Oskari Kuusela and **Marie McGinn**, eds.
The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein.
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Philosophical handbooks, companions, and compendia are not exactly endangered species. These volumes, mostly gigantic, appear to be produced for university libraries rather than individuals, and the quality of the articles, never mind the need for the collections themselves, varies enormously. Discussion tends to be directed at specialists with argument swamping explanation, pedantry trumping getting on with it, and throat-clearing clogging up the works. It is not that all such collections are uninformative, uncompanionable, and uncompendious. It just often seems that way.

In the publicity material, this somewhat oddly titled work is overhyped as 'the most comprehensive volume ever published on Wittgenstein ... offering critical engagement and original interpretation, and tracing his philosophical development'. The examination of the philosophy is far from searching, more than a few interpretations have been around for ages, and the emphasis is more on selected remarks than on the evolution of Wittgenstein's thought. Nor is the book 'the place to look for a full understanding of Wittgenstein's special importance to modern philosophy'. Nor are all the essays are 'brand new'. At least four, for all but a sentence or two, are already in print.

The editors, for their part, acknowledge that Wittgenstein has in recent years been pushed to the margins, his place in the analytic pantheon notwithstanding. But they see him as still having an important role to play in contemporary philosophy. Instead of regarding his philosophy as 'superseded by subsequent developments in analytic philosophy' or pretending that 'the mainstream still has to catch up with [him]' (11), philosophers should, they suggest, use his writings to 'address the still unanswered question of how philosophy in the analytic mode would best be pursued' (10). This is not much in evidence here, however. Wittgenstein's remarks mostly serve as a pretext for subtle scholarly disquisitions, and the scientific turn in analytic philosophy, which the editors regret, is scarcely acknowledged, let alone challenged.

Counting the editors introduction, the collection comprises 36 essays grouped into seven sections. After an introductory section, there are sections on Wittgenstein's treatment of logic and mathematics, his thinking about language, his discussion of the mind, his comments on knowledge, his 'method' and his remarks regarding religion, aesthetics, and ethics. Infinity, proof, contradiction, the notion of a proposition, logical atomism, the limits of sense and rule-following are all accorded a chapter or part of a chapter, as are meaning, understanding, privacy, private language, first-person experience, sense data, action, the will, other minds, scepticism, certainty and aspect seeing. Moreover Wittgenstein's relationship to Frege, Russell and Moore, his conception of grammar, his use of examples and his literary style receive more than passing attention. Not unexpectedly, in a volume of over 800 pages, the patient reader will find much to ponder. Yet no more than a quarter of the essays struck me as suitable for a handbook.

Brian McGuinness's 'Wittgenstein and Biography' certainly fills the bill. Nobody is better on Wittgenstein's life and times, and in this essay he provides a deft sketch of the man, concentrating on the demands he placed on himself and his need to put his mental life in order. What chiefly intrigued me, however, besides how skilfully the historical facts are woven together, was how little the biography meshes with the picture of the philosopher that emerges from the writings. Wittgenstein may have 'lived his life in order to recount it' (14) and written his philosophy 'to come to terms with himself' (15), but I prefer McGuinness's more cautious concluding suggestion that 'it is not that [Wittgenstein's] life enters into his philosophy but rather that his philosophy is part of his life' (19).

Gregory Landini also contributes an essay appropriate for a handbook. Although usually antipathetic to the philosopher he likes to call 'the oracle', in 'Wittgenstein reads Russell' he provides a beguiling account of the thinking behind the *Tractatus*. He reads Wittgenstein as extending Russell's 'research programme' of 'logical analysis, elimination, and reconstruction' (30) by dispensing with identity as a genuine relation and extending the idea of a 'structured variable', i.e. a variable with an internal structure defining a range of significance. I should have liked more explanation of the technical details, something Landini chides Wittgenstein for omitting, and I see no reason to upbraid Wittgenstein for not knowing what nobody knew at the time. Still, Landini is onto something in reading Wittgenstein as following in Russell's footsteps. Wittgenstein may not have been Russell's apprentice (34), but he was doubtless an ally (33).

Though previously published, Ian Proops's 'Logical Atomism in Russell and Wittgenstein', struck me as deserving of being reprinted in this collection. I have reservations about Proops's (fairly standard) account of where the *Tractatus* comes apart but was taken by his insightful discussion of Wittgenstein on names and objects. He attends closely to Wittgenstein's words, includes instructive background material and alerts the reader to alternative ways of understanding what the *Tractatus* is about. Had all the chapters been as sharp as Proops's, the book would have been, as the publisher has it, '[e]ssential reading for anyone interested in Wittgenstein'.

Barry Stroud's 'Meaning and Understanding' is another paper meriting a spot in a handbook on Wittgenstein's philosophy. While less an introduction to an aspect of Wittgenstein's thought than an analysis of a cryptic remark, the paper is generally accessible, one that all and sundry can read with profit and pleasure. Stroud explores with his customary care Wittgenstein's double contention that 'any kind of explanation of language presupposes a language already' and that we cannot 'use language to get outside language' (297), a point Stroud links, surely correctly, with Wittgenstein's rejection of a 'full-blooded' theory of meaning and understanding in favour of something much less philosophically speculative (308–9).

In 'Wittgenstein and Idealism', a discussion that complements Stroud's, David Cerbone scrutinises Wittgenstein's response to the view that human experience and human life circumscribe what can be sensibly thought and said. He first critically examines a couple of influential interpretations of Wittgenstein as an idealist, then surveys Wittgenstein's remarks on the question of whether a tribe of deaf people would be conceptually limited. What such a survey shows, Cerbone maintains, is that 'Wittgensteinian idealism' is a product of

misinterpretation, Wittgenstein's aim being to criticise, rather than defend, the idea that we are locked in our own little worlds. In addition he brings out the depth and importance of Wittgenstein's remarks on people with different perceptual abilities.

Joachim Schulte's 'Privacy' likewise gets us to see an aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the right way. Concentrating on writings from the mid-1930s, Schulte illuminates Wittgenstein's thinking about 'private experience', 'private sensations', 'private images', 'private objects' and the like. He makes clear that Wittgenstein is out to undermine the philosopher's conception of an 'inner world' and the idea that we have exclusive ownership over what transpires inside. By directing us back to the texts, Schulte reveals what was primarily driving Wittgenstein's treatment of privacy and private language. His presentation of a range of source material clues us into what Wittgenstein is about far more than no end of discussion of one or two selected passages.

Beginners and old-timers alike will, I imagine, also appreciate Thomas Baldwin's 'Wittgenstein and Moore'. Not everyone will agree that *On Certainty* was sparked by Wittgenstein's discussions with Norman Malcolm, let alone accept that Moore's proof of the external world and defence of common sense 'provide the initial dialectical context for Wittgenstein's accounts of knowledge and certainty' (552). But in Wittgenstein's case some narrowing of focus is unavoidable, and Baldwin performs an important service in tracing a central thread of *On Certainty*. Best of all he sheds more than a little light on Wittgenstein's attempt to sort out the rights and wrongs of Moore's argument and demonstrates that epistemologists would do well to pore over Wittgenstein's writings on knowledge.

Finally Kim van Gennip's 'Wittgenstein on Intuition, Rule Following, and Certainty' seemed to me pitched at just the right level. She illuminates Wittgenstein's thinking about knowledge by discussing material, some published, some from the *Nachlass*, that 'foreshadows' what is said in *On Certainty* (570). Possibly she relies too heavily on other commentators' discussions and misses some small tricks (*Philosophical Remarks* is, for instance, identified with two different manuscripts). But I felt myself in excellent hands, and especially so when reading her discussion of Wittgenstein on Russell's 'The Limits of Empiricism'. She treats Wittgenstein as neither passé nor as way out in front, but carefully explains his thinking. Might this not be the best way to get him into the contemporary conversation?

As for the remaining chapters, I do not want to be thought of as implying they are all philosophically weak and forgettable. Philosophers fascinated by very early Wittgenstein will want to study Colin Johnston on assertion in the *Tractatus* while those interested in very late Wittgenstein will want to study Michel ter Hark's discussion of the remarks on 'meaning experience'. There is also much in Kuusela's essay on the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy for those exercised by the question of its continuities and discontinuities and much in Malcolm Budd's essay for those concerned with Wittgenstein and art (and the equation of aesthetics with ethics in the early writings). Similarly those with a taste for technical discussions of Wittgenstein on mathematics will find much to get their teeth into, and there are more turns of the screw for New Wittgensteinians to brood on. It is just that there is not much for the student seeking help with the texts or the casual reader wanting to know what all the fuss is about.

My guess is that the audience for this handbook would have been bigger had it been more comprehensive and less technical (and the scholarly articles consigned to scholarly journals). I cannot help but think that Wittgenstein's late writings on philosophy of psychology could have been accorded more space and his remarks on colour concepts at least mentioned, to say nothing of more out-of-the-way texts. While his observations about politics, science, Freud, and Frazer may be just as 'exiguous and fragmentary in the extreme' as his thoughts on religion (755) and just as 'sparse and sporadic' as his thoughts on ethics (796), they could have been given a shake, as could his differences with the Vienna Circle and associates like Ramsey, Hardy and Sraffa.

I was troubled too by fiction being passed off as fact. Did 'Wittgenstein *always* [have] Frege in mind' (183)? Was he averse to conceptual analysis of every description (354)? Is the *Investigations* marred by the fact that he 'confuses action with motion' (470)? Is it true that '[t]he problem of skepticism informs all of Wittgenstein's writings' (523)? Were his 'examples ... *dynamic*' (675)? Was his 'real discovery' that '[e]xamples offer clarification of our concepts in all of their variations' (695)? And would he have said: 'Not *what* one says but *how* one says it is the key to doing philosophy' (727)? It is a shame as well that awkward phrases were not recast, passages cited out of context not suppressed, and references not always supplied (it took me a while to track down 'Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein').

Perhaps most worrying of all, however, is that one gets little sense from reading the volume of how slippery a customer Wittgenstein is. The editors acknowledge that he has 'often been read as an academic philosopher and discussed in professional articles' despite his 'express[ing] dislike of professional academic philosophy' (9). Yet he is routinely interpreted here as arguing in standard ways for standard philosophical conclusions. ('Literary Form in Wittgenstein' by Marjorie Perloff, who is not a philosopher, is a notable exception.) Time and again I was reminded of the complaint, alluded to briefly (377), that one of Wittgenstein's most important themes is debated with next to no reference to his actual words. Turning back to the texts, I felt I was in a totally different world.

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