

# Essays in Philosophy

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## Book Reviews

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*Approaches to Wittgenstein: Collected Papers*, by Brian McGuinness. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. 299 pages including bibliography and index of names; preface 4 pages; ISBN: 041503261X; \$80.00.

*Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions*, by David Bloor. New York, NY: Routledge, 2002. 173 pages including bibliography and full index; preface 4 pages; ISBN: 0415161487; \$27.95.

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The appearance of these two books in the same year and by the same major academic press (Routledge) should offer encouragement to beleaguered wittgensteinians lamenting Wittgenstein's conspicuous absence from most of today's prominent philosophical discussions. Bloor's *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions*, originally published in 1997, now appears for the first time in paperback. It provides what is likely to be the most cogent and up to date argument available for a sociological reading of the later Wittgenstein on rules and rule following. As such, it not only makes an important contribution to Wittgenstein studies, but to contemporary philosophy of mind and language in general. McGuinness's more historical *Approaches to Wittgenstein*, consists of twenty-four of his characteristically authoritative articles published over the last fifty years. The only criterion for their inclusion in this new volume seems to have been to keep them from 'mouldering' in the relative obscurity of distant archives and foreign periodicals. Six originally published in German appear in English for the first time. Another, "The Unsayable: A Genetic Account" (Vienna, 1999) has been much expanded. The book spans both the early and later periods of Wittgenstein's thought with flawless and meticulous scholarship.

While McGuinness's articles vary widely in degree of difficulty, all do presume a considerably high degree of familiarity with Wittgenstein's place in twentieth century analytic philosophy. This new volume is therefore most appropriate for the graduate-level reader. But if there is a general 'approach,' which unites these essays, it is McGuinness's historical and often biographical emphasis—he authored the first well-known biography of Wittgenstein: *Wittgenstein, A Life: Young Ludwig 1889-1921* (Duckworth, 1987). The book is divided into four parts the contents of which appear as follows:

### **PART I**

#### **The Man**

1. 'The Lion Speaks, and we don't Understand': Wittgenstein after 100 years
2. Philosophy and biography
3. Asceticism and ornament
4. The idea of Jewishness
5. 'It will be terrible afterwards, whoever wins'

## **Part II**

### **The *Tractatus***

6. The path to the *Tractatus*
7. Pictures and form
8. The supposed realism of the *Tractatus*
9. Language and reality
10. The *Grundgedanke* of the *Tractatus*
11. Philosophy of science
12. The value of science
13. Solipsism
14. Mysticism
15. The unsayable: a genetic account

## **Part III**

### **Philosophy revisited**

16. Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle
17. Relations with and within the Circle
18. Probability
19. Philosophy of language and philosophy of mind
20. Freud and Wittgenstein
21. *On Certainty*: comments on a paper by G.H. von Wright

## **PART IV**

### **Philologica**

22. Bertrand Russell and the 'Notes on Logic'
23. Some pre-*Tractatus* manuscripts
24. Manuscripts and works in the 1930s

Part one, *The Man*, addresses the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of Wittgenstein's thinking to best illustrate his character. It is by far the most biographical section and reads a bit like an incomplete follow-up to McGuinness's biography of Wittgenstein's early years. A common theme is Wittgenstein's obsession with being original, i.e., generating new philosophical paradigms. Another is his deep intellectual piety, devoting every bit of time and energy with complete seriousness in helping others to think correctly about the important problems of life and to not allow himself to be distracted by lesser considerations of any nature. The first essay includes insightful passing observations of the profound and wide-ranging impact the methodology and substance of Wittgenstein's work has had across the academic spectrum from the foundations of mathematics, to linguistics, to psychology, to social anthropology, to theology, to computer science, to literary theory. He argues that Wittgenstein's greatest legacy is an emphasis on putting theory in its proper place. He takes for example Kuhn's idea of revolutionary changes of paradigm in science to be inconceivable without Wittgenstein. This first essay is merely a general and introductory tribute given for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wittgenstein's birth and so unfortunately does not delve much into specifics. However, the rest of the essays in part one are detailed and thorough, offering a most revealing biographical sketch of Wittgenstein's own influences and his singular approach to life and to philosophy in general.

Part two, *The Tractatus*, explores Wittgenstein's early metaphysics, with considerable attention given to the realism/anti-realism debate. "The Supposed Realism of the *Tractatus*" for example, masterfully shows how and why for Wittgenstein, realism, idealism, and solipsism collapse into one. His discussion of this theme is one of the several essays in this volume that reach beyond history and biography to focus entirely on argumentation. In this respect, they all make original and valuable contributions to Wittgenstein studies, and at times extend even beyond to central contemporary metaphysical discussions. One such case is in the article above where he addresses the question of the existence of simples and complexes, concluding that an example of an absolutely simple object cannot be given and thus that we cannot grasp anything other than a concatenation of objects. This flies in the face of the continuing contemporary preoccupation with simples guided by misapplication of Occam's razor.

Part three, *Philosophy Revisited*, concerns Wittgenstein's later thought, marked by his decision in 1929 to return or 'revisit' philosophy. The first two of the six articles in this section are biographical, illuminating Wittgenstein's inspirations for returning to philosophy. The other four essays focus entirely on Wittgenstein's work. They tend to highlight interesting evolutions in his thought from the early to the later periods. One such passage is in the essay "*On Certainty*" which explores Wittgenstein's view of the world as admitting of different analyses into facts and hence being conceivable as having different *forms*. Thus, various alternative bodies of *Vor-Wissen* ('pre-knowledge' which must be known to anyone to think at all) are possible. Hence, this allows for different sets of certainties for different communities and groups. We can see why this interpretation is held by some to be a possible contiguous reading of the early and later periods. McGuinness however rejects this view, I think correctly, to highlight evolution rather than continuity between the two periods.

Part four, *Philologica*, consists of three articles entirely devoted to Wittgenstein's early work on logic. The first of these discusses the genesis of Wittgenstein's "Notes on Logic" and in particular the part played by Russell in it. It makes use of recently discovered external evidence to suggest that the standard Costello version of 'Notes on Logic' is in fact Russell's own compilation and translation. Thus, it is not an accurate depiction of Wittgenstein's thinking, though the remarks are indeed better organized than they originally appeared. It should be taken as a depiction of how Russell viewed the material and not an authentic representation of Wittgenstein's thoughts at a specific stage in his thinking. McGuinness instead favors the original, unedited raw material of typescripts and manuscripts in the Russell archive. He holds that while the order of the remarks seems random, the original is clearly the better choice for a printed version. Included in the essay is an appended text of the Costello version. The last two articles discuss little-known private papers of Wittgenstein's that McGuinness compares with a very close reading of the rest of Wittgenstein's known early writings, mainly to support or correct existing translations.

As a whole, the entire volume greatly illuminates Wittgenstein's thinking by combining the virtues of thorough biographical research with meticulous exegesis of his writings. It thus stands as an invaluable resource to current and future students of Wittgenstein's thought.

Bloor's *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions* provides a fresh and lucid argument for a sociological or collectivist reading of Wittgenstein's later work. Thus, it might more appropriately have been titled 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Institutions.' There seems to be a slight tension and even irony in this since Bloor concludes with the slogan "to understand Wittgenstein, one must go beyond him." This is obviously the consistent and necessary implication of a collectivist and thus dynamic and evolutionary

account of rules and rule following. But he adds an interesting footnote remarking that he may have written his two books on Wittgenstein in the wrong order. According to him, the function of this second one is more to prepare the ground for the further work of construction and bridge-building of his first book, *Wittgenstein, A Social Theory of Knowledge*, (Macmillan, 1983). But it seems to me that the titles of these two works imply a further level of irony. For if the first book is actually the one that goes beyond Wittgenstein, and the second one really only provides the wittgensteinian theoretical groundwork, not only should the *content* of the second have come before the first, but it also should have traded its *title* with the first, thus leaving that chronology intact!

Bloor's table of contents is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Meaning Finitism
3. Rules as Institutions
4. Conscientiousness
5. Rule Skepticism
6. The Analogy with von Mises
7. Individualism
8. Isolation and Innovation
9. Rules and the State of Nature
10. Conclusion

Bloor's main line of argument in this latest book is against the individualist reading of Wittgenstein popularized by McGinn's *Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation* (Blackwell, 1984) and others. Bloor's sociological reading is essentially built upon a wittgensteinian account of meaning finitism with interesting references to Book III of Hume's *Treatise*. Both thinkers, he argues, advocated finitism, i.e., both claim the human capacity to apply rules is finite, and therefore cannot depend upon transcendently infinite criteria to ensure correct applications in new instances. The correct application of rules is thus not made possible by the individual but by collective conventions, customs, and institutions.

Bloor makes ingenious use of thought experiments throughout the text and clearly has a knack for the *reductio ad absurdum*. One characteristic example in "Isolation and Innovation" is showing that the individualist argument for rules and rule following actually rests on the following invalid argument:

Social isolates cannot participate in institutions  
Physical isolates can follow rules

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Therefore: Rules are not institutions

Although both premises are true, the conclusion does not follow. The reason he ultimately gives for individualists not claiming that social isolates can follow rules is "that they have no account, other than a dogmatic one, of how objective standards of right and wrong can be provided in such cases" (p. 111.). The reason why the individualist account of social isolates is dogmatic according Bloor, is that it rests on faulty thought experiments such as McGinn's example of the status of a discovery claim as settled by a single innovator and not by a scientific community consensus. Bloor refers insightfully here to Popper's reminder that if Robinson Crusoe were to conduct laboratory experiments on his island, those results

would not in fact be scientific since an essential aspect of the scientific method would necessarily be missing. There would be nobody to check his results, or to criticize and argue with him. There would be no friendly-hostile cooperation. Through this, and many other ingenious and persuasive arguments found within the pages of his excellent book, Bloor gives the individualist a great deal to ponder and reckon with.

Bloor also revisits Kripke's notorious reading of Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox (that there is no fact of the matter on exactly how any rule is to be re-applied) expectedly supporting this finitist interpretation, although ultimately elaborating much more on its solution in a direction somewhat incompatible with Kripke's. Instead of accepting Kripke's merely 'skeptical' solution, Bloor upholds an entirely 'strait' answer to the skeptic with a community-wide institutional theory. Bloor argues that Kripke's failure to find a straight answer to the skeptic is based on a misconstrual of Wittgenstein's remarks rejecting solutions based on the natural dispositions of human nature. So for example, when Wittgenstein says "human beings believe that twice two is four" and "twice two is four" do not mean the same" (PI p. 226) he is denying the purely dispositionalist solution—not the institutional use-based one, as Kripke falsely assumes. Once this is acknowledged, Bloor sees no need to launch Kripke's "rescue operation" replacing truth conditions with rather contrived notions of 'assertability' or 'justification' conditions. Wittgenstein is not trying to do away with truth, he's only redirecting our attention to its real nature, namely, that "it is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use." (PI §241). Thus there are indeed "truth conditions—necessary and sufficient conditions—for the correctness of one response rather than another" (Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* Blackwell, 1982, p. 111), only they are continually determined and *re-determined* by finite institutional practices, not infinite metaphysical abstractions.

I confess that I myself had similar thoughts upon my first encounter with Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Blackwell, 1982). No doubt others have as well. This interpretation has indeed been given in print elsewhere and is thus not entirely original. But Bloor clearly and engagingly presents this thesis in a highly readable style, appropriate even for advanced undergraduates, replete with references to the relevant contemporary literature on the debate. It is hence likely to stand for years to come as the principle book-length resource on the subject in English. In fact, the only book I know of that approximates it in scope and quality, but without the extended discussion of the Kripke-McGinn debate, is Bouveresse's *La Force de la Règle: Wittgenstein et l'Invention de la Nécessité* (Paris, 1987).

In sum, Routledge has given us two entirely first-rate elucidations of Wittgenstein's thought, which should stand as models for the literature to come. With both appearing in the same year, wittgensteinian cups runneth over.

Julian Friedland  
St. Cloud State University