Hans Sluga
Wittgenstein.
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With *Wittgenstein*, Hans Sluga sets himself a twofold aim: like other books of this kind, he aims at providing a general, elementary, and accessible introduction to Wittgenstein's philosophy 'for readers who have as yet little or no familiarity with it' (vii). Unlike other books of this kind, which tend to concentrate on Wittgenstein's contributions to philosophy of language, logic, mind, and epistemology (a contribution the importance of which for twentieth century philosophy it would be hard to overestimate), Sluga considers Wittgenstein's work in philosophy 'with an eye to our political realities' (vi), and thus explores the relevance of Wittgenstein's thought for political philosophy. This despite the fact that 'Wittgenstein lacked an eye for political matters. […] He was certainly in no way a political thinker […] [and] politics has no significant place in [his writings]' (132). The book therefore does not try to construct a Wittgensteinian political philosophy, as it were; instead, and more modestly, it draws on some aspects of Wittgenstein's (later) thought and sketches how it can be useful for political theorising.

Sluga gives a biographical sketch of Wittgenstein in chapter one, focusing on the cultural background he inherited and historical reality he lived in. He then presents (in chapters two and three) Wittgenstein's early work on the nature of language, logic, and ethics, epitomised in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in 1922. The next chapters discuss the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy, from his critique and revision of the *Tractatus*, which started in 1929, to the development of the new philosophical perspective inaugurated in the *Blue Book* (which contains material from the thirties) and fully presented in the *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953). These chapters address the origins and development of some central concepts of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, such as that of language-games (chapter four), family resemblances (chapter five), grammar (chapter six), rules, and private language (chapter seven). Sluga does not proceed chronologically but thematically, by showing how the same central philosophical issues are addressed from different angles, and with different outcomes, in Wittgenstein's early and later work. By putting the phases of Wittgenstein's thought in constant dialogue with one another, Sluga remains faithful to Wittgenstein's own suggestion that his new thoughts 'could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking' (*Philosophical Investigations*, Preface). In chapter eight, Sluga addresses directly the question how Wittgenstein's ideas (on language games, family resemblances, forms of life) can prove relevant for political philosophy and how, more particularly, they 'may help us to face the peculiar problems of our contemporary social and political experience' (vii).

Although Sluga's book is addressed to a non-specialist audience and thus remains generally fairly readable and accessible (there are exceptions, however, chapter six being the most noticeable), it does not merely present and elucidate Wittgenstein's philosophy, but also deeply engages with it, along with some of the shortcomings it faces. Chapter five—on the

notion of family resemblance—is significant in this respect. The notion of family resemblance marks an important shift between the view endorsed in the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later thought. While the *Tractatus* had argued that there is a common structure (the general form of the proposition) to all propositions (language is thus essentially a unity), in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein claims that there is nothing which is common to all phenomena that we call language, but that these show 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblance'' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 66–7). Besides being crucial to the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy, the notion of family resemblance is important to Sluga's book's overall 'political' perspective on Wittgenstein's thought, because 'the basic concepts of politics are likely to be family resemblance concepts' (138). Sluga argues that Wittgenstein's use of the notion of family resemblance, however, is ambiguous, insofar as it does not make it clear whether a family resemblance concept is merely a *cluster* concept (whose members are simply related by family resemblances) or a *causal*—or *kinship*—concept (whose members are related by causal relationships). Wittgenstein, in fact, seems to favour the former use of the concept, but in so doing—so Sluga says—he hinders his views from playing an important role in the analysis of political or social phenomena: 'In history we are not only concerned with mapping similarities of one sort or another, we are also seeking to establish real connections, causal links, dependencies and "influences". Similarity terms proves insufficient for this kind of undertaking' (92). Sluga's analysis thus shows that we cannot simply 'apply Wittgenstein's methodology in an uncritical manner to the analysis of our political concepts' (138); Wittgenstein's perspective has to be enriched and built on in order to prove useful for our understanding of historical, social, and political phenomena.

A broader aspect of Sluga's book that deserves consideration is its overall discussion of the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein had made the idea that objects are simple and necessarily existent the basis of his logical atomism and of his conception of logical analysis. On the *Tractatus* view, the analysis of propositions in their simpler elements must eventually give us elementary propositions, immediate combinations of (simple) names, which, in turn, directly refer to (simple) objects; objects must thus exist in order for our propositions to have sense (to say something). This is, according to Sluga, a view that Wittgenstein later abandoned; from the mid-1930s, Sluga argues, Wittgenstein began to explore the view that simplicity is context-relative: 'In sharp contrast to the *Tractatus* doctrine that "the object is simple", Wittgenstein asserts [in the *Philosophical Investigations*] that there is no such thing as absolute simplicity or absolute complexity. When we call something either simple or composite we do so always in relation to a certain standard or measure' (34–5); '[I]n one language one class of signs might count as simple names and in another language another class' (33).

Wittgenstein, however, explored this very possibility as early as 1915, when he was working on the *Tractatus*. The very view that simplicity might be context-dependent is explicitly discussed in his wartime *Notebooks*, where the idea is advanced (see the entry on 18–06–15) that the simplicity or complexity of a name might not be univocally identifiable, but might depend on the sense of the proposition where the name is question is used. If an object's complexity is not relevant to the sense of the proposition where the object's name is present, then

such complexity is irrelevant to the proposition's descriptive level and the object in question could well be considered simple. This idea, admittedly, does not occur in the *Tractatus*, and even in the *Notebooks* it seems to be considered as one possibility among others. However, this is just one of the many examples that show aspects of continuity in Wittgenstein's thought, a continuity that has somehow been overlooked until recent years in the literature on Wittgenstein's philosophy, which has rather tended to conform around the paradigm of two radically different Wittgensteins; another example is the view of meaning as involving *use*, present in the *Tractatus* at 3.326–3.328, and a third would be Wittgenstein's constant interest in the role of pictures. Sluga's book does seem to conform to the 'two Wittgensteins' paradigm overall, although elsewhere Sluga has more correctly characterised Wittgenstein's two main works as 'moments of crystallization in an ongoing process of thought' ('What Has History to Do with Me? Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy', *Inquiry* 41), a process of thought that shows moments of discontinuity as well as aspects of continuity.

Sluga's *Wittgenstein* is a welcome addition to the literature on Wittgenstein. It manages to reach a balance between introductory exposition of Wittgenstein's philosophy and critical discussion of it, although, at times, the latter somewhat limits the accessibility of the book, the preservation of which should be the book's primary aim, given the non-specialist audience it targets. Secondly, the book is welcome because it puts forward an original perspective—that of stressing the implications and relevance of Wittgenstein's thought for political philosophy and political theorising. This connection has certainly been investigated before, in fact several books exist on Wittgenstein and political philosophy, but these are generally aimed at experienced (and specialist) readers. The downside, again, is that this perspective somewhat undermines the introductory function of the book. Chapter eight, for instance, in which Sluga directly addresses the importance of Wittgenstein's themes and philosophical methodologies for our understanding of political and historical concepts (linking them to authors as diverse as Arendt, Foucault, and Schmitt) is by no means the most accessible of the book.

Sluga's *Wittgenstein* would be an ideal textbook in a course on Wittgenstein and political philosophy and an excellent introduction for those interested in exploring that relation. I would, however, not choose it as a textbook in an introductory course on Wittgenstein, where the link between Wittgenstein and political philosophy is unlikely to be the central issue or concern; rather, in such a setting this book would act as a complementary or additional text.

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