

Wittgenstein at His Word. By Duncan Richter. (London/New York: Continuum Press, 2004). vi + 197 pp. £60.00 cloth.

This ambitious book attempts to do just what is says on the tin; rather than offering an assessment for or against Wittgenstein's philosophy it sets out to 'say what Wittgenstein means' (p. 1). The author talks of 'settling' for interpretation, but is also aware of the enormous controversy between scholars over which readings or approaches are to be preferred. Richter hopes to navigate this treacherous terrain by sticking close to what Wittgenstein says about his methodology (hence taking him at his word) while at the same time attending to *how* his approach manifests itself, not only in what he wrote about it - but also what and how he wrote on various topics and - indeed - what he *did not* write on issues of philosophical and personal importance, such as ethics and religion.

Taking an interest in the whole of Wittgenstein's career, the book focuses on five issues, each with its own dedicated chapter - clarification, nonsense, certainty, ethics and religion. These topics are central to understanding Wittgenstein and his philosophizing during all of his so-identified distinct periods (early, middle, late and very late). Thus it is argued that Wittgenstein's primary goal was always that of seeking clarity in and for itself. His method throughout was therapeutic; designed to relieve his own 'philosophical' ailments. Concomitantly, his purpose in writing philosophy was to share the insights of his methodology with those, perhaps few others, who suffered similarly. His purpose was never to establish any theories or doctrines of his own - nor, according to Richter, to prove or disprove those of others.

In advocating this line, the book takes up a position somewhat slightly left of the centre. Although Richter has decided leanings towards the resolute readings (as most prominently promoted by Conant and Diamond), he also makes it clear that these are in need of some fine

tuning and, more than this, he recognizes that standard or orthodox readings ought not be *wholly* ignored; they too have something to offer.

There is much to admire about this book. It has an easy style and without doubt it addresses issues that anyone embarking on a study of Wittgenstein's work ought to get to grips with. Moreover, it discusses - in a very useful way - how we might begin to understand and put into perspective Wittgenstein's views on ethics and religion (and their importance to him). For those coming to Wittgenstein's work for the first time or for those aiming to quickly understand the contours of the current debate about how to read Wittgenstein, this will book is a very useful supplement. However, it places it lightness of touch much more would need to be said and in greater depth it order to establish some of its preferred readings - for example, Richter's claim that the *Tractatus* is ultimately to be understood in an ironic fashion. So, while the book makes a strong case for taking Wittgenstein at his word and gives an interesting view of what this means, it hardly supplies the final word.

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