

The New Wittgenstein, edited by Alice Crary and Rupert Read. London: Routledge, 2000. Pp. x + 403. H/b £75.00, P/b£19.99.

Wittgenstein in America, edited by Timothy G. McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xii + 280. H/b £45.00.

Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays in Honour of David Pears, edited by David Charles and William Child. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. Pp. xviii + 198. H/b £35.00.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the early work of Wittgenstein, and a fundamental contributory factor has been a reading of that work promoted by, in particular, Cora Diamond and James Conant. It has been labelled 'therapeutic', 'deconstructive' and simply 'American'; but the label that seems to have stuck is 'resolute'. What that reading is claiming to be 'resolute' about is the demand that an interpretation of the early Wittgenstein must take seriously his claim in the penultimate paragraph of the *Tractatus* (6.54) that those who understand him recognize his propositions as nonsensical. This reading and how it might be interwoven with different understandings of the later Wittgenstein are the dominant themes in the collection edited by Crary and Read (which I will refer to as *New*) and in the majority of the contributions to that edited by McCarthy and Stidd (*America*); but it also casts a shadow across the collection edited by Charles and Child (*Themes*).

To 'take 6.54 seriously' and 'resolutely' is to take it to imply that Wittgenstein's propositions 'really and truly [have] no articulable content' (Diamond, *New*, p. 155); they are combinations of signs to one or more of which, as they occur in these combinations, no meaning has been given. According to this 'austere conception' of nonsense, such strings of signs are problematic by virtue of a *lack* of meaning rather than a meaning which is somehow 'malformed'; the latter option is taken up by what are then labelled 'irresolute' approaches that read the *Tractatus* as embodying a set of metaphysical views which are, somehow, inexpressible, 'which *strictu sensu* cannot be said' (Hacker, *Themes*, p. 19).

But, if not to convey an inexpressible metaphysics, what is the purpose of the resolute *Tractatus*? According to Conant, it is to reveal our susceptibility to a certain kind of illusion. In reading the book, 'we are drawn into an illusion of occupying a certain sort of perspective', a perspective from which 'we can view the logical structure of language "from sideways on"' and can 'contemplate the logical structure of thought as it is and imagine that we are also able to contemplate the possibility of its being otherwise'. 'The only "insight" a Tractarian elucidation imparts' is that the reader is prone to such illusions (*New*, p. 197).

Papers by Conant, Cerbone and Witherspoon in *New*, as well as one by Conant in *America*, elaborate this proposed reading of the early Wittgenstein by contrasting his outlook with that of Frege and Carnap. Though those papers include much of interest, it is the two papers by Diamond in *New* that undertake what seems to me the more pressing task. Critics of the resolute

reading often depict it as unsatisfactorily *thin*, as a highly abstract, 'strategic' account of how the book ought to work as opposed to a detailed reading of the text as we find it; Diamond's two papers attempt to meet that challenge by addressing remarks of Wittgenstein's which might seem least hospitable to a resolute reading, those on ethics and solipsism. The paper on the latter, for example, offers a sense in which an identification of the limits of the world about which I can have knowledge with the limits of the realm of my experience might be seen as a 'view' that 'self-destructs' (*New*, pp. 267 and 282), as a rung on a 'ladder' that is to be 'climbed up' and then 'thrown away'. (The paper by Winch in *America* offers further useful and resolution-friendly observations on another aspect of the *Tractatus* on subjectivity.)

But, predictably, the resolute proposal that Wittgenstein's propositions are as senseless as the pure gibberish of 'piggie wiggle tiggie' (Diamond, *New*, p. 151) strikes many as absurd, and *New* and *Themes* each includes an important piece by Peter Hacker leading the backlash. The case that Hacker makes is elaborate and any advocate of a resolute reading simply must confront the challenge that he poses. In the space available I will comment on only a few of Hacker's criticisms.

Hacker cites many passages in which the *Tractatus* seems to indicate truths that are to be shown rather than said. Nonetheless, this evidence is ambiguous; resolute readers respond that, in a work that is to be 'thrown away' having been seen to be made up of propositions that are nonsensical, 'the claims that its author makes' have to be viewed with circumspection: some (many?) of these claims are to be 'thrown away' (Conant, *New*, p. 215). Hacker, in turn, responds to this feature of his opponent's position by pointing also to remarks of Wittgenstein's which seem to articulate the views of the author of the *Tractatus* but which are made *outside* of the 'frame' that 6.54 provides; most of these come in the form of retrospective comments that Wittgenstein makes. (Ian Proops has followed this path too in his 'The New Wittgenstein: A Critique', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 9, 2001.) Again, however, no simple victory follows, because resolute readers argue, not implausibly, that many of these remarks are cases of Wittgenstein subsequently recognizing that he had particular philosophical commitments; thus the claim that the *Tractatus* was not designed to impart any metaphysical or other form of philosophical theoretical message could be harmonized with Wittgenstein's later remarks about having held metaphysical or other philosophical commitments when he wrote that book by claiming that these commitments were unwitting commitments of the early Wittgenstein that he later recognized as such (*New*, Introduction, p. 17; also cf. Conant and Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', sect. 5, in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss (eds), *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, London: Routledge, 2004).

I suspect that Hacker is also aware of this second resolute response but hopes to inflict on the resolute approach a death by a thousand cuts: 'So he didn't mean it when he said this, or this, or this, or this ...?!' The resolute

responses indicated obviously only postpone a confrontation with the real challenge that Hacker poses, that of presenting a fully worked out resolute interpretation that provides plausible readings of the many passages that he cites. Hacker has not, I feel, shown that such an interpretation—with which I confess I have a lot of sympathy—is unsustainable; but he has set out clearly part of the obstacle course that resolute readers must negotiate.

In addition to citing putative ‘external’ counter-evidence, Hacker also challenges the internal consistency of a resolute reading. Crucial here, I believe, is the charge that ‘we can hardly claim that a “ladder” consisting of mere gibberish can lead anywhere’ (Hacker, *Themes*, pp. 15–16). An aspect of that question might be developed by asking, in particular, how strings of pure nonsense can constitute a chain of reasoning, how they can constitute a ladder that is climbed by thinking through arguments. To deny that that is crucial to what reading the *Tractatus* involves would seem to require that that book is a body of squiggles that merely *causes* the philosopher to stop saying what he says, something that acts on us, as Sullivan has formulated the point, ‘like a blow on the head’ (‘Ineffability and Nonsense’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 77, 2003, p. 196).

Conant claims that ‘the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus* depends on the reader’s provisionally taking himself to be participating in the traditional philosophical activity of establishing theses through a procedure of reasoned argument’, though the reader must ultimately “recognize” that he has only been going through the motions of “inferring” (apparent) conclusions from (apparent) “premises” (*New*, pp. 196–7). The challenge for the resolute is to give a sense to the ‘successful’ going through of those motions (to be contrasted with that in which the reader nods his head as he moves his finger down the page, muttering ‘Yes, I see’, when in fact he has no idea what is going on) without going back on the belief that ‘entailment is a relation between sentences only in so far as they are meaningful’ (Witherspoon, *New*, p. 348) and the claim that the ‘premisses’ and ‘conclusions’ ‘really and truly [have] no articulable content’.

While there are significant similarities between the approaches adopted by most (though not all) of its contributors, the editors of *America* make no claim for a substantial consensus of outlook between the contributions they have collected. The same is true of *Themes*, despite the fact that all of the contributors to that collection take their initial bearings from the work of David Pears. The editors of *New*, however, see in the work that they have gathered together the emergence of a ‘New Wittgenstein’, a larger event of which the emergence of a resolute early Wittgenstein is presented as merely a part. ‘Extensionally’, as it were, we can identify ‘the New Wittgensteinians’ as (roughly) resolute readers of the *Tractatus* and readers of the later Wittgenstein who derive inspiration principally from Stanley Cavell and John McDowell. But I have my doubts about the ‘intensional’ specification of the ‘New Wittgenstein’. In her introduction to this volume, Cary proposes that the New Wittgenstein’s ‘primary phil-

osophical aim', early and late, 'is therapeutic' (p. 5); more specifically, his 'fundamental aim is to get us to see that the point of view on language we aspire to or think we need to assume when philosophizing—a point of view on language as if outside from which we imagine we can get a clear view of the relation between language and the world—is no more than the *illusion* of a point of view' (p. 6).

One might well ask: what's so new about that, at least as a view of the later Wittgenstein? Crary claims that what distinguishes the New perspective from 'standard interpretations' is the claim that 'the idea of an external standpoint on language is thoroughly confused and that its abandonment is accordingly *without consequence* for our entitlement to our basic epistemic ideals' (p. 4). So we can retain 'our entitlement to talk about full-blooded objectivity' and style ourselves as 'innocent platonists' or 'naive' or 'commonsense realists' (*New*, p. 10; Putnam, *America*, p. 165). But, again, what's so new about that? For example, according to Eilan, Pears's later Wittgenstein rejects 'the coherence of any philosophical theorizing about the mind–world relation from the outside' but retains a 'commitment to the mind-independence of the world we think about' (*Themes*, pp. 168, 165). In fact, any reading of Wittgenstein that attempts to defend his outlook will surely need to present any commitments that he undermines as mere 'castles in the air' (*Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, sect. 118), as 'philosophers' myths' that are '*without consequence* for our entitlement to our basic epistemic ideals.' So the claim that a 'New Wittgenstein' has emerged will have to be made in more fine-grained terms than that. Kripke, of course, does think something important is lost; but his feelings for Wittgenstein are also clearly mixed; and if thinking like Kripke is what makes one a 'standard' interpreter, then I suspect that there may only be one such interpreter of any consequence, greatly influential though he is.

More importantly, there seems to be something philosophically problematic in Crary's 'New Wittgenstein', a problem that is not obviously present in the work of all of 'the New Wittgensteinians' themselves. If an 'external perspective' really is an illusion, then all there are are 'internal perspectives'; but then what does their 'internality' amount to if the notion of 'an external perspective' is 'thoroughly confused' (p. 4)? My bet, though it would take some work to prove the point, would be that in the work of most of 'the New Wittgensteinians' (the principal exception, discussed below, being McDowell) the metaphor of an 'external perspective' merely serves to *articulate* in the following way illusions to which we are victim: we believe we glimpse the possibility of justifying or criticizing how particular activities of ours happen to run; 'where we are' takes on the air of being an 'internal perspective' which contrasts with an 'external perspective' that we come to believe we glimpse; this 'perspective' is 'external' in that the reflection imagined to take place 'there' takes as an open question—in a way in which the occupants of what we come to think of 'the internal perspective' do not—a kind of 'legitimacy' that we come to see those

activities as capable of possessing or lacking. To find out that such an external perspective is an illusion is then to see that that possible justification or criticism was actually a mirage: there is no such 'legitimacy' to be 'desired' or 'missed', no such 'reflection' to be carried out and no such point of view, no such 'there', from which to carry it out. But, in recognizing this, we ought also to recognize that there is no corresponding 'here' either. One might say that these illusions result in our feeling as if our perspective on the matters in question is *merely* an 'internal perspective'; but it would be more accurate to say that we feel as if we merely have a *perspective* on that matter. (As Cerbone nicely puts it, exposing as an illusion the notion that "there is something "out there" beyond our skin, only we cannot, due to the constraining effect of our skin, get to it' is something that ought ultimately to make us question 'the idea of our having a conceptual *skin* at all and with it the notions of *inside* and *outside* that accompany such an idea' (*New*, p. 308)).

But if the above assessment of the role of the 'internal/external' metaphor is accurate, then 'externality' itself is not the problem; rather *illusory* perspectives from which one might carry out (illusory) forms of explanation, justification or criticism are the problem; they are what we need to avoid. In which case, we need to *reject* the proposal that Crary presents as uniting 'newness' and distinguishing it from 'oldness', the proposal that 'the idea of an external standpoint on language is thoroughly confused'. If the 'internal/external' metaphor does merely *articulate* the illusions in question—an 'external standpoint' on something on which we come then to think of ourselves as 'normally' or 'ordinarily' having an 'internal standpoint' is what the illusion is an illusion *of*—then, though such troublesome 'standpoints' are 'external', that is not what makes them troublesome and there is no independent notion of 'externality' available here by reference to which we can identify such philosophical illusions.

Unsympathetic readers of the later Wittgenstein have always asked, 'What's so great about "the everyday"?' Unsympathetic readers of *New*, and in particular its introduction, may well find themselves asking, 'What's so bad about "external perspectives"?' Putnam's comments in his contribution to *America* are revealing. He describes his 'common sense realism' as not itself 'a metaphysical position, or even an anti-metaphysical position' (p. 165); when applied to external world scepticism, his 'strategy' 'consists rather in, first, taking perfectly seriously our ordinary claims to know about the existence of birds and automobiles [etc.] ... and our ordinary explanations of how we know those things, and, secondly, in meeting the objection that these ordinary claims simply ignore a philosophical problem by challenging the very intelligibility of the supposed problem' (pp. 165–6). Putnam later reports and endorses a remark of Cavell's that '[t]he notion of the ordinary in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is meant only to contrast with the philosophical' (p. 176). But if so, nothing very much seems to turn on the claims and explanations that Putnam's 'strategy' 'takes perfectly seriously' being 'ordinary'; all the work of the strategy rests on its second element; the strategy is not that of defending 'the ordinary' or dis-

suading us from adopting an 'external perspective' but of showing that what we may think is under attack (in the many different cases in which the strategy is applied) has had no real attack mounted upon it.

It seems to me that what Wittgenstein offers is, first and foremost, a particular *practice*, a set of techniques for thinking about, detecting and undoing knots in our thinking, and a set of examples of those techniques at work. Moreover, there are excellent illustrations of work in that 'style' in these collections: I would single out, in particular, Stone's discussion of *Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 201 in *New*, Diamond's discussion of Kripke on the metre rule in *America*, and (though not officially 'new') Stroud's discussion of private language in *Themes*. These are examples of the focused dismantling of particular philosophical confusions: having followed the Wittgensteinian paths set out, one concludes not that one shouldn't have questioned 'the ordinary' or 'the internal perspective', but simply that a question that one thought one was posing was actually a mirage, a confusion. There is no prospect of an end to this kind of work; one cannot decide not to be tempted into thinking one can occupy such an 'external perspective' and one also cannot resolve not to adopt such a perspective. Instead one 'finds' that one has 'adopted' such a 'perspective'—it is conjured into 'existence'—again and again, every time we confuse ourselves into thinking we glimpse the possibility of a critical reflection when none 'is there'.

There does indeed seem to be a continuity between the 'austere conception' of nonsense, with its assault on the idea of 'illogical thoughts', and the later Wittgensteinian aim, in destroying mere 'castles in the air', of leaving us without the feeling that there is 'something that we cannot do' (Diamond, *America*, p. 137, cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 374); as Stone puts it, 'such a philosophical destructiveness must destroy ... the impression of its own destructiveness' (*New*, p. 110). But talk of 'the illusory comfort of an external standpoint' (the subtitle to Part One of *New*) not only obscures the differences between Wittgenstein and the queue of pragmatists, Marxists and post-structuralists that use the same talk; it also sets up mistaken expectations about what Wittgenstein and some of the 'New Wittgensteinians' offer us.

The 'New Wittgensteinian' whose work fits the picture I have roughly sketched least well is McDowell; but what I think that shows is that there is reason to question not only where the 'outer borders' of 'newness' lie, but also—once one presses the discussion beyond a certain homogenizing abstraction—how internally homogeneous 'newness' is. McDowell ascribes to himself therapeutic aims: he thinks we need to acknowledge that we have certain problems because we have certain prejudices. But his aims, and even more so his therapeutic 'practice', seem dissimilar to Wittgenstein's. To take just one illustrative aspect, McDowell seems to believe that the kind of thinking that he wants to combat could actually come to an end '[i]f we could achieve a firm hold on a naturalism of second nature, a hold that could not be shaken by any temptation to lapse back into ordinary philosophical worries about how to place

minds in the world' (*Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 86). Wittgenstein's 'target', as I understand it, just doesn't have that kind of identity: '[W]e never get to the end of our work!—Of course not, for it has no end' (Zettel, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, sect. 447); nor, for that matter, does the target of Putnam's 'common sense realism'.

What is perhaps most misleading about talk of a 'New Wittgenstein' is the insinuation that a substantial consensus had been achieved about the 'old' issues that Wittgenstein raises. Clearly one reason why Wittgenstein may seem intent on revealing 'external perspectives' as illusions is his emphasis, in our understanding of meaning and thought, on 'practice'. But there are a range of opinions about how the appeal to 'practice' functions. (Interesting suggestions can be found in *America* in the chapters by Hertzberg and Finkelstein (see also his chapter in *New*) and, taking a very different tack, Williams.) One of Charles and Child's 'Wittgensteinian Themes' is the question of how a philosophy that emphasizes the practical character of understanding can retain realist commitments—in other words, the question of how, in the light of such a philosophy, we can retain 'our entitlement to our basic epistemic ideals': Charles argues that such a philosophy can depict as intelligible the possibility of grasping ratification-independent truth-conditions and the possibility of critically evaluating our practices, but that that philosophy is Aristotle's, not Wittgenstein's; Eilan explores what it would be to be a realist about conscious states without committing oneself to the intelligibility of a 'view from nowhere'; and Child critically examines a range of anti-Platonist arguments that have their roots in Wittgenstein and finds each wanting.

Child passes close to, but does not consider, another, and, it seems to me, better, anti-Platonist argument (of which I have offered a fuller version elsewhere). He notes that a modest Platonist (who 'holds that standards of correctness are investigation-independent' but rejects the 'immodest' idea 'that any one system of concepts can come closer to mirroring the structure of reality than any other' (p. 92)) must allow our natural tendency to continue a series in a particular way to determine which investigation-independent standards of correctness are relevant to the correctness of our continuation of that series. Child questions whether this is a coherent position because it leaves indeterminate which standard is relevant for cases to which 'our natural tendency does not reach' (p. 95).

But this seems to miss something crucial about this dependency of a Platonist story on reference to our own performance as rule-followers. We are invited to imagine that to see someone's acts as meaningful we must see them as standing in a relation to an investigation-independent standard: failure to conform to that particular standard renders particular uses of a sign mistaken. But to establish which of the many investigation-independent standards that are 'out there' is relevant we need already to see the person's acts as meaningful: we need to know which particular rule the person is *trying* to follow, and to know

that we must know to which features of reality their sign is *correctly* applied. (Some ‘community views’ of rule-following attempt to solve this problem by citing the performance of ‘the person’s community’; but the problem resurfaces when we try to identify the community to which the person ‘belongs’: why do we think that the person is even trying to use the rules that this particular community follows?) What the identification of a suitable investigation-independent standard was to settle seems to need to be settled before we can identify such a standard. Clearly more needs to be said, but, on the face of it, the Platonist story seems to be incoherently circular; if so, we can believe that we can adopt the standpoint—dare I say it, ‘the external standpoint’—that he offers only if we confuse ourselves, succumbing to some kind of illusion

It seems to me that it is in reflection on these ‘old’ issues—of the philosophical significance of ‘meaning as use’, the relationship between the mental and the behavioural, the character and status of the laws of logic, and so on—that Wittgenstein’s continuing importance lies, even if what we ultimately seek is their dissolution in some way or other. Despite my complaints about the ‘packaging’ of *New*, all three of these collections contain important pieces (some of which, due to restrictions of space, I have not even mentioned) that may help us arrive at a deeper appreciation of these ‘old’ issues.

As readers may or may not know, *Mind* has the policy of giving the author/editor(s) of a book the opportunity to comment upon the review commissioned for the journal. In one set of such comments, Crary has proposed that the point I make about the idea of an ‘internal perspective’—so to speak—collapsing in on itself is actually a point that she was trying to make all along. I simply have to take her word for that. But what I will say is that it is unclear to me how that can be all she meant by the remarks in question; I have tried to make that clearer in the body of the review and will add a comment or two more here. In particular, if Crary were merely making the point that I was making, this would leave the attempt to characterize what is distinctive of the ‘New Wittgenstein’ back at square one. As I indicated in the original version of the review, many ‘old’ commentators attempt to read Wittgenstein as undermining our belief that there are perspectives from which our discursive practices are revealed as ‘groundless’; part of what such a reading requires is a demonstration that ‘abandoning’ such ‘perspectives’ is, as Crary puts it, ‘without consequence for our entitlement to our basic epistemic ideals’. As a result, it seems to me that she *needs* to be making stronger claims than those that I have recommended; she needs to make stronger claims in order to demonstrate the ‘newness’ of the ‘New Wittgenstein’. If one reads the ‘internal/external’ metaphor as merely *articulating* the illusions in question and not as providing a general articulation of what it is that, according to the ‘New Wittgenstein’, we should avoid doing, then we seem to have dropped the main thread that Crary offers as tying ‘New Wittgensteinianism’ together.

There are, without doubt, similarities between the approaches taken by the philosophers whose work Crary and Read have gathered together; I would like

to have a clearer sense of what they are too, since I find much of value in that work. But if Crary's introduction is merely making the points that I have made, then it moves us no further forward in identifying what those similarities are, what 'larger trend' this body of work might constitute. It wasn't my ambition here to identify such similarities; but, it seems to me, it must have been Crary's. Read has suggested that I may be expecting from Crary some sort of magical formula, some set of words that will fix for all eternity what is and what is not 'new'. I would agree with him that that would be asking too much. But there are surely a lot more things that one could call 'an explanation of one's outlook' that would not have to take that form and which one might reasonably expect to be given. I think that, as academics, we should be glad that we are not required to engage in 'party politics' and that, consequently, the onus lies with those who would present we readers of Wittgenstein as all either 'old' or 'new' to explain what that distinction amounts to and demonstrate that bearing it in mind will illuminate rather than obscure our concerns. I would like to thank both Crary and Read for a discussion which has helped me to clarify the criticisms that I have set out, though they do not, of course, accept them.

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Art as Performance, by David Davies. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. Pp. xii + 278. H/b £55.00, P/b £19.99.

In *Art as Performance*, David Davies argues for a radical revision of our ontology of art. A painting or sculpture (for instance) is not, as we pre-theoretically think of it, a piece of canvas covered with paint, or a chunk of marble, to be bought, sold, and carted from one museum to another. Rather, an artwork is the creative act performed by an artist that results in the production of the object we usually (but mistakenly) take the artwork to be. In addition to this central thesis, Davies considers many other issues that are intertwined with the ontology of art, such as the methodology of the subject, the role of intentions in determining meaning, and the puzzling nature of late- and post-modern art. In the last few pages of the book he even tosses in a new proposal for the definition of art! The clarity and detail of argument that Davies brings to these discussions alone would make the book worth reading, but there is space here only to briefly explore the intriguing central thesis.

Before I do that, though, a note to those familiar with the recent literature in ontology of art: Davies distinguishes his view from Gregory Currie's similarly