.

Moore's notes contain extended discussions of the *Tractatus* in November 1932 (215–221) and February 1933 (250–260), where Wittgenstein offers his self-criticisms concerning whether quantifiers can be treated as logical sums or products, and whether analysis can deliver atomic propositions. Perhaps most interesting are notes of nine lectures in May 1933, in which Wittgenstein focusses on ethics, God, aesthetics, and Frazer. And in the course of a discussion of aesthetics (358–359) Wittgenstein recounts the experiments on rhythm which he performed on David Pinsent in 1913. All these topics had been noted in Moore's earlier report or in Ambrose's notes, but they are presented much more fully here.

While Moore's notes cover lectures already familiar from previously published notes, though now in much more detail, Smythies' notes cover largely unfamiliar territory – being taken during academic terms for which we have had little information. Here we find interesting elaborations of the infamous fly bottle image (7 and 196) referenced in *Philosophical Investigations* §309, and discussions of the idea that pain is 'not a something, but not a nothing either' (9 and 117) proclaimed in *Philosophical Investigations* §304. We also find many and varied characterizations of philosophical method and of privacy throughout these notes.

I was especially interested to find further discussions of Wittgenstein's most perplexing thought experiment about two seeds that cannot be distinguished, but which produce different plants. The case is most famously discussed in manuscript passages dating from 1947 and then collected in *Zettel* (§§608ff), where it seems to undermine our very concept of mediated causation. But it has its origins in a manuscript from 1937, published in *Philosophical Occasions* (373–377). Rush Rhees published notes from lectures in Easter term 1938, where Wittgenstein elaborated the case (410–11), but Smythies' notes (18) offer an alternate account of the lecture noted by Rhees, as well as two other places from the same term where Wittgenstein reflected on the case. In one place (64–65) Wittgenstein seems to have reminded himself of the 1937 manuscript before his lecture; in the other (81) he makes use of notes from another student, James Taylor, and the case comes up in a very different

context. Instead of using the case to reflect on our conception of causality, he uses it in the course of reflecting on the nature of necessary propositions.

In the case where we have both Smythies' and Rhees's notes from what is sure to be the same lecture, they differ in ways that merit further reflection (which I undertook in my book *Wittgenstein in Exile*, Chapter 8). In fact, it is generally valuable to have students' notes from the same lectures, both because of the possible unreliability of the notes, and because of the different perspectives they can represent. Cora Diamond's conflation of students' notes from the 1939 Lent and Easter term lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics deprived us of this comparison, while offering a fuller and smoother-reading text. Peter Geach's edition of the 1946–1947 lectures offered us three different versions of the same course, and left it to us to piece together our own account of what happened (supplemented, perhaps, by the still unpublished notes from yet another student, Gilbert Harris Edwards). Neither approach to editing can be faulted – though Diamond's may be more attractive to the Wittgenstein fan, Geach's to the Wittgenstein scholar.

What strikes me about the 1938 lectures on seeds is that they pursue in greater depth how our temperament influences our reaction to the seeds case, an issue only raised in the 1937 manuscript passage. Something similar happens in 1947, when Wittgenstein returns to the seed case in his manuscript in early April: His remarks are far less insightful than his comments in his lectures later that month. Anyone shocked by the *Zettel* passages about the seeds (Stich called them an expression of 'mystical vitalism') would do well to consider them alongside the much richer reflections in Wittgenstein's lectures, in 1938 and again in 1947. There is perhaps no better illustration of the value of his lectures in relation to his writings.

I mentioned that we have fairly good coverage of notes from Wittgenstein's courses, roughly 30 of 47. That leaves more than a dozen. One gap begins around the last year of Moore's notes, 1932–33. It was during this same year that Wittgenstein also offered a course on Philosophy for Mathematicians. The *Cambridge University Reporter* lists this additional course for the three terms of 1932–33 and the Michaelmas term of 1933. Notes from this class were published by Alice Ambrose, but her published notes amount to only 20 printed pages and are divided into eleven numbered sections. These would seem to represent eleven class meetings. Even though the class met only once a week, these undated notes would account for only a fraction of the class meetings. The extra class for mathematicians was notoriously cancelled partway through the

Michaelmas term of 1933, when Wittgenstein decided to dictate what came to be called the Blue Book instead. But the Blue Book, though dictated to five mathematics students, certainly was not a discussion of philosophy for mathematicians. Supposedly the regular philosophy class for 1933–1934 went on as planned. But there are no known class notes that derive from that year.

A second gap occurs during World War II. Because of war work in London, Wittgenstein began lecturing only on Saturdays during Michaelmas term of 1941 and attendance was rather sparse. There are no known notes from then through Lent term 1943, at which point Wittgenstein stopped lecturing altogether as he moved with a medical research group to Newcastle. Then when he completed the work in Newcastle, he began lecturing again full time in Michaelmas term 1944, but the third gap in notes runs from then through the Easter term of 1946. It is possible that notes may yet appear from these missing terms – such are the mysteries, and joys, of scholarship.

The publication of these two books is a blessing for Wittgenstein fans and scholars alike. They cover a wide range of interesting topics, often in greater depth or with more subtlety than in his writings. And for this blessing a great debt is owed to the five editors. These editions are true labors of love. I know the edition of Smythies' notes, for example, was some twenty years in the making. In both cases the editing was done with endless devotion and care. Something not all publishers these days would tolerate.

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