

## REVIEWS

William H. Brenner, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, 1999,  
State University of New York Press, xv + 184, price \$18.95 pb.

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It should be noticed that the title of this book is not 'Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*'. Though presented by the author as 'a companion to the *Investigations*' (xi), it is both less and more than that: less, in so far as it does not aim at anything like a comprehensive commentary on the *Investigations*; more, in so far as there are discussions of philosophical topics which draw on sources beyond the text of the *Investigations*. William Brenner has achieved an interestingly unusual combination – an introduction to Wittgenstein's later philosophy by way of a commentary on the text of the *Investigations*. The book's introduction and conclusion address the history and nature of philosophy: this provides a frame within which to present the textual commentary, approximately half the book, followed by chapters on sensations and the soul, colour and number, religion and ethics, which develop Wittgensteinian themes touched on in the commentary.

Most readers of the *Investigations* have difficulty, as Brenner puts it, in 'seeing the woods (*sic*) for the trees' (p. 12). Accordingly, the aim of his commentary is 'to clearly bring out some of the main lines of Wittgenstein's thought' so that readers can find their way around 'the forest of remarks' (xi). Brenner divides the commentary into two major parts, 'Language' and 'Mind', corresponding respectively to §§ 1–242 and the remainder of the text, with further headings and sub-headings within each part. The commentary follows the order of topics in the *Investigations*, though Brenner frequently draws on remarks from different parts of the book as well as from other areas of the *Nachlass* forest, including notes of lectures and conversations (and passages from Waismann). The employment of non-*Investigations* material in amplifying the *Investigations* remarks is strikingly successful: for instance, the use of 'the charming and instructive Story of Boo' from *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics: Cambridge 1939*, pp. 182–3, to

illuminate Wittgenstein's now familiar example of 'adding two' in §185 (pp. 34–5). With cross-references to classical and contemporary literature mostly confined to numerous footnotes, the result is a highly informed, continuously readable guide to the major features of the Wittgensteinian landscape.

Brenner's commentary is genuinely introductory: written clearly and non-technically, it is suitable for first-year students of philosophy. The dominant form of his comments is exegesis and clarification of groups of Wittgenstein's remarks. Sometimes Brenner lightly sketches the relevant background, e.g., under the heading "THIS" (Sections 38–42) Russell's logical atomism is succinctly described (pp. 18–19); sometimes he presents Wittgenstein's remarks in a simpler way, e.g., under the heading "RULE", "AGREEMENT", "SAME" (Sections 224–228) he writes, 'These words are interwoven in our everyday use of them. And as we learn new language games, we learn new uses of "same and different", "agreement and disagreement". We learn a whole family of contrasts' (p. 40). Occasionally, this latter procedure errs on the side of redundancy, as when at the end of the commentary on §§ 194–6 Brenner adds in parenthesis '(Compare philosophical puzzlement about "suddenly understanding" with a child's surprise at hearing that a tailor can "sew a dress". He thought this meant that a dress was produced by sewing one thread on another!)' (p. 36). But this does barely more than repeat Wittgenstein's parenthetical remark in § 195.

This latter commentary is in dialogue form, a device Brenner borrows with due acknowledgement from Ossie Hanfling's brilliant course books for the Open University. In some cases, the dialogue is constructed using a selection of Wittgenstein's own words; e.g., the dialogue on 'How do you mean?' based on §§ 186–90 (pp. 35–6). It is surprising how helpful it is to see Wittgenstein's remarks laid out in this way: the eye's tendency to glide over Wittgenstein's paragraphs is arrested and the dialectical structure then becomes unavoidable. In other cases, Brenner invents dialogue to illustrate steps in Wittgenstein's reasoning; see, e.g., the dialogue on kinaesthesia to accompany Part 2, section viii (p. 77). One of the most effective commentaries deals with the issue of concept formation raised by Part 2, section xii: here Brenner shrewdly combines invented dialogue with remarks from various parts of the *Investigations* and other texts to elucidate Wittgenstein's view of the relationships between grammar and general facts of nature (pp. 84–91).

Brenner's success in clarifying the central features of Wittgenstein's thought is achieved at the expense of eschewing all reference to the

numerous controversies over the interpretation of such topics as rule-following and the private language argument. Names such as Fogelin, Kripke, McDowell, von Wright make no appearance, not even in the bibliography, thus depriving more advanced students of guidance in further study. There is a similar silence regarding contemporary non-Wittgensteinian philosophy. Dennett is the sole representative of 'the numerous post-Wittgensteinian philosophers who want to achieve results' (p. 61). If, fifty years after his death, Wittgenstein is not to be relegated to a chapter in history, then students must be shown how his philosophy engages with Quine, Davidson, Fodor and Dummett, as well as with Descartes, Berkeley, and Russell. It is not the least merit of this book that Brenner recognizes that part of the difficulty here concerns Wittgenstein's radically divergent conception of philosophy. As he puts it, '[Wittgenstein] too wants results – of a kind: "complete clarity. But that simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear" (*PI* § 133)' (p. 61). This does not quite secure the point of divergence. But the crucial next sentence of § 133 had already been quoted as part of Brenner's introduction to the *Investigations*, "'The real discovery is the one that . . . gives philosophy peace" (*PI* § 133). Yes, but this "peace" is internally related to "the spirit that seeks clarity as an end" (Cf. *CV*, p. 7)' (fn 6, p. 11). Brenner rightly relates the spirit of Wittgenstein's elucidatory philosophical activity to a certain religious concern for purity of heart which pervades his life and his work; this helps us understand Wittgenstein's remark to Drury (which Brenner does not quote), 'I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view' (R. Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (OUP, 1984), p. 79).

Perhaps inspired by the reproduction (p. 52) of a cartoon from Hanfling's *Language and the Privacy of Experience*, Brenner uses as the book's cover a picture of Theseus disposing of Procrustes to characterise Wittgenstein as a 'philosophical Theseus doing battle against metaphysical marauders who force all varieties of language (and life) into the procrustean bed of what he calls "the model of object and designation"' (xi). The image seems well chosen, for throughout the commentary, and especially in the ensuing discussions of colour, number, and religion, Brenner is adept at displaying Wittgenstein's emphasis on the variety and complexity of those language-games which are obscured by metaphysical realism and empirical reductionism. Ironically, however, for someone who is particularly good at conveying the spirit of Wittgenstein's philosophizing, the

violence expressed by the cover-picture is at odds with Wittgenstein's concern to bring about a change in our way of seeing. (Commenting on Hilbert's remark about the paradise which Cantor created, Wittgenstein said, 'I wouldn't dream of trying to drive anyone out of this paradise . . . I would try to show you that it is not a paradise – so that you'll leave of your own accord'. *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics: Cambridge 1939*, p. 103). It is also at odds with Wittgenstein's comparison of philosophy with the treatment of an illness (*PI*, § 255). And in this respect it is significant that Brenner does not make use of the analogy of therapies which occurs in the (for him) crucial *PI* § 133: neither psychoanalysis nor Freud figure in this book.

The prosecution of Procrustes leads Brenner astray in his discussion of religion. Having explained something of the grammar of 'God' and 'belief in God', Brenner remarks, 'Some religious teachers certainly do seem to present the existence of God as a (well-supported) scientific hypothesis. If this accurately reflects the central use of the word "God" in their denomination, then they are teaching quite a different religion from the one Wittgenstein learned' (fn 3, p. 142). This is a false step. One wonders which religion it is that these people are teaching! To concede that the procedure of supporting hypotheses, etc., constitutes the practice of a 'different religion' immediately raises the question of what it means to say that such a practice is a religious practice. The answer is to be found in the relationship of the beliefs to the rest of the believers' lives. The claims of the religious teachers about the nature of their religious practice are no more to be taken at face value than are the claims of a Cartesian who characterizes his relationship to other people in terms of the argument from analogy.

There is an index to paragraphs in *Philosophical Investigations* (though not to any other texts). But it is not as useful as it might be. There are typographical errors, e.g., §§ 244–57 are referred to on page 104 rather than page 114; and some crucial references (e.g., to § 133 on pages 11 and 61) are not listed.

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John W. Cook, *Wittgenstein, Empiricism and Language*, Oxford University Press, 1999, xv + 224, no price.

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Cook's central argument is that Wittgenstein was influenced by Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World* and that his writings should be read as a response to scepticism. Cook claims that by borrowing Russell's way of posing or framing certain philosophical problems, Wittgenstein opts for empiricism, 'that is, for phenomenalism, behaviourism and other forms of reductionism', because he thinks there is no other way to extricate himself from a calamitous scepticism. He claims that Wittgenstein accepts Russell's premises uncritically throughout his lifetime and that they remain influential on both his early and later writings. As a result, Wittgenstein fails to make any philosophical progress.

Although this interpretation appears inconsistent with Wittgenstein's claims that he eschews theory in favour of description, Cook argues that (for Wittgenstein) phenomenalism, behaviourism and other forms of reductionism are not theories (but the antitheses of theories). Nevertheless, Cook argues that Wittgenstein concedes to the sceptic everything that goes into making the sceptic sceptical, such as the idea that we perceive sense-data and that what we perceive of another person is a body and its behavior. One result of Cook's reading is that 'there are no people as we normally understand this' in Wittgenstein's philosophy. Instead there are humanoid bodies. Cook writes that he does not mean that Wittgenstein's philosophy 'is littered with corpses', rather the bodies in question are the residuum of methodological doubt. According to Cook, there are (phenomenal) 'bodies' and Wittgenstein's *attitude* towards them.

What is thought-provoking about this work are not the claims Cook makes nor the conclusions he draws, but the methodological approach which renders them possible. His entire argument rests on the claim that Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World* had an enormous influence upon Wittgenstein's thinking. However, support for this claim is relegated to a short appendix at the end of the book in which Cook provides little convincing textual evidence. When he quotes Wittgenstein (and others) throughout the text, he presents short passages that are often incomplete and taken out of context.

Several of Cook's arguments also rely heavily on Wittgenstein's writings from the early 1930s and late 1940s. While not inherently problematic, quoting such passages does not (as Cook often implies) demonstrate that a particular theme or problem runs throughout Wittgenstein's later philosophy. The earlier texts are rightly regarded within the literature as transitional and the later writings are distinct in purpose, form and content. More textual exegesis and analysis are required to support Cook's interpretation. Contrary to his claim that 'we are still in the dark as to the source of [Wittgenstein's] oracular pronouncements about language', we *can* place his writings within a philosophical and cultural context, and we can investigate his written remarks within the context of the *Nachlass* as a whole. Russell's text and Cook's appeals to empiricism do not adequately address such methodological issues.

Even more philosophically problematic is the fact that Cook rarely takes Wittgenstein at his word. He dismisses much of what Wittgenstein says as inaccurate and describes several passages as 'worded very cagily'. Although Wittgenstein's aim is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use, Cook claims that he pays little attention to what we actually say. And although Wittgenstein claims that a main source of philosophical confusion is a one-sided diet of examples, Cook claims not only that he seldom deals with fully developed and realistic examples but that he mismanages the ones he presents. He quotes with approval Frank Ebersole's remark that Wittgenstein 'does not – in truth – ever follow his own advice'. When he qualifies such statements he becomes even more dismissive: 'naturally [Wittgenstein] *believed* he was following his own advice ... And his sureness, his enormous self-confidence, inspired devotion, even blind devotion. But it was a case of the blind leading the blind'. Such passages, although unequivocal, do nothing to forward Cook's argument.

In addition to dismissing Wittgenstein's own words, Cook also dismisses his explicit remarks concerning language. He claims that Wittgenstein treats ordinary language as a phenomenalistic language in disguise: 'Bringing a word back to its everyday use means showing that, appearances notwithstanding, the word belongs to a (covert) phenomenalistic language'. He asserts that when Wittgenstein proposes to bring a word back from its metaphysical to its everyday use, he decides which use is the everyday one by considering what sort of use is consistent with his own metaphysical views.

In order to substantiate his interpretation Cook introduces three different kinds of ordinary language philosophy: standard, metaphysical and investigative. He discusses the first with reference to Moore and Malcolm, the second with reference to Augustine, Leibniz, Berkeley and Reid, and the third with reference to his colleague Frank Ebersole. He identifies Wittgenstein most closely with the second (metaphysical) form of ordinary language philosophy but concludes the book with a presentation of investigative ordinary language philosophy. Cook claims it should not be necessary to address the nature of this (third) philosophy because it has been practised by Ebersole and others for nearly half a century; however, he concedes that it has been neglected and is unfamiliar to most philosophers. He introduces his final chapter with the following words: 'In view of this unfamiliarity then, I will present here, as a small sample, a piece that I wrote (for the most part) forty years ago'. (The piece that follows is seven pages long.)

Cook presents a great deal of material in his book but he does not provide a bibliography. With few exceptions his references do not include works published after the mid-1980s. His recent references are, for the most part, critical responses to and reviews of his own work. His endnotes, although extensive, are often abbreviated, incomplete and difficult to follow. This is significant because much of his argument is relegated to the endnotes. A reader who seeks more detailed discussion of key issues or claims is often merely directed to other short passages or notes.

Throughout the text Cook's tone is condescending towards Wittgenstein, his readers and his critics. He speaks of Wittgenstein's 'would-be followers' and ascribes to them positions which few would recognize or acknowledge. These positions are repeatedly described or dismissed as failures, assumptions or philosophical tendencies. Despite his rhetorical vehemence it never becomes clear or convincing that these are the appropriate targets of philosophical criticism, nor does Cook succeed in presenting a viable or sound philosophical alternative. One is left wondering why, if Wittgenstein and his readers are as philosophically misguided as Cook claims, one would read them and why, further, one would write books in response to them.

At one point in his text Cook chastises philosophers for seeing in Wittgenstein's aphoristic style what they want to see. I can think of no better example than Cook's own work. However, I am also

reminded of Wittgenstein's remark that he ought to be no more than a mirror in which his readers can see their own thinking, so that helped in this way they can put it right (CV 18e). It is this dimension of Wittgenstein's philosophy that is missing from Cook's reading of his later writings.

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Frank Cioffi, *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer*, 1998, Cambridge University Press, x + 310, price £40.00 hb/£14.95 pb.

Brian R. Clack, *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, 1999, Macmillan, x + 200, price £42.50 hb.

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Frank Cioffi's collection of essays is a sequence of variations on a theme. The theme is our tendency to turn to empirical inquiry in matters involving human affairs even where doing so cannot bring us the satisfaction we seek. One form of this misidentification of our concerns has been widely discussed: the tendency to mistake a request for clarification for a bid for causal explanation. Cioffi's chief concern is to draw our attention to another form of misidentification: cases in which what really troubles us is not the phenomenon itself but the impression it makes on us. In the former case, what is required to amend the situation is conceptual clarification, in the latter case self-reflection.

The issue is primarily addressed in the way it enters into Wittgenstein's treatment of Frazer and Freud. There is also an essay on Wittgenstein's discussion of aesthetics, and one dealing (without reference to Wittgenstein) with the issue of misidentification in the work of social scientists like Thorstein Veblen, David Riesman and Erving Goffman. In addition the book contains a charming essay on a rather different theme, the spontaneous feeling that life is a dream.

Some of the essays were originally published years ago and are well known. In some cases, one is left in the dark as to whether and where the essays have appeared before, though it is evident that at least a couple of them were freshly written for this collection.

There is a great deal of sound philosophy in this book. Cioffi succeeds in bringing into focus an aspect of our thought about human affairs which we tend to overlook. He is subtle, sophisticated and to a large part convincing. He is also erudite, and the essays present a rich panorama of examples, although at times the citing of examples comes to seem an end in itself. One drawback is that the structure of the book makes for a great deal of repetition. Also, Cioffi has a stylistic virtuosity which one cannot help feeling he sometimes uses more to amuse himself than to make things easy for the reader. Thus, though the book is intellectually rewarding, reading it sometimes becomes a frustrating experience.

Cioffi gives several formulations of the type of thought that he contrasts with the search for empirical hypotheses: seeking a further description of a phenomenon, seeking for an account in terms of an internal or formal relation, seeking an aesthetic account. This is to be achieved by assembling what we already know, or by giving an account of what is at the back of our minds or at the tip of our tongue, by formulating 'the chain of ideas that will lead us from one end of a story to the other', by getting clear about the object at which our reflection is directed, etc. The criterion of a person's having found what she was looking for is her assent. This is connected with Cioffi's elegant definition of a formal relation: it 'is one, lacking which, the object would not be that which we meant to speak of' (p. 264 n.); an advantage of this definition is that it brings under one head both inquiry into the concepts we share and reflection on our individual experiences. Finding what we were looking for may lead to further results like peace of mind, solace, relief of vicarious guilt, feeling an inwardness with an alien ritual; or, in the case of Freudian therapy, cure.

A recurrent theme in Cioffi's discussion is that Wittgenstein's failure to make clear the distinction between the two kinds of misidentification of our concerns led him to reject empirical inquiry even in cases in which it is in place. While a causal hypothesis cannot relieve a bewilderment which concerns what we already know, additional information may change the object of our reflection.

Cioffi is critical of Wittgenstein's claim, in 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', that certain non-instrumental practices neither can nor

need be explained. Although we do not ordinarily ask why people in our culture kiss pictures of their beloved ones, the question may still make sense. And while we may see an affinity between this practice of ours and, say, an alien ritual in which an effigy is treated in some benevolent or malevolent way, it does not follow that the same rationale is at work in both practices. According to Cioffi, Wittgenstein ought to have made a different point: it is the impression that the ritual practice makes on us, not the practice itself, that is impervious to hypothetical explanation. Analogously, it is suggested that many of the remarks on Frazer make better sense if read as dealing with issues of self-reflection than with the conditions of anthropological understanding.

Obviously both concerns are present in Wittgenstein's remarks. However, I would question whether they are as clearly distinct as Cioffi supposes. The above argument is unclear. For one thing, I am unsure what to make of Cioffi's claim that the question why we kiss pictures makes sense, since he admits that it is not clear what might constitute an answer to it. In any case, speaking of a rationale in connection with such a practice seems out of place: does kissing the beloved one herself have a rationale? More crucially, Cioffi does not allow for the extent to which our explanatory explorations are themselves conditioned by our attitudes to the phenomena in question. If we do not inquire why members of the alien culture plow their fields, it will hardly be suggested that this is because we are gratuitously taking for granted that the rationale of this practice is the same as that of more familiar ones. Obviously, the weirdness of burning someone in effigy in contrast with plowing or hunting will condition the questions we ask about that practice, and obviously too, its aspect may change when we put it into connection with some practice of our own. More generally, the impression the alien ritual makes on us can hardly be extricated from the kind of challenge it poses to our understanding. Or, turning this point around: there is no determinate line distinguishing wondering about the practice from reflecting on our reaction to it. (Cioffi touches on this issue on p. 193 but apparently dismisses it.)

Wittgenstein's Freud is mainly discussed with reference to the *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychoanalysis and Religious Belief*, while limited attention is given to the remarks in *Culture and Value*. When Wittgenstein accused Freud of creating an 'abominable mess', Cioffi takes him to have referred to Freud's confounding of

reasons and causes (p. 206). He suggests that it would have been more apposite to attribute to Freud the failure to distinguish 'between that of which we can bethink ourselves and that which we can only learn through empirical inquiry'. (Confusingly, on p. 133 Cioffi himself proposes that reading of Wittgenstein's accusation.) Cioffi agrees that Freud failed to keep that distinction clear: he wavered between regarding the correctness of interpretation as a matter to be resolved by the patient's assent, and thinking of it as a matter of expert judgment, in which the patient might have to defer to his analyst. However, he criticizes Wittgenstein for overstating the case against Freud, arguing that psychoanalysis actually has a use for both kinds of account.

Cioffi makes many telling points here, but there is one problem with this view that he does not address (except perhaps cryptically on p. 274). If his defence of Freud is accepted, we end up with two kinds of unconscious motives: those that we ourselves can become aware of by reflecting on 'what we really meant' by something said or done, and those that we may discover, say, through expert guidance. In the former case, the previously unconscious motive becomes conscious, in the latter case, we may become conscious *of* it, but that by itself does not turn it into a conscious motive. But this seems to mean that the 'un-' in 'unconscious' is ambiguous, and hence the unconscious is not one thing but two.

Cioffi is not careful about references. There are some inadvertencies: Wittgenstein gave his ethics lecture in 1929, not 1932; the translator of the Frazer remarks is Beversluis, not Berzelius; the quotation on p. 105 is not from *Philosophical Investigations* (although on p. 230, not p. 232, there is a remark on a similar theme). Cioffi does not give the source of the 'abominable mess' quotation; it comes from Moore's lecture notes, *Mind* 64 (1955), p. 20.

Brian R. Clack's book, while dealing with some of the same subjects as Cioffi's, is quite a different read. His style is much more accessible. On the other hand, while Cioffi and Clack agree on some points (Cioffi has evidently influenced his work), Clack's argument does not have the subtlety of Cioffi's. His argument is thought-provoking, but he sometimes fails to give convincing answers to the questions he brings up.

Clack is well read on his topic and his book is useful as a source of references. However, he tends to have an unhappy way with quotations. Thus, he claims that Wittgenstein states, in the preface to

the *Philosophical Remarks*, 'This book is written to the glory of God', leaving out the words surrounding these: 'I would like to say –, but nowadays that would be chicanery, that is, it would not be rightly understood.'

Clack argues against the claim frequently made that Wittgenstein wanted to replace the intellectualist account of ritual with an expressivist account. He then goes on to examine Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea that rituals can be explained, arguing that this was merely the expression of a personal preference on Wittgenstein's part. Clack considers and rejects the suggestion that Wittgenstein wanted to propose conspicuous representation as an alternative to empirical explanation in anthropology. He thinks the reason Wittgenstein considered empirical inquiry irrelevant to his concerns was that he was interested in finding the conditions that all possible rituals must fulfil, what one might call an anthropological *a priori*. He argues that for Wittgenstein ritual was the natural expression of a ceremonial animal, though its particular form is shaped by the culture in which it is practised. The book concludes with a discussion of Wittgenstein's remark that a whole mythology is laid down in our language, which Clack interprets to mean (if I have understood him correctly), not that the forms of language give rise to a mythology, but that a mythology has given rise to the forms of language.

The book has some strong points, foremost of which is Clack's determination to present a fresh reading of Wittgenstein's remarks. I agree with his view that Wittgenstein was not laying forward anthropological theories or proposing methods; also, he makes a telling point in arguing that expressivism depends on accepting a clear-cut dichotomy between cognitive and non-cognitive uses of language, which Wittgenstein rejected. I thought him right too in criticizing the way Rhee and Phillips proposed to distinguish between confused and clear-headed forms of magic.

I found other aspects of Clack's position less convincing. What I found the most misleading was his determination to present Wittgenstein as advocating a specific view of human nature, thus failing to take into account how he himself regarded his contribution to philosophy. The discussion of the mythology laid down in language seemed to me too brief and somewhat obscure. The treatment of expressivism (pp. 148 f.) is confusing, involving an equivocation on the word 'satisfaction'. I also found the idea of (what I called above) the anthropological *a priori* rather mystifying. Is Clack

thinking about conceptual reflection or psychological hypothesizing? Clack's formulations on this score are not very helpful. Thus, he writes, 'It is ... as a form of *conceptual evidence*, as a series of observations on *general patterns of religious thought and action*, that Wittgenstein's thoughts have significance for the study of religion' (p. 103, my italics). Wittgenstein's ultimate concern, as I read him, was not with general patterns of human behaviour, but with what sort of inquiry the investigation of ritual practices might be.

Clack calls Wittgenstein's critique of intellectualist accounts of ritual 'the product of a particular philosophical view of the way human beings act, one which stresses "primitive reactions" and the instinct component of human behaviour' (p. 103). Clack here appears to be attributing to Wittgenstein a specific theory of human behaviour, rather than a logical observation about the relation between thought and action. This seems to be connected with his overlooking what I take to be the decisive objection to the idea that the existence of a ritual can be *made intelligible* by reference to the opinions of the natives. If we want to know why the natives began doing the rain dance in the first place, the answer, for us, cannot be that they discovered that it worked, for the simple reason that it does not 'work'. Hence, even if they tell us the dance will bring on the rain, the *history* of that belief is altogether different from the history of the belief, say, that irrigation will save the crops in a drought. The point to be made here, then, is that invoking the natives' beliefs will not remove whatever we find puzzling about the practice. (A related point is noted on p. 132, but Clack, like Cioffi, does not appear to recognize its full importance.)

Clack's critique of the idea that rituals are not in need of explanation seemed unconvincing, mainly for reasons analogous to those adduced against Cioffi. Against Phillips's claim that a scientific explanation takes us away from the naturalness of religious responses he cites evolutionary explanations of ritual practices, arguing that they actually bring us closer to the naturalness of the expressions. But here he is obviously confusing different senses of 'natural': the sense of something grounded in our evolutionary history vs. the sense of something with which we feel at home: there may, for instance, be some evolutionary explanation of hiccuping but this would not make it feel any the less unnatural. Clack might have noticed this point had he not left out the words I have italicized in the following quotation from Phillips: 'the explanation takes us away from the naturalness of

the expression *in a culture*' (quoted on p. 90). (By the way, Wittgenstein was not ruling out external explanations in the remarks on Frazer, but simply pointing out their irrelevance for getting clear about ritual. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, eds. J. Klagge & A. Nordmann, p. 139.)

In discussing the way the form of ritual is shaped by culture, Clack attributes to Wittgenstein the view that 'the collective religious practices of a people . . . make manifest the values and ideals which lie at that culture's heart' (p. 163), a claim which he concedes not to be made explicitly in the Frazer notes; in fact, his main evidence for attributing this idea to Wittgenstein is the fact that it is 'prominent in the work of . . . Paul Ernst and Oswald Spengler – whose influence . . . is dominant in the *Remarks*' (ibid.). Not only is this argument question-begging, but in my view it is at loggerheads with a central strand of Wittgenstein's thinking: his critique of the view of human activity as the application of certain ideas that can be identified and described in separation from the activity itself. Thus, Spengler's idea (at least as rendered by Clack) that the style of a work 'enables a thinker . . . to *trace features* of that culture's soul which could *give rise* to such a work' (p. 166; my italics), seems to lend itself to being interpreted precisely as an instance of what Wittgenstein is attacking in *The Brown Book* (II, § 6): 'There is a kind of general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our acts spring as from a reservoir. Thus one says, "The fashion changes because the taste of people changes" . . . But if a tailor to-day designs a cut of dress different from what he designed a year ago, can't what is called his change of taste have consisted . . . in doing just this?' For 'fashion' and 'taste' substitute 'values and ideals'.

Clack correctly notes that the concluding part of the Frazer remarks is different in style and quality from the rest. It is a sustained treatment of the Beltane fire-festival and its suggestions of human sacrifice. On Clack's reading, Wittgenstein's point was that the tenaciousness of the ritual shows that under the thin veneer of civilization we are all barbarians. This reading raises several questions. For one thing, how is this subterranean barbarism related to 'the ideals and values which lie at a culture's heart' and which are also supposedly manifested in its rituals? The thinness of the veneer of civilization is a cliché, and as with most clichés, it is not even clear what is being said: *how* thin is the veneer? thin compared to what?

Neither do the terms of the contrast civilization vs. barbarism seem properly thought through: the type of wanton cruelty that fascinates and abhors us in ritual, far from being in conflict with civilized life, is only possible in a more or less civilized setting; after all, watching a lion devour its prey is an altogether different sort of experience from watching the ritual sacrifice of a human being.

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Nigel Pleasants: *Wittgenstein and the Idea of a Critical Social Theory. A Critique of Giddens, Habermas and Bhaskar*. Routledge, 1999, ix + 211, price £55.00 hb.

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This book is a critique of critical social theory. That approach has today established itself as the theoretical mainstream in large parts of the social sciences. Critical social theory claims to have been (and, in one sense, is) strongly influenced by Wittgenstein's later philosophy. There are a number of problems with this book but they do not dispel my positive overall impression.

The first half or so is a general discussion of the relations between Wittgenstein, Peter Winch, and critical social theory. Then the writer moves on to consider the works of the three authors identified as the central representatives of critical social theory. Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, and Roy Bhaskar are each considered. According to Pleasants, they essentially build their theories around the same central theoretical concepts: *tacit knowledge and transcendental rules* (52). (Elsewhere, however, he speaks of the relation between the views of the three writers as one of family resemblance rather than shared essence – see p. 2).

In critical social theory, positivism and empiricism are condemned for promulgating a picture of the agent as a passive subject of deterministic social structures and forces. The individual is rather to be treated – democratically as it were – as a knowledgeable agent

skilfully coping with social reality and reproducing it. Social studies should articulate the way in which that is achieved. Critical social theorists also believe that such articulation will, by itself, have an emancipatory effect – as opposed to the commitment to the status quo said to be inherent in positivism and also in Wittgensteinianism.

Critical social theorists nevertheless regard Wittgenstein's later philosophy as one of their main influences. On their view, Wittgenstein poses a 'rule-following paradox' and hints at a solution of it by an appeal to the agents' tacit knowledge of implicit rules. However, Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical and anti-explanatory stance kept him from working out the ontological implications of his philosophy. Hence he ended up (the argument runs) with political conservatism and nihilism vis-à-vis the possibility of social theory.

Giddens, Habermas, and Bhaskar believe in the possibility of an objective social science, but conceive it along non-positivist and non-empiricist lines. They solve 'the problem of social order' by postulating a universally possessed tacit knowledge and a transcendental order of rules underlying behaviour. Such universal structures are assumed necessary for explaining the observable features of society and individuality. They *must* exist even if knowledge – claims regarding particular entities must be regarded as contingent and fallible.

Pleasant has little sympathy with these views. Tacit knowledge has no real explanatory leverage: it just redescribes the relevant phenomena in a certain theoretical language (78–9). He also compares critical social theorists' insistence on the knowledgeability and freedom inherent in individual agency with the same assurance by neo-liberal economists. 'Knowledgeability' and 'freedom' are portrayed as facts about human nature rather than precarious and contingent human achievements (92, 120). So much for the suggested radical political implications. Critical social theory actually succumbs to many of the tendencies it decries in 'traditional philosophy'. It is only 'critical' of other theoretical pictures, not of itself nor of actual social and political conditions. It adheres to the Augustinian 'name-object' model of language-world relations. For related reasons, it succumbs to dogmatic 'ontological' pictures of agency which are represented as infallible (177–8).

Thus Pleasant argues that critical social theorists make a singularly *unwittgensteinian* and, moreover, *bad* use of Wittgenstein's work. They ignore the implications of Wittgenstein's rejection of theory and explanation in philosophy. Wittgenstein fought the tendency to construct transcendental entities for explanatory purposes (97–8).

However, Pleasants is not very explicit about what exactly will count as the kind of theorizing that Wittgenstein would reject. He motivates this omission with the argument that in order to be explicit, he would need 'a *theory* of "theory" – which would, of course, be self-defeating' (p. 3). This is confusing. All we want to know is what *the author* (and, according to him, Wittgenstein) means by 'theory'. We will see that the question of what counts as a 'theory' of the reprehensible kind has some relevance for Pleasants' treatment of Peter Winch.

Pleasants demonstrates that Wittgensteinian influences on critical social theory come almost exclusively via *The Idea of a Social Science*. Everyone writing on the subject tends to treat Wittgenstein's views as equivalent with Winch's rendering of them. Pleasants suggests instead that Winch's is, as he puts it, a much more creative application of Wittgenstein than he is usually given credit for. The interest that guides Winch is basically not Wittgensteinian but the *Kantian* one of examining under what conditions certain kinds of understanding are possible. The suggestion is certainly worth pursuing. Of course, much will depend on what Kant's original views are taken to be.

In rejecting theory, Wittgenstein was also trying to get away from what arguably was his own earlier ('Kantian') idea of the philosopher as a legislator once and for all mapping out the 'bounds of sense' (22). According to Pleasants, that tendency nevertheless lingers on, even in works that claim to be drawing on Wittgenstein's later philosophy (78). In *The Idea of a Social Science* (1990, p. 41), Peter Winch says the task of epistemology is to 'elucidate what is involved in the notion of a form of life as such', adding that the same task must also be a central part of the sociological enterprise. Pleasants says this is a return to the search for the transcendental conditions that must obtain in order for such-and-such experiential phenomena to be possible.

A more appropriate name for this task would surely be 'ontology', for Winch is quite explicit in saying that he seeks an account of *being* – 'the nature of reality as such and in general' – not an account of the means by which we can justifiably claim to *know* what exists (Pleasants, p. 39).

Pleasants thus suggests a story where Winch's 'Kantian' and Hermeneutic project is mistaken for Wittgensteinianism and then, in the hands of yet others, deteriorates into the metaphysics that besets critical social theory.

Here I would wish for a clearer handling of such key terms as 'theory' and 'ontology'. It seems to me that there is a crucial difference

between, for instance, Kant's theorizing and the project of the critical social theorists. Kant presents his Critiques as *descriptions* of central features of perceptual knowledge, reason, judgement, etc., not as explanations of them in terms of underlying quasi-phenomena. One may of course doubt the viability or desirability of such philosophical enterprises, but it is not an instance of the kind of ontological theorizing that Pleasants is critical of.

Similarly, Winch indicates at the beginning of his book that, by a philosophical investigation of the nature of reality, he does not mean ontology (1990, p. 8 ff.) – even if that investigation cannot, either, be assimilated to the question of *how we can know* what exists. It concerns 'the *force of the concept* of reality', that is, 'what difference this will make to [one's] life' (ibid., p. 9).

An analogous difference arguably exists between Winch's and the critical social theorists' views on 'rule-governedness'. Critical social theorists think meaningful behaviour is explained by rules. These may be tacit rules and our ability to follow them is described as tacit knowledge. Winch does not give the rules an explanatory role. The relation between rules and meaningful behaviour is, rather, internal. The meaning of an act is constituted by the fact that certain kinds of distinctions between right and wrong are applicable to it. The fact that certain right/wrong-distinctions *are* applicable belongs to a form of life and does not, in its turn, involve a further reference to rules – tacit or otherwise. Winch's discussion of *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles* brings out this point (Winch 1990, pp. 55–7).

To be fair, the confusion is partly a consequence of Winch's original failure to distinguish between the regulative and constitutive roles of 'rules'. (Rules as prohibitions and demands constraining us vs. 'rules' as the possibility of applying certain distinctions to action). In any case, Pleasants does not address the issue.

Pleasants, like the critical social theorists, takes Winch to recommend a certain methodology for the social sciences (35). But Winch himself said he was, instead, trying to see what *in fact* is involved when one engages in such investigations (see Winch's reply to Louch, *Inquiry* (1964, pp. 202–8). In sum, some of Pleasants' descriptions apply to misreadings of *The Idea of a Social Science* rather than the book itself. Nevertheless, they are perceptive and useful, since those readings are influential, even among 'card-carrying' Wittgensteinians.

After his general discussion, Pleasants sets out to detail his critique and to subsume the targeted individual authors under his general description.

There is an interesting attempt to rehabilitate Milgram's 'obedience experiments'. Milgram's research subjects were manipulated to deliver what they thought were next to lethal electric shocks to a 'learner' (experimental stooge). Critical social theorists accuse Milgram of construing his subjects as unreflexive 'cultural dopes'. He is contrasted with Garfinkel, whose experiments allegedly represent the lay individual as an active, reflexive agent skilfully reproducing social reality. Pleasants replies, in sum, that we should not construe interpretations along preconceived ontological pictures but rather look and see when, and to what extent, we actually behave 'skilfully', 'reflexively', 'dopily' or some combination thereof (147). Milgram's study shows, in particular, that 'we may be deluding ourselves if we think that people who commit such atrocities [as in the Holocaust] are radically different from "normal people" like ourselves' (180).

I am not quite convinced of this last point, however. How many of us actually did think that the Holocaust happened because of the deviant personalities of those who did it? Historical evidence to the contrary has been around for decades anyway. So why not rather study the actual atrocities, their perpetrators, and those who protect them – in Germany, Cambodia, Chechnya and elsewhere?

Pleasants writes in a fresh way and with stamina, yet with a good command of the literature. In spite of the problems I have identified, I recommend his book to anyone seriously interested in Wittgenstein, Peter Winch, and/or critical social theory – with the qualification that it may be too difficult for most undergraduates. It has been a pleasant task to review this book.

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