

Review of Culture and Value by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980) (review revised 2019)

[Michael Starks](#)

ABSTRACT

This is Wittgenstein's least interesting book, being only random notes dealing with art, music, religion and other areas of culture, taken from his notebooks over the course of his life. But W is never dull and it's a measure of the awe in which he is held that this book was even published. I can't imagine publishing such a book by anyone else; certainly no philosopher. Those interested in W should go to nearly any of the other 20,000 odd pages of his works (but NOT the Tractatus!), but those with little acquaintance be forewarned, though W may seem a shallow tepid pool, if you jump in you may never stop swimming.

Those wishing a comprehensive up to date framework for human behavior from the modern two systems view may consult my book 'The Logical Structure of Philosophy, Psychology, Mind and Language in Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Searle' 2nd ed (2019). Those interested in more of my writings may see 'Talking Monkeys--Philosophy, Psychology, Science, Religion and Politics on a Doomed Planet--Articles and Reviews 2006-2019 3rd ed (2019) and Suicidal Utopian Delusions in the 21st Century 4th ed (2019).

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You might wish to consult my other writings for detailed comments on W and his revelations on language, thought and reality. Nearly all of W's writings are contained on a searchable CD of many his English works issued by Blackwell and available for about \$100 from Intelix while his vast and largely untranslated nachlass -The Bergen CD- costs about \$1000 on CD and another \$1000 for the CD's with images of the 20,000 odd pages of the original manuscripts. The entire German *nachlass*, is now on several sites on the net and the Bergen CD is due for a new edition ca 2021--<http://wab.uib.no/aloes/Pichler%2020170112%20Geneva.pdf>), and all of his works are widely available on the net (libgen.io, b-ok.org and on p2p).

Although I've never seen anyone say so, W was a history making pioneer in cognitive and evolutionary psychology—the first person (and arguably one of the few to this day!) to see the structure of our innate intentional psychology. As a philosopher (armchair psychologist), all of his research was thought experiments and introspection. It is an easily defensible view that he is the greatest natural psychologist to date and nobody has ever matched his talent for describing the mind at work.

Nearly all the meatiest items from his papers have been culled for other works, and mostly the dregs remain for this book, but I have selected a few comments that seemed to me of general philosophical interest and since I have written extensively on his works, these will constitute the review for this one.

“There is no religious denomination in which the misuse of metaphysical expressions has been responsible for so much sin as it has in mathematics.”
“People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why it has to be so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there continues to be a verb 'to be' that looks as if it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long as we still have the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as we continue to talk of a river of time, of an expanse of space, etc., etc., people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up. And what's more, this satisfies a longing for the transcendent, because, insofar as people think they can see 'the limits of human understanding', they believe of course that they can see beyond these.”

“Philosophers often behave like little children who scribble some marks on a piece of paper at random and then ask the grown-up ‘what’s that?’ It happened like this: the grown-up had drawn pictures for the child several times and said ‘this is a man’, ‘this is a house’, etc. And then the child makes some marks too and asks ‘what’s this then?’

“A curious analogy could be based on the fact that even the hugest telescope has to have an eyepiece no bigger than the human eye.”

“The power of language has to make everything look the same, which is most glaringly evident in the dictionary and which makes the personification of time possible: something no less remarkable than would have been making divinities of the logical constants.”

“Philosophers say ‘after death a timeless state will begin’, or: ‘at death a timeless state begins’, and do not notice that they have used the words ‘after’, and ‘it’ and ‘begins’ in a temporal sense and that temporality is embedded in their grammar.”

“The queer resemblance between a philosophical investigation and (perhaps especially in mathematics) an aesthetic one. (E.g., what is bad about this garment, how should it be, etc.).

“Unshakeable faith (e.g., in a promise). Is it any less certain than being convinced of a mathematical truth? -But does that make the language games any more alike?”

“Nothing is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than to construct fictitious ones.”

“It’s only by thinking even more crazily than philosophers do that you can solve their problems.”

“Ambition is the death of thought.”

