

# *Wittgenstein Rehinged,* by Annalisa Coliva

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Annalisa Coliva, *Wittgenstein Rehinged*. London: Anthem Press, 2022, 175 pp.

The last twenty years or so have seen a surge of interest in Wittgenstein's last writings, especially the handful of manuscripts published posthumously under the title *On Certainty*. This has manifested itself in two ways: on the one hand, in an intensification of efforts to understand the exact import of Wittgenstein's often cryptic remarks; on the other, in a proliferation of philosophical projects that take their lead and inspiration from *On Certainty* – most notable among these, for its scope and the intensity with which it has been pursued, is the project of hinge epistemology.

Annalisa Coliva engages extensively in both exegesis and Wittgenstein-inspired theorising. Her contributions include two monographs as well as several papers, and *Wittgenstein Rehinged* is a selection of nine such articles, accompanied by a new introduction. Although all the articles in the collection have been previously published, about half the chapters contain additions from other papers, mostly designed to meet some of the objections that have been raised since the original publication.

In the extensive introduction, Coliva outlines in broad strokes her brand of hinge epistemology (dubbed the “Extended Rationality view”) and summarises the distinctive features of her interpretation of *On Certainty*. It is followed by two chapters that can be profitably read as opinionated introductions to the relevant literature.

Chapter One is devoted to examining the Wittgensteinian pedigree of some epistemological proposals. It scrutinises and critiques on textual grounds the attempts of Crispin Wright and (to a lesser extent) Michael Williams to develop Wittgenstein's suggestions into full-fledged epistemological theories. Coliva's own hinge epistemology is then presented as a more faithful development of the core insights in *On Certainty*.

In Chapter Two, Coliva turns to two other prominent hinge epistemologists, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and Duncan Pritchard. This time their proposals are assessed along both the exegetical and the substantive dimensions, although the focus is different in each case. Since Moyal-Sharrock strives for exegetical accuracy, Coliva's critique focuses on the

lack of robust textual support for some of Moyal-Sharrock's main claims. By contrast, since Pritchard's main objective is to develop a Wittgenstein-inspired but independently compelling epistemology, Coliva's objections target the "philosophical fruitfulness" (p. 28) of the resulting view. Her twofold conclusion: Coliva's interpretation of *On Certainty* is closer to the text than Moyal-Sharrock's, and her hinge epistemology is more promising than Pritchard's.

In Chapter Three, Coliva advances the claim that Wittgenstein was a contextualist of sorts. In her view, one of Wittgenstein's crucial contributions was to detect an ambiguity in the use of "I know", between an ordinary or "epistemic" use and a "grammatical" use. A third, illegitimate use emerges when philosophers combine features of the two genuine uses, which leads them to produce nonsense: Moore's (in)famous proof of an external world is an example of such deviant "philosophical" use. Wittgenstein's *sui generis* contextualism is then contrasted with other contemporary views that go by the same name.

In Chapter Four, Coliva clarifies and defends her "Extended Rationality view". The problem concerns her moderate account of perceptual justification, according to which a necessary condition for a belief to be perceptually justified is that some hinge proposition is "assumed". The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the nature of such "assumptions" and to defend the moderate account

against several objections in the literature.

The larger part of Chapter Five is devoted to the question whether Wittgenstein included some mathematical statements among the hinge propositions in *On Certainty*. On the basis of textual considerations, Coliva answers this question in the negative, before asking whether a "hinge philosophy of mathematics" is nevertheless possible and offering a sketch of what it would look like.

Like the fourth chapter, Chapter Six again focuses on the specifics of Coliva's hinge epistemology. Here she investigates the "metaphysical status of hinges", prompted by the question: in what sense can hinge propositions be said to be *true*? Coliva adopts a conception of truth which she calls "minimalism". The contours of this view are mostly drawn in a negative way, by contrasting it with a "correspondentist" and an "evidence-based" conception of the truth of hinges, both of which Coliva rejects. But when it comes to specifying the positive content of her view, Coliva's explanations are not entirely satisfactory. In fact, some remarks seem to pull in opposite directions. For instance, she claims that minimalism can reasonably be called anti-realist, for it "denies that hinges are true because they correspond to a mind-independent reality". This sounds like a substantive statement about the "metaphysical status" of hinge propositions. A few lines later, however, Coliva suggests that "minimalism would pair well with a form of quietism about the metaphysical

status of hinges” (p. 108). In general, the minimalism that Coliva advocates is quite difficult to pin down, and thus difficult to evaluate.

The next two chapters both revolve around the problem of relativism. In the short Chapter Seven, Coliva distinguishes two versions of epistemic relativism and argues that *On Certainty* does not, on the whole, support either kind. She then argues that contemporary hinge epistemology, insofar it is committed to the universality of hinges, is not hospitable to epistemic relativism either.

In Chapter Eight, the focus is eminently exegetical: here Coliva engages at length with the much-debated issue of Wittgenstein’s alleged epistemic relativism. She defends the claim that the anti-foundationalism of *On Certainty*, with its insistence on the groundlessness of our epistemic system, does not entail a form of relativism, because it does not entail that alternative epistemic systems are conceivable.

In the closing chapter, an examination of Wittgenstein’s “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” provides Coliva with an opportunity to survey Wittgenstein’s forays into a variety of topics, from the methods of anthropology to the nature of philosophical explanation, to the salient features of the society and culture of his time.

What emerges is a picture of Wittgenstein as a “philosopher of culture” (p. 163), interested in the methodological problems inherent in the study of distant cultures as well as in the critique of his own, as evidenced by his attack on the scientism prevalent in his time.

One cannot but wholeheartedly endorse the methodological principle that Coliva emphasises throughout the book: that in engaging with a philosopher’s work, one should always make clear whether one is doing exegesis or substantive philosophical work loosely inspired by the texts. (This principle is arguably rather platitudinous: nevertheless, especially in relation to *On Certainty*, it has been violated a disquieting number of times.) And it is a commendable feature of Coliva’s work that she never strays away from this principle. Moreover, although her interpretation of Wittgenstein is occasionally open to doubt and her positive epistemological proposals are sometimes questionable, her arguments in both cases are usually well thought out. For these reasons, and for the breadth of topics that it covers, this volume should be warmly welcomed by practitioners of epistemology and Wittgenstein aficionados alike.

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