IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH WITTGENSTEIN?

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ABSTRACTS

William Child (University College, Oxford)
Self-knowledge and memory in Wittgenstein

Three of the criticisms to which Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mind have been subject are: (i) that it is anti-realistic about the mental; (ii) that (relatedly) its use of the apparatus of criteria and symptoms embodies an unacceptable semantics and epistemology; and (iii) that it is philosophically unsatisfying, because it raises pressing philosophical questions that it refuses to address. I consider these criticisms in connection with Wittgenstein’s discussion of the "language-game" of reporting what one has thought. I argue that, though Wittgenstein does not endorse any general anti-realism about past thoughts, his treatment does involve elements of anti-realism for some cases – an anti-realism that is unacceptable in some instances but may be right in others. I raise doubts about the extent to which Wittgenstein does in fact accept the view of criteria and symptoms that have led to the objections. And I consider how far he can be defended against the charge of philosophical evasiveness.

Hans-Johann Glock (University of Reading)
Wittgenstein was right about the normativity of meaning

Most contemporaries have been interested in the normativity of meaning as a potential threat to naturalism. In this paper I refrain from pronouncing on whether normativity precludes naturalism. Before one can consider using the normativity of meaning as a stick with which to beat naturalism it is imperative to get clearer on what, if anything, it amounts to. My aim is to explain and defend the idea that there is an essential normative dimension to linguistic meaning in a way that is indebted to the content though not the style of Wittgenstein’s discussion of the issue.

I first discuss the Wittgensteinian roots of the normativity of meaning (sct. 1) and how the contemporary debate has shifted relative to these roots (sct. 2). This paves the way for a distinction between various semantic normativity claims in section 3. In section 4 I try to motivate one such claim, namely that a linguistic expression has meaning only if there are rules for its correct use, by distinguishing different types of mistakes. In section 5 I consider and reject three objections to this idea associated with Davidson and Boghossian, viz. that semantic principles merely state ‘descriptive facts’ about linguistic behaviour, that correctness is not a normative notion, and that semantic principles are in any event they are not genuine rules because they do not prescribe any linguistic acts. The final section turns to one of the remaining problems facing a Wittgensteinian account of meaning.
Paul Horwich (New York University)

Regularities, rules, meanings, truth conditions, and epistemic norms

My plan is to trace a Wittgensteinian explanatory route through the above-mentioned phenomena. I guess it’s uncontroversial that they are in some way intimately related.-- The question is, how. At one extreme there are philosophers who suggest that we’re faced with a holistic hodge-podge: the interconnections are messy, and none of these things is objectively more fundamental than any of the rest. At the other extreme there are those who think that there is a correct order of grounding amongst them -- a definite hierarchy whereby the more superficial ones reduce to the more basic ones. My own sympathies are more in line with the second point of view. However, it’s not that I hold on some sort of general metaphysical grounds that matters simply must be like that. It’s rather that such a story would be particularly simple; simplicity is good if you can get it -- a significant explanatory virtue; and in this case it seems to me that you can get it.

More specifically, what I’ll be suggesting is that the basic facts here are law-like regularities of word use (characterized in non-semantic, non-normative terms); that such regularities help engender (i.e. are the primary reductive basis of) facts about which rules of use we are following; that these facts suffice to fix what we mean by our words and hence sentences; and that the meanings of our sentences (given contextual factors) determine their truth conditions -- which are the conditions in which we should hope to accept them.

This picture is inspired by Wittgenstein’s ideas about meaning and rule following. Nonetheless it is very much at odds with Saul Kripke’s treatment of these matters, which is also billed as Wittgensteinian. And it also conflicts with the body of work on meaning elaborated over the last thirty years by Crispin Wright -- another influential exponent of Wittgenstein. So a fair part of the defense of my own position will consist in responses to their arguments. What’s at stake is both the nature of these phenomena, and the most fruitful way of reading Wittgenstein’s discussion of them.

Anthony Kenny (Balliol College, Oxford)

Thought, Brains and Behaviour

“Only of a human being” Wittgenstein wrote “and what resembles (behaves like) a human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious”. This does not mean that Wittgenstein is a behaviourist: he is not identifying experience with behaviour, or even with dispositions to behave. The point is that what experiences one can have depends on how one can behave. Only someone who can play chess can feel the desire to castle; only a being that can discriminate between light and darkness can have visual experiences.

The relation between experiences of certain kinds, and the capacity to behave in certain ways, is not a merely contingent connection. Wittgenstein made a distinction between two kinds of evidence that we may have for the obtaining of states of affairs, namely symptoms and criteria. Where the connection between a certain kind of evidence and the conclusion drawn from it is a matter of empirical discovery, through theory and induction, the evidence may be called a symptom of the state of affairs; where the relation between evidence and conclusion is not something discovered by empirical investigation, but is something that must be grasped by anyone who possesses the concept of the state of affairs in question, then the evidence is not a mere symptom, but a criterion of the event in question.
Exploiting the notion of criterion enabled Wittgenstein to steer between the Scylla of dualism and the Charybdis of behaviorism. He agreed with dualists that particular mental events could occur without accompanying bodily behaviour; on the other hand he agreed with behaviourists that the possibility of ascribing mental acts to people depends on such acts having, in general, a behavioural expression.

If it is wrong to identify the mind with behaviour, it is even more mistaken, according to Wittgenstein, to identify the mind with the brain. Such materialism is in fact a grosser philosophical error than behaviourism because the connection between mind and behaviour if a more intimate one than that between mind and brain. The relation between mind and behaviour is a criterial one, something prior to experience; the connection between mind and brain is a contingent one, discoverable by empirical science. Any discovery of links between mind and brain must take as its starting point the everyday concepts we use in describing the mind, concepts which are grafted on to behavioural criteria.

Oddly enough, developments in the philosophy of mind since Wittgenstein have shown that it is possible to combine the errors of materialism with those of dualism. One of the standard dualist misunderstandings of the nature of the mind is the picture of mind’s relation to body as that between a little person or homunculus on the one hand, and a tool or instrument or machine on the other. This misunderstanding is compounded if we assign the role of homunculus to the brain, identifying it, as materialists do, with the mind so conceived.

What is wrong with the homunculus fallacy? In itself there is nothing misguided in speaking of images in the brain, if one means patterns in the brain, observable to a neurophysiologist, that can be mapped onto features of the visible environment. What is misleading is to take these mappings as representations, to regard them as visible to the mind, and to say that seeing consists in the mind’s perception of these images. The misleading aspect is that such an account pretends to explain seeing, but the explanation reproduces exactly the puzzling features it was supposed to explain.

The identification of mind and brain is a category mistake, because the brain is a material object and the mind is a capacity. The mind is the capacity to acquire intellectual abilities. The possessor of human mental capacities is neither the mind nor the brain but the human being. Wittgenstein, like Aristotle, worked hard to bring home to his readers the crucial importance of the distinction between potentiality and actuality, both in general and in the particular case of human thought and knowledge.

The distinction between actuality and potentiality is neglected equally by Cartesian dualists and by scientistic materialists. But to avoid confusion in this area it is necessary to introduced a further concept, not developed either in Aristotle or Wittgenstein. This is the notion of the vehicle of a capacity: that is to say, the actuality that experience shows must belong to the capacity’s possessor if it is to exercise its capacity. Uncontentious examples are: the shape of a key (the vehicle of its capacity to open the door), the alcohol in whisky (the vehicle of its capacity to intoxicate). My paper will spell out how the notions of possessor, capacity, exercise, and vehicle should be applied in order to achieve clarity in thinking about the human mind. The only thing that is wrong with Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mind, in my view, is that he is insufficiently explicit about the relationship between capacities and their vehicles.
Kevin Mulligan (University of Geneva)

**Essence, Meanings and Rules**

Do rules or use determine or constitute meaning? Or do rules for using words hold in virtue of the nature of meanings? I consider three lines of thought in the Investigations which might be held to support the view that rules or use really do constitute or determine meaning. I argue that the first two lines of thought are implausible and that it is not clear that Wittgenstein really endorsed them. The third line of thought is the argument from the claim that "this" does not name or signify and from the claim that uses of "this" explain names and naming to the conclusion that naming is explained in non-semantic terms. I argue that this line of thought can be attributed to Wittgenstein; that the first premiss is false; and that the account of the relations between semantic meaning, use and rules given by Karl Bühler in 1934 and before is superior to Wittgenstein's account.

Eva Picardi (University of Bologna)

**Meaning in Context**

Consider the following three sentences:


2. Nur der Satz hat Sinn, nur im Zusammenhange des Satzes hat ein Name Bedeutung (Wittgenstein, TLP, 3.3).


Is one entitled, on the basis of (1) and (2), to come to the conclusion that Frege and Wittgenstein stood to each other in the relation of same-saying as regards the Context Principle? Is one entitled to use (3) as evidence in favour of this interpretation? A moment reflection shows that it would be rash to jump to this conclusion. In the first part of my talk I will try argue that (1) and (2) make different assertions in spite of the similarity of wording. To circumscribe the area of disagreement between Frege and the author of the *Tractatus* is comparatively easy; to assess to extent to which in (3) Wittgenstein took himself to be agreeing with Frege is a much harder task.

Since the sections of the PU where Frege’s Context Principle is endorsed are devoted to the discussion of proper names such as “Nothung”, “Moses”, “N.N.”, one is led to wonder whether Wittgenstein, once he had abandoned his former conception of simple names, might not have considered Frege’s account of proper names in a different and more sympathetic light. He certainly did not embrace Frege’s theory, but in PU the criticisms he levels against it are very different from the ones we know from the TLP.

In those sections of PU where he discusses proper names, Wittgenstein’s main goal is to point out that the grammatical category of proper names comprises expressions whose pattern of use is very diversified. Names do not function as Millian tags, nor do they function according to the descriptivist model. The concept of a proper name is, I surmise, the first family resemblance concept that we come across in the PU.
It is a great merit of Frege to have called attention to the different criteria of identification and to the conversational expectations implicit in the use of proper names as different from each other such as the number 2, the Morning Star, Aetna, Skylla, Gustav Lauben, Odisseus, Don Carlos, Mont Blanc, Vulcan, etc. However, Frege more was interested in offering a uniform treatment of proper names, than in stressing the different ways in which each of them could be said to be endowed with a sense. This is particularly striking when we consider his treatment of empty names: on the one hand they are ascribed a sense, on the other they are denied semantic significance. And this, as Dummett and Evans have shown, is a very unstable position to occupy.

When, in philosophy, we consider the case of a proper name that lacks a bearer we tend to think of it as a defect that ought to be remedied, possibly by supplying it with an ad hoc bearer, be it the empty set, a fictional object or a cultural posit. This is the move that Wittgenstein suggests that we should not make. The “extensions” of the Builders’s Language Game discussed in section 41 and 42 of PU are meant to show how effortlessly the Builders can cope with empty names. These sections prepare the ground for the discussion a (genuine) empty name “Nothung” (PU, §44). Lack of a bearer does not imply semantic insignificance.

And yet, notwithstanding Wittgenstein’s teaching, the idea that proper names function in one way only, i.e. as Millian tags, is still with us. The modal picture sketched by Saul Kripke in Naming and Necessity has proved very powerful. In fact, Kripke’s conception of the use and function of proper names is the leading view. Does this show that there is something very wrong with Wittgenstein’s approach to the problem of proper names?

Joachim Schulte (University of Zürich)

Reading-machines, Feelings of Influence, Experiences of Being Guided: Wittgenstein on Reading

In Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, the section on reading (§§ 156 ff.) stands out as a sustained attempt at discussing several issues at the same time: ‘logical’, or conceptual, questions concerning understanding and capacities are, on the one hand, illuminated by striking and fanciful examples (e.g. reading-machines) while, on the other hand, the relevant conceptual waters are muddied by bringing in a number of psychological issues (feelings of influence, experiences of being guided) whose import is far from obvious. One way of looking at this section would be to see it as an early but somewhat uncertain shot at accounting for various questions discussed at greater length and more successfully in later parts of the book (the sections on rule-following and private language) or even later manuscripts (Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology). Another way of reading this section would emphasize the smoothness of the development of its themes and see it as a particularly successful example of vintage Wittgenstein. In this context, it is important to remember that most of this material can be found in the Brown Book and, in particular, in Wittgenstein’s German revision of that text. In my paper, I shall try to take these points into account and give a convincing reading of some difficult passages in that section.
Frederick Stoutland (University of Uppsala)

Wittgenstein, Analytical Philosophy, and Metaphysics

My paper discusses the objection to metaphysics that runs through all of Wittgenstein’s work. I distinguish an unobjectionable sense of metaphysics from the pejorative sense to which he objected: a philosophical method that abstracts from problems that arise out of genuine difficulties in thought and practice in favor of problems created solely by philosophers. This means that what is metaphysical in the pejorative sense will depend on cultural-historical factors that determine what are genuine problems. I contend that analytical philosophy has too often practiced metaphysics in the pejorative sense, something which is evident in so-called “analytical metaphysics,” a point I illustrate by considering the way truth is discussed in Marion David’s “Correspondence and Disquotation”. That it is very difficult to avoid metaphysics in this sense is shown by the fact that Wittgensteinians often fall prey to it.

Meredith Williams (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore)

Method and Metaphilosophy in the Philosophical Investigations

One of the fundamental debates over how to understand Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* concerns whether he is developing theories of language and mind that are alternatives to traditional theories. Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks clearly deny this: "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything" (PI 126). Nonetheless, constructivist interpretation finds such theories, and so must downplay the significance of the metaphilosophical remarks. The quietist reading, which privileges these same remarks, exerts a constant pressure on the constructivist. The centrality of this debate, for many, explains why Wittgenstein's work is no longer seen as engaging with meaningful issues. In my paper, I will show that a closer examination of Wittgenstein's actual method of argument reveals a deeply original and distinctive use of two forms of argument: the conflation argument and the paradox argument. My own recommendation is that the actual method must be the measure of the metaphilosophy. This is not a rejection of the metaphilosophy but a recalibration.

Timothy Williamson (New College, Oxford)

Conceptual Truth

The paper criticizes epistemological conceptions of analytic or conceptual truth, on which assent to such truths is a necessary condition of understanding them. The critique involves no Quinean scepticism about meaning. Rather, even granted that a paradigmatic candidate for analyticity is synonymous with a logical truth, both the former and the latter can be intelligibly doubted by linguistically competent deviant logicians, who, although mistaken, still constitute counterexamples to the claim that assent is necessary for understanding. There are no analytic or conceptual truths in the epistemological sense. The critique is extended to purportedly analytic inference rules. An alternative account is sketched on which understanding a word is a matter of participation in a linguistic practice, while synonymy and concept identity consist in sameness of truth-conditional semantic properties. Although there are philosophical questions about concepts, the idea that philosophical questions in general are conceptual questions generates only an illusion of insight into philosophical methodology. The talk will consist largely of utterances with which Wittgenstein would not have been happy.