BOOK REVIEW

Wittgenstein's Investigations: Awakening the Imagination by Beth Savickey

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A book review of Beth Savickey. *Wittgenstein's Investigations: Awakening the Imagination*. Cham: Springer, 2017, 137 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-45308-8

Beth Savickey's *Wittgenstein's Investigations: Awakening the Imagination* discusses Wittgenstein's art of grammatical investigation, focusing on what she characterizes as the descriptive, improvisational, and performative aspects of his investigations. These aspects of Wittgenstein's philosophizing, she maintains, have been eclipsed by the more standard confessional, therapeutic, and commonsensical interpretations. According to her, Wittgenstein's art of investigation, by contrast, is 'a philosophical and aesthetic practice that expresses a consistent regard for the authenticity of actual, living experience, and a critical view of language itself as a possible means of probing and conveying that experience in all of its particulars' (p. xiii). Or as she also writes, 'In his post-1929 philosophy, Wittgenstein presents interactive and multi-perspectival texts and improvisational exercises that awaken the imagination and encourage readers to open themselves to the live moment; the moment when meaning is in question' (ibid.). The book has two parts. Whilst Part I is dedicated to developing Savickey's reading and the concepts in terms of which it is articulated, Part II engages critically with the mentioned three kinds of interpretations. The conclusion complements this with a discussion of Wittgenstein's gardening metaphors, in accordance with the proposed Wittgenstein-interpretation.

There is a lot in this book I agree with and find important, but certain points also remained unclear to me and struck me as underdeveloped. I have in mind in particular Savickey's proposal that Wittgenstein's language games are meant to be enacted and responded to improvisationally. As she explains, 'While Wittgenstein's multi-perspectival texts present complex two-dimensional grammatical pictures, his art of grammatical investigation also encourages us to enact or perform improvisational scenes' (p. 41; comp. p. 45). This point is connected with something I would certainly agree with, namely, that Wittgenstein's texts, and the *Philosophical Investigations* in particular, are not meant to be passively received but actively engaged with. As Savickey puts it, 'our relationship to Wittgenstein's texts […] is not a given. We must become participants, not merely spectators' (p. xv; comp. p. 27). I certainly agree that the reader is meant to participate by thinking with Wittgenstein, and not merely to accept his clarifications as if they were offered as some kind of ready-made set of doctrines. Rather, one must make those remarks one's own by thinkingly engaging with them.

Indeed, as Wittgenstein notes in the preface to the *Investigations,* he is trying to stimulate his reader to thoughts of their own. Surely, if this is his goal, passive receptivity cannot be the intended way to read the book.[1] Nevertheless, I do not think I understood the point of enacting Wittgenstein's language games.

To put my difficulty anecdotally, although I have been reading Wittgenstein for about thirty years, I have never enacted any of his language games, or perhaps not even read aloud their descriptions, for instance, the grocery and builders language games in the opening of the *Investigations*. Does this mean I have missed out on something? If so, what have I missed out on? I do not know. Of course I might be somehow blind to this, but I struggle to understand what I might have missed and what kind of difference enacting language games makes. For example, is the account of the method of language games that I have developed without enacting language games, and without giving enactment any methodological role, consequently flawed?[2] I am unable to answer these questions because I am unsure how enacting those language games would help either to understand Wittgenstein's language games or what he wants to say by means of them. This is something that the book seems to leave unexplained.

Savickey writes about enacting and grammatical improvisation: 'Unlike […] similar examples throughout the history of philosophy, Wittgenstein's improvisational exercises call for spontaneity, action, and interaction' (p. 45). And:

> The shopping example can be enacted as an improvisational exercise involving at least two individuals, a slip of paper with three marks or words on it, a table of words and colour samples, a drawer labeled 'apples' and five red apples. It is helpful to act out this scene, in order to shift the act of imagination from one that is individual and introspective to one that is collaborative and public. (p. 47)

> To improvise is to enact a simple or primitive application of language. The work is collaborative, and language is public and shared. We act, react, and interact with one another when investigating words and the actions into which they are woven. Improvisation begins, but does not end with personal experience. (p. 55)

Although I think these are representative samples of explanations from Savickey, I fail to get much clarification from them. For example, contrary to her suggestion, I do not see anything essentially introspective in my own attempts to understand Wittgenstein's simple language games, despite the fact that I have not tried to enact them. I presume, for instance, that part of the point of the grocer language game is to illustrate differences between the uses of

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[1] I discuss this in terms slightly different from Savickey's in 'Philosophy as Education in Thinking: Why Getting the Reader to Think Matters to Wittgenstein', in *Wittgensteinian (adj.): Looking at the World from the Viewpoint of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, ed. Shyam Wuppuluri and Newton da Costa (Cham: Springer, 2019), 21–37. Works by Wittgenstein are abbreviated as follows: *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, ed. and trans. C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), abbreviated as BT; *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), abbreviated as PI; *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1932–1935*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), abbreviated as AWL; *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, ed. Cora Diamond (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), abbreviated as LFM; *Wittgensteins Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), abbreviated as MS (von Wright numbering); *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), abbreviated as Z.

[2] See Oskari Kuusela, *Wittgenstein on Logic as the Method of Philosophy: Re-examining the Roots and Development of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), chap. 5.

words, that is, that there are different kinds of uses of words as opposed to their use to refer to objects which Augustine mentions and Wittgenstein quotes (PI, § 1). But I cannot detect anything essentially introspective in my recognition that there are differences of use such as Wittgenstein's grocery language game illustrates. After all, language is not a merely mental phenomenon. Thus, when I ask myself whether there are the kinds of different uses that Wittgenstein describes, I am not looking inward into myself. Rather, I imagine scenes of acting with language. But I cannot see how enacting those language games would be essential to this task. This point seems to remain oddly underdeveloped in the book, given how many times improvisation is mentioned. (The word in its different forms occurs over a hundred times. I went back and checked more than once whether I might have missed some crucial explanation of how this works.)

This is not to deny that there is something improvisational in Wittgenstein's approach, even though I seem only able to make sense of this in somewhat different terms. This is perhaps therefore not the sense in which Savickey describes Wittgenstein's approach as improvisational, although the two may be connected. As Savickey also emphasizes, on Wittgenstein's view, philosophy only states what everyone grants to it (PI, § 599). As Wittgenstein develops this point, it can be understood as emphasizing the responsive and clarificatory character of his philosophy. For, if philosophy genuinely seeks to clarify something to others, and it does not merely keep dogmatically repeating clarifications which their author him- or herself finds helpful, then it has to be able to offer something that the interlocutors can genuinely recognize as clarifying. It has to provide something the interlocutors can agree with as having clarified whatever issues are under investigation. Or as Wittgenstein also remarks, 'only when I say what is self-evident is it philosophy' (MS 110, p. 214). Any controversial or debatable statements, such as philosophical theses, will therefore not qualify as clarifications, because clarifications have to be uncontroversial to whomever they work as clarifications: 'If someone were to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them' (PI, § 128).

However, this also implies that any unsuccessful attempts to clarify matters in ways that an interlocutor finds controversial, and is unwilling to accept, need to be put to the side in the course of conversation. 'I won't say anything that anyone can dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else' (LFM, p. 55). This suggests that the improvisational character of Wittgenstein's philosophy is indeed important. In philosophy one needs to be able to think creatively on one's feet, and to respond with sensitivity to changing clarificatory situations, just as in musical improvisation one needs to be able to respond with sensitivity to the tonal and rhythmic situation, and the expectations and possibilities arising from there. I would therefore agree that improvisation in this sense is essential to Wittgenstein's philosophy, and that it should be so for anyone who wants to try to follow his lead in philosophizing. But it does not seem to help me to understand why enactment of language games is important for reading Wittgenstein.

Despite this difficulty and as noted, there is much in Savickey's book that I agree with and find worth discussing and emphasizing in contrast to how Wittgenstein has mostly been portrayed by his interpreters. This includes the point that I already mentioned that 'The *Investigations* challenges us to move beyond the role of individual, passive reader (or spectator) and become active participants. […] In other words, we learn Wittgenstein's philosophy by doing it and not merely by reading it' (p. 55). Why should this be the case, however? Here we come back to the point that, if the *Investigations* aims to stimulate the reader to thoughts of their own, it cannot be passively received, or read without engaging in thinking. Relatedly, as Wittgenstein also explains, the book seeks to introduce a method by means of examples (PI, § 133). Given that methods are meant to be put into use, rather than marvelled at from

the outside, clearly the book is intended as one from which one can learn doing philosophy. But what kind of approach does Wittgenstein then practice and recommend?

I found Savickey's comparison between Wittgenstein's approach and Cubism illuminating in this regard. Of this she writes: 'The clarity of form sought in Cubist attempts to present a multi-perspectival view of a scene is also found in Wittgenstein's writings. [...] [O]ne of the problems addressed by Cubists was how to represent an object or scene from differing viewpoints simultaneously in order to give equal validity to each' (p. 22). Accordingly, 'The multi-perspectival nature of Wittgenstein's investigations is apparent in the composition and structure of his writings' (p. 23). Here it is important that whilst 'Wittgenstein's grammatical remarks, like Cubist paintings, arrange what we already know' (p. 36), what we know is not anything static that could be captured in terms of philosophical doctrines. Rather, Wittgenstein's philosophy aims to teach us how to find our way about in our language use, as opposed to getting entangled in confusions when discussing the issues we want to talk about. Part of the problem is, however, that even though we may be familiar with a vast array of uses from our life with language, this does not equip us for the rather different task of describing uses and the circumstances of use (Z, §§ 114–19). Consequently, we may get lost. To counteract this it may be necessary to describe the same and related points from a variety of perspectives, as Wittgenstein characterizes his remarks in the preface to the *Investigations*. Accordingly, in the *Investigations* there is 'no first or final word or conclusion but grammatical movement' (p. 24). There could be no such final word, I take it, because our unclarities and problems in response to which clarifications are articulated, which also provide us with a criterion for the completeness of clarifications, are historically changing and varied, and allow for no general standardized responses. Correspondingly, as Savickey explains, it is not Wittgenstein's point, contrary to what many interpreters have held, that Augustine's picture of language which describes all words as names, discussed at the start of the *Investigations*, is incorrect. The question, rather, is: in what regard is it correct or incorrect (PI, § 3)? Or as Savickey writes: 'It is not that Augustine has formed an incorrect picture, but that he does not know how to use this picture. Wittgenstein recommends that we yield to the temptation to use particular pictures but investigate their application' (p. 62).

As regards Savickey's critique of confessional, therapeutic, and commonsense interpretations in the second part of the book, according to her, the problem with confessional interpretations is that they turn philosophical problems into private ones, whereby 'Public interaction is replaced by private, inner dialogue' (p. 77). Moreover, 'When read as confessional, scholars often characterize Wittgenstein's later writings in predominantly negative terms' (p. 91). Here 'Philosophical temptation is characterized as a personal inclination to illusion or emptiness, and attributed to a willful separation of words from the contexts in which they have meaning. [...] Thus, the aim of philosophy becomes one of bringing temptation, and philosophy itself, to an end' (p. 77). By contrast, Savickey argues that Wittgenstein's response to Augustine, in particular his acceptance of Augustine's picture of language as correct with certain reservations, challenges this interpretation (pp. 77, 82). More generally, Wittgenstein challenges the emphasis placed on inner dialogue by confessional interpretations 'through his descriptive, improvisational, and performative investigations' (p. 91). Herewith philosophy then emerges, not as an inner dialogue, the confession and elimination of confusions, but as a collaborative enterprise (p. 92).

Recalling my earlier difficulty, however, is anyone who works by themselves, relying on inner dialogue and silent thought, without enacting language games, a confessionalist interpreter? I would not recognize myself from such a description, or that inner dialogue is necessarily a problem to be addressed through enactment of language games. Personally, I would say that I have been looking to Wittgenstein for help with making philosophical sense

of various phenomena in the world, and for solving philosophical problems that arise when trying to think about those things. This is, it seems to me, what his methods are designed for. They are, I agree, not just for acquiring self-knowledge and for addressing mistakes made by individuals in their thinking, whatever the latter might be. Thus, whilst I would partly agree with Savickey's critique of the confessionalist interpretations, I found her point about the problem with inner dialogues not very clear, similarly to the point about enactment. I will keep on going on debating things in my head for now.

My attitude towards Savickey's careful critique of therapeutic readings is markedly different. This I did find quite helpful. (It could be compared with my own critique of therapeutic readings from earlier this year, with special reference to the *Tractatus*. With little overlap between the two discussions, they seem to complement each other in a useful way.)[3] Amongst interpretations of philosophy as therapy, Savickey distinguishes three types: '(i) those that compare Wittgenstein's philosophy to psychoanalysis, (ii) those that compare his philosophy to therapy (generally), and (iii) those that describe philosophy as an illness (or as a cause of illness)' (p. 95). Such readings then either regard philosophy as an intellectual or mental illness, or the treatment of such illness, with the aim of bringing philosophy – 'whether illness or treatment' – to an end. But this, Savickey maintains, gets several things wrong. First and foremost, while such interpretations 'attempt to affirm the significance or importance of his philosophical acts, they call into question the practice of philosophy itself' (p. 95). For it is not Wittgenstein's purpose simply to rid us of our philosophical problems and to dismiss them as confused. Rather, his goal is to solve philosophical problems in such a way that justice is done to those problems as deep and disconcerting, and to help us to deal with our philosophical difficulties by means of the philosophical practice which he seeks to introduce to the readers.

Moreover, whilst it is true that Wittgenstein compares his philosophical approach to therapy in certain specific respects – that is, philosophy, like psychoanalysis, must state the interlocutor's problem so that they really recognize it as their own (BT, pp. 409–10; comp. MS 110, p. 240; 220, p. 83), and there are many philosophical methods like there are different therapies (PI, § 133) – this is not the same as identifying philosophy with therapy, or claiming that it *is* therapy. 'To read philosophy not merely as similar to therapy (in a variety of ways) but as therapy itself is to read these remarks too literally' (p. 100). Accordingly, when Wittgenstein writes that 'A simile is part of our edifice; but we cannot draw any conclusions from it either; it doesn't lead us beyond itself, but must remain standing as a simile' (BT, p. 418; comp. PI, § 599), this should be seen as applying to the therapy comparison too (p. 100). Or as O. K. Bouwsma noted, based on conversations with Wittgenstein, whilst Wittgenstein recognized certain similarities between his philosophy and psychoanalysis, he talked about this 'in the same way in which he might say that it was like a hundred other things' (p. 99). Accordingly, when Wittgenstein speaks of treatment, he speaks of treating problems, not persons (p. 108). 'For Wittgenstein, a philosophical loss of problems is something that we suffer; it is not a cure' (p. 113). Hence, rather than therapy, Wittgenstein's recommended way to address philosophical problems is his art of grammatical investigation. Instead of dismissing philosophical problems as confusions, this approach constitutes what Wittgenstein refers to as 'the real discovery that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions that bring itself into question' (p. 112; PI, § 133). From this point of view there is some irony in how therapeutic readings seek to question philosophical questions and philosophy itself as a valuable activity.

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[3] See Oskari Kuusela, 'On Wittgenstein's and Carnap's Conceptions of the Dissolution of Philosophical Problems, and against a Therapeutic Mix: How to Solve the Paradox of the Tractatus', *Philosophical Investigations* 42 (2019): 213–40.

Relatedly, as Savickey emphasizes, Wittgenstein denies that there is any common sense solution to a philosophical problem. Philosophical problems cannot be solved by restating common sense. A philosopher is not someone who lacks common sense. Neither are philosophers out of their senses or in error in asking their questions. Accordingly, whilst an attempt to solve philosophical problems by citing common sense risks dismissing the problem rather than resolving it, Wittgenstein emphasizes the importance of feeling the puzzlement deeply (p. 125). As Savickey remarks, quoting Wittgenstein: 'In seeking the source of puzzlement, Wittgenstein is not dismissing philosophical temptations but encouraging us to approach them anew: "You must not try to avoid philosophical problems by appealing to common sense: instead, present it as it arises with most power. You must allow yourself to be dragged into the mire and get out of it"' (p. 125; AWL, p. 109).

Finally, the conclusion to the book discusses Wittgenstein's largely overlooked gardening metaphors for philosophy which, as Savickey notes, are much more frequent than comparisons with therapy (p. 139). In particular, the gardening metaphors 'challenge us to see the nature and practice of philosophy in a new and different light' (p. 139) which is 'consistent with his descriptive, improvisational and performative art' (p. 141), and which takes 'the form of interactive, multi-perspectival texts that require reader participation' (p. 140). This is also reflected in Wittgenstein's style of working in that 'Just as gardening involves weeding, pruning, and clearing away, so too Wittgenstein thins out his remarks while editing and rewriting. He cuts down and rearranges remarks innumerable times' (p. 142). Moreover, 'Like gardening, Wittgenstein's grammatical methods involve different kinds and degrees of human intervention (in response to specific difficulties and concerns)' (p. 145). The gardening metaphors also clarify Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as a dynamic practice with no final ready-made results:

> Wittgenstein's philosophical texts (like gardens) require our active participation in order to bear fruit. Both philosophy and gardening are perpetual labours. Once we have completed or finished a particular task we must begin again. A garden is alive and ever changing. Philosophy and language share this impermanence. (p. 146)

'In matters of intellect and grammatical improvisation, we begin again and again' (p. 140).

This, Savickey maintains, also helps to understand the tone of Wittgenstein's philosophizing, which like gardening books 'is welcoming, humble, fair, and confiding' (p. 146). By contrast, when misread as explanatory and argumentative it is 'often heard as dismissive, arrogant, inaccurate, or judgmental (on the one hand), or as tentative, trivial, or unprofessional (on the other). Its spoken, casual immediacy is often interpreted as a lack of rigour, detail, or development' (ibid.). But rather than dogmatically telling us how language and our concepts work by stating 'grammatical truths', 'Wittgenstein's philosophy is a celebration of the richness, diversity, and beauty of language and life. Far from bringing philosophy to an end, his art of grammatical investigation offers the promise of new beginnings and an awakening of the imagination' (p. 147).

Overall, despite the difficulties I experienced with some of Savickey's notions and ideas, this is a very welcome book. It helps to rethink Wittgenstein's philosophical practice, and to recover it for ourselves as something to work with, as opposed to discussing it theoretically and revering or despising it from afar.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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