

WITTGENSTEIN APPROACHED

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Brian McGuinness. *Approaches to Wittgenstein: Collected Papers*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Pp. xv, 299. US\$115.00.

This book is a joy to read. Brian McGuinness is among the foremost scholars of Wittgenstein's life and work. For better than 40 years, his papers have given perhaps the most clear and authoritative account of the complex intellectual and personal journey of Wittgenstein. The collection of these important papers in one book is an outstanding gift to all who are interested in early analytic philosophy.

The papers are not presented diachronically, but topically, starting with McGuinness's discussions of the interplay between Wittgenstein's philosophy and his conception of himself, as Austrian patriot, as teacher, as Jew, as architect, as penitent. There is much controversy in all of this. It is upsetting to learn that Wittgenstein remarked (likely sometime shortly after the events of Pearl Harbor in 1941) that "Things will be terrible when the war is over, whoever wins. Of course very terrible if the Nazis won, but terribly slimy if the Allies win" (p. 51). In spite of McGuinness's attempts at charitable explanation, it is hard to excuse this remark. Wittgenstein should have recognized that it was imperative that the Allies win, for surely he could not, by then, have been blind to the *pogroms* of Nazism (if not the implementation of their Final Solution to the Jewish question). It is just disappointing to discover Wittgenstein's dalliance with anti-Semitism or with Weininger's deplorable *Sex and Gender*. Nonetheless, McGuinness offers a wonderful and balanced portrait of Wittgenstein with a welcome minimum of hyperbole either concerning his genius, achievements and influences, or his eccentricities and failings.¹

¹ As also in McGuinness's *Wittgenstein, a Life: Young Ludwig* (London: Duckworth, and Berkeley: U. of California P., 1988; reprinted as *Young Ludwig: Wittgenstein's Life, 1889–1921* with a new Preface [Oxford: Clarendon P., 2005])

In a second part, the book delves into the origins and nature of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Since the papers in this part do not come diachronically, it would be nice for each to have a date by its title, so that if there is an historical development of McGuinness's ideas it could be more easily tracked. But evolving or not, the interpretations in McGuinness's papers are of the very highest quality. I know of no one else who has come closer to unravelling the often cryptic entries in the *Tractatus*. Though some of McGuinness's assumptions about Russell's philosophy are now challenged by new interpretations—in particular, it seems that Russell never held a theory of types of *entities*—there remain a great many gems in these papers. Among them are the following: Wittgenstein's conception of solipsism is not Cartesian and epistemic, but concerns the limits of logical form and the proper ethical attitude towards life (p. 136); the *Notes on Logic* were offered as satisfying the dissertation requirement for Wittgenstein's B.A. degree (p. 254); Wittgenstein included among the "logical constants" such notions as that of a "predicate" and a "dual complex", not just logical particles such as "not", "or", "all" and "some" (p. 104); Wittgenstein's *Grundgedanke* was independent of his "picture theory" (p. 111); Wittgenstein's "logical atomism" was to be a purified form of Russell's so that it forms "true logical atomism" with no differences of type and with the unification provided by neutral monism of mental and physical particulars (p. 74); Wittgenstein and Russell had similar attractions to Spinozistic ethics, the conception of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and the "mystical" as what inspires the scientific attitude (pp. 122, 142); Hertz's elimination of the concept of "force" in physics was an inspiration for Wittgenstein's elimination of "classes", "probability", and the logical constants (p. 168); structured variables were central to Wittgenstein's Tractarian programme (p. 78); Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical analysis has important ties to Kuhn's concept of a paradigm (pp. 4, 130, 198). These are absolutely brilliant.

The third part of the book collects papers discussing Wittgenstein's thoughts on probability, the nature of empirical science, and reduction in the physical and social sciences. These papers address Wittgenstein's intellectual relationship with members of the Vienna Circle, highlighting Carnap and Waismann among others. Wittgenstein's reaction to Freudian psychoanalysis is discussed as well. This is a nice group of papers, some of which are translated into English for the first time. They do not include a discussion of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mathematics in the 1930s nor his reaction to the conventionalism that characterized the time. There is nothing on Wittgenstein's puzzling account of Gödel's famous results or on intuitionism. There are, however, interesting remarks concerning the extent to which Wittgenstein's post-Tractarian "middle period" preserves what was central to the Tractarian conception of philosophy.

The final part, called "Philologica", discusses the origins of the *Notes on*

Logic, the construction of the *Tractatus* from earlier typescripts and manuscripts, and comments on the composition of Wittgenstein's work in the 1930s. Always measured and careful in his approach to history, McGuinness avoids the indulgences and excesses that are all too often found in interpretations of Wittgenstein. There is a voluminous and growing secondary literature associating Wittgenstein's name with most every philosophical position. From the portrait that McGuinness paints, Wittgenstein would surely view this development with consternation. He severely scolded self-proclaimed disciples of his work. Wittgenstein didn't seem to want disciples, but demanded that his readers do as he did—think matters over for themselves.
