

**Michael Hymers.** *Wittgenstein on Sensation and Perception.* Routledge 2017. 202 pp. \$140.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781844658565).

Hymers' book is readily divisible into two parts. In the first he advances his substantial exegetical claims for Wittgenstein's engagement with the philosophy of perception and sensation. In the second part he applies his exegetical thesis to more contemporary debates. The central thesis of the first part is that Wittgenstein's views not only on sensation and perception, but also on the possibility of a private language, stem from his reflections on sense-data. Specifically, he claims that sense-data theories are mistaken because they are caught up in a misleading analogy between phenomenal space and real space. As corollary to this thesis, Hymers considers Wittgenstein's therapeutic philosophical method to have its basis in Wittgenstein's reflections on phenomenal space. The second part takes up the claim that there is a misleading analogy between phenomenal and real space in order to critique debates on first-person authority, revivals of sense-data theories, and arguments for sensory qualia.

Hymers argues that Wittgenstein's engagement with the misleading metaphor of phenomenal space passes through three stages beginning in 1929. This itself is an interesting claim: Hymers persuasively argues against the views that consider the objects of the *Tractatus* to be sense-data. The narrative that Hymers reconstructs situates Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge as facing and reacting to two salient features of the contemporary sense-data theories: the act-object analysis of sensation and perception, and the logical privacy of phenomenal space. The former asserts that the act of sensing or perceiving is different from the object sensed or perceived, while the latter asserts that objects thus sensed or perceived belong to a privileged space for the perceiving subject rather than to the common space of the external world. The three stages he identifies in Wittgenstein's thought on sensation and perception are an attempt to develop a phenomenal language, the acceptance of sense-data as an eliminable manner of talking, and finally, a view that sees phenomenology as grammar.

The first stage was Wittgenstein's brief attempt to develop a phenomenal language for immediate experience. Based on the textual evidence he provides, Hymers shows both that it is not clear that Wittgenstein thought such a language must be logically private and that there is not any one consistent view regarding the phenomenal language that can be attributed to him. The second stage purportedly seeks to avoid confusing characteristics of phenomenal and physical space by considering talk of sense-data to be a particular vocabulary that is adopted, without ontological commitment, for describing immediate experience, but which may always be translated into talk about how things seem. This second strategy for dealing with the objects of sensation shows a sharp division between hypotheses—empirical propositions—and propositions about immediate experience. The latter are conclusively verifiable and hence truth evaluable, whereas the former are not and hence they are not genuine propositions at all. The third stage sees the culmination of this distinction between kinds of proposition in Wittgenstein's formulation of grammatical propositions and empirical propositions. Hymers provides interesting and compelling textual examples showing that Wittgenstein's views on sensation and perception did in fact pass through these three stages.

The critique of the metaphor of phenomenal space is manifestly not a criticism of the concept of phenomenal space because it is metaphorical. Rather, the criticism is that we are liable to be misled by forgetting that when we talk about how things appear or seem to us that we are not entitled to predicate the same properties as when we are discussing objects in public space. Examples of such misattributed properties include distance, size, measurement, existence when unperceived, vague boundaries, and even objecthood. In this sense, the metaphor is one of the many pictures that Wittgenstein seems to think hold us captive. Hymers elevates this specific misleading metaphor to occupy a central place in the web of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

In one of the book's most interesting discussions, Hymers argues that the private language argument has its basis on Wittgenstein's criticism of phenomenal space. Insofar as we are misled by the analogy between phenomenal space and real space, we are led to believe that we can name and refer to the 'objects' of our phenomenal space in a similar way that we can designate objects in public space. We assume that we can concentrate our attention and establish a rule for the correct application of a name, and that this can be achieved through some kind of private ostension or pointing, but this leaves completely indeterminate all those public antecedents and correlates of successful pointing or naming an object in physical space. Following from this discussion is the undermining of the assumption that we have privileged access to some private space. It is especially clear in the book that the very idea of private objects motivates the notion of a private language, but that any attempt to develop one seems to fall back onto methods that are in principle public, and moreover that the analogy of phenomenal space with physical space lends itself to positing a privileged authority on first person reports. What we discover when we explore the analogy between physical space and phenomenal space is that the rules and conventions for using perception and sensation language do not map onto the kinds of distinction we can make when considering physical space. It is in this sense that we might understand Wittgenstein's mysterious remarks that phenomenology and the geometry of visual space are really grammar (81).

The discussion of Wittgenstein's distinction between hypotheses and the propositions of immediate experience is penetrating and fruitful, especially in how Hymers connects it to Wittgenstein's later distinction between grammatical propositions and empirical propositions. It is disappointing that, despite several references to *On Certainty*, there is no engagement with Wittgenstein's distinction there between empirical and grammatical propositions. While it may stand as an exegetical question whether Wittgenstein's work in *On Certainty* represents a separate phase of his thought, it would be a powerful asset to Hymers' arguments if he could show that the metaphor of phenomenal space had a continuing influence on Wittgenstein's discussions beyond serving as the original impetus for a distinction between grammatical remarks and empirical remarks. Moreover, Wittgenstein's remarks from *On Certainty*, regarding some propositions being able to change roles (e.g. the river metaphor), might helpfully illuminate his remarks concerning the possibility of adopting different conventions for talking about our perceptions and sensations—that is, under what conditions our sensation talk is to be considered as grammatical, and in what way we are constrained by grammatical forms.

Overall, Hymers' exegetical thesis seems to be overly strong. He does provide a wealth of textual evidence showing that Wittgenstein was engaged with questions concerning perception and sensation, especially regarding visual space. What is less clear is that the metaphor of phenomenal space has the priority in Wittgenstein's thought that is attributed to it in this book. That is, it seems an interpretative stretch to claim that this specific misleading analogy is the keystone to Wittgenstein's thought through the 1930s, and that it is essential for properly understanding his reflections on meaning, noticing aspects, the private language argument, first-person authority, and his philosophic method. A more moderate thesis—to the effect that Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* provides the resources for constructing a powerful criticism of this metaphor—would be more plausible than that the criticism of the metaphor of phenomenal space, reconstructed from scattered remarks, was in fact Wittgenstein's view and that it plays the central role which Hymers attributes to it in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Of course, even if Wittgenstein did not hold the critique of phenomenal space as the central thesis of his later philosophy, that does not diminish the philosophical interest of Hymers' discussion. His reading of the private language argument through the critique of phenomenal space is insightful, and his engagement in the second half of the book with debates on first person authority, attempted sense-data theory revivals, and the lingering contemporary discussion of qualia are always interesting

and frequently compelling. The second part of the book effectively establishes Hymers' second principal contention that Wittgenstein's work on sensation and perception is relevant to contemporary issues. As is so common in Wittgenstein scholarship, we can question whether the thesis advanced in the first part of the book is one we can attribute to Wittgenstein as an official position. Nevertheless, Hymers brings a novel interpretation to Wittgenstein's discussions of sensation and perception through careful exegetical work, and shows that Wittgenstein's work remains an insightful stimulus for more recent concerns—updating his philosophical investigations to our own.

**John D. Lehmann**, University of Western Ontario