

# Wittgenstein's Way of Working and the Nature of Experience

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I

The *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* is the most representative text of Wittgenstein's "earlier" philosophy. It is a *sui generis* book, mainly on account of its formal structure. The sources of this work in the *Nachlass* are Tss202-204 as final versions of the *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*. These typescripts derive from Ms104, the so-called *Prototractatus*, which was worked out from remarks registered in Mss101-103, namely the ones edited in *Notebooks 1914-1916*. Some of those reflections were originally formulated in Ts201 and in Ms301.

From among the mentioned items the diaries hold a position of high standing. In fact, they set up as the starting place for Wittgensteinian *style* of investigation. To begin with, it is remarkable, in these manuscripts, the division between a "philosophical" part and a "private" one, the former using the recto pages in normal script and the latter the verso pages in code. It must be noted that in post-1929 writings we often find coded remarks, not only in notebooks but also in "volumes" (*Bände*), and now and then regarding "philosophical" statements. Moreover, reading throughout the texts, that is in standard and "secret" script, we can follow a parallel line of thought. Therefore, the status of Wittgenstein's cipher is problematic, much more than it seems to be. However, the most important issue in the First World War diaries concerns the quest for an appropriate *expressiveness* about the nature of proposition. What is at stake in Wittgenstein's approach to this *foundational* question is the insight that we are only able to say something *from inside*. As a matter of fact, any characterization of natural language implies the use of that *system*, *i.e.* it presupposes an *integral calculus*. Thus, the conditions of possibility *show* themselves, as Wittgenstein argues, so that whatever *description* of experience we may establish is necessarily incomplete. But this partial character of what we can grasp of reality cannot present itself as a *theory*, precisely as something *determined*; it must be *mirrored*, consequently not referred to in *language*. The following entries on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1915, are elucidative:

But is *language*: the *only* language?

Why should there not be a mode of expression through which I can talk *about* language in such a way that it can appear to me in co-ordination with something else?

Suppose that music were such a mode of expression: then it is at any rate characteristic of *science* that *no* musical themes can occur in it.

I myself only write *sentences* [Sätze] down here. And why? (Ms102, 111r-112r: NB, 52e)

The *Tractatus* corresponds, exactly, to a *determination* of that perspective. By means of an unusual framework, Wittgenstein traces the limits of a *logical* systematization, displaying the sphere of what is left out. This field includes all *existential* categories that take part in any event, shaping it. For that reason, science, while devoted to factual investigations, does not shed light on the crucial, interpreted as nonsensical: what cannot be put into words, what *makes itself manifest*, what is mystical (cf. TLP, 6.522). Wittgenstein's aim is to circumscribe the task of philosophy, setting up "what can be said, *i.e.* the propo-

sitions of natural science, *i.e.* something that has nothing to do with philosophy" (TLP, 6.53). He writes afterwards:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless [*unsinnig*], when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. (TLP, 6.54)

And he concludes:

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. (TLP, 7; cf. also the "Preface")

How to avoid *nonsense* philosophizing? Obviously Wittgenstein spoke too much, but his metaphysics proves *indirectly* the insufficiency of any *theory of meaning*. In other words: the "treatise" explodes. This attempt to be so *clear as possible* in relation to the book *thesis* represents Wittgenstein's ethical view, which is outlined in the famous letter to von Ficker, probably from end of October / beginning of November 1919, submitting the text to *Der Brenner*:

[...] the point of the book is ethical. I once wanted to give a few words in the foreword which now actually are not in it, which, however, I'll write to you now because they might be a key for you: I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book; and I'm convinced that, *strictly* speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which *many* are *babbling* today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it. [...] For the time being, I'd recommend that you read the *foreword* and the *conclusion* since these express the point most directly.— [...] (LLF, 94-95)

II

After his return to Cambridge in January 1929 Wittgenstein began to write on Ms105, the first of a series of "volumes". From Mss105-107 and part of Ms108 he produced a synopsis, Ts208, which gave rise to Ts209, a revised version composed of a collection of "cuttings" (*Zettel*), published in *Philosophical Remarks*. Wittgenstein presented one of these typescripts (on the problem whether it was Ts208 or Ts209 see Pichler 1994, 53-59) to the Council of Trinity College, applying for a research fellowship in the spring of 1930. In an undated letter to Moore (March or April 1930) he describes the dictation of the synopsis as "the most loathsome work", feeling himself "wretched doing it" (CL, 241). Wittgenstein adopted this practice notwithstanding (and cf. Ms109, 51: 27.8.1930). He summarizes the remainder of Ms108 in Ts210, dictating Ts211 from Mss109-113 and the first half of Ms114. Some of the material contained in Mss110-113 had been drafted in pocket notebooks, Mss153-155. The second cutting-collection, Ts212, derives from Ts208 and Ts210-211: it is the basis for Ts213, the so-called "Big Typescript" (1933).

Wittgenstein was planning out a book, from at least the end of 1930. From the 6<sup>th</sup> of November on, he made several sketches for a foreword (cf. Ms109, 204ff). The “Foreword” to Rhees’ edition of Ts209 is an arrangement of those drafts. They constitute the genesis of a new book concept, an *extension* to the *Tractarian* achievement. A preparatory remark reads as follows:

The danger in a long foreword is that the spirit of a book has to be evident in the book itself & cannot be described. [...] (Ms109, 208: CV, 10e)

And on December 13<sup>th</sup> Wittgenstein says:

If I do not quite know how to begin a book that is because something is still unclear. For I should like to begin with the original data of philosophy, written & spoken sentences, with books as it were.

And here we encounter the difficulty of “Everything is in flux”. And perhaps that is the very point at which to begin. (Ms110, 10: CV, 11e)

If we take into consideration previous comments on the *fluxional givenness*, from December 1929 (cf. Ms107, 222ff, Ms108, 1ff), the similarities with the *Tractatus* arise. But the development of Wittgenstein’s thought requires another *medium*, susceptible to *project* our form of access in a quasi-organic way. An accurate *description* passes to fall upon the operative factors of any situation, identifying, *partially*, that background (cf. Ms110, 243: 30.6.1931). Once more, the essential point is to *express* the impossibility of a whole comprehension. This does not mean a sceptical position (then, a negative dogmatism), but a claim of finitude. Each empirical plan is a *horizontal* unit, merely allowing *intersections* in the *totalitarian* effect. The *analysability* of our point of view is *aphaeretic*, in so far as we need to *isolate* aspects, suspending (*in abstracto*) all the rest. Accordingly, Wittgenstein defends a *synoptic* model, fitting the (*in*)*determinable* nature of experience.

The “Big Typescript” plays a prominent role in that undertaking. Being divided into 19 “chapters” and 140 “sections”, each of them bearing titles, it cannot be regarded yet as a conventional book. Besides the fact that it does not contain neither introduction nor conclusion, the relation between the subjects is discontinuous. Although Wittgenstein’s “Table of Contents” indicates a thematic sequence, the *fragmentary* outcome is notorious. Nevertheless, it is a specific *fragmentation*; it works as a *synopsis*.

In the “chapter” on “Philosophy” Wittgenstein states that the “method of philosophy” is “the synoptic presentation” (*die übersichtliche Darstellung*) (Ts213, 414 [P, 9]) (on this concept see Pichler 2004, 175-198). Ambrose’s opening notes of the “Yellow Book” (Ts311: 1933-34) run as follows:

There is a truth in Schopenhauer’s view that philosophy is an organism, and that a book on philosophy, with a beginning and end, is a sort of contradiction. One difficulty with philosophy is that we lack a synoptic view. [...] (YB, 43)

The goal of the “Big Typescript” is to afford *openness*, in such a manner that every *fragment* can blend into a whole, enabling to “present synoptically” (*übersichtlich darstellen*) a maximum of grammatical connections. (Cf. Ms108, 31: 23.12.1929; Ms110, 257: 2.7.1931; cf. also e.g. Ts209, 1 [PR, 52]; Ts213, 417 [P, 11]; as well as Tss227ab, 88, §122 [PI, §122], where the first sentence is to be found in Ms142, 107, §115.) Hence, the idea of philosophy, inclusively, is presented in this way. Roughly speaking,

what Wittgenstein contends against is nothing but a philosophical methodology *theoretically* based.

Nonetheless, the “Big Typescript” did not answer Wittgenstein’s purposes entirely. He revised extensively its first part (*i.e.* the primary source for Part I of the *Philosophical Grammar*) in the typescript itself, correcting, reordering, crossing out and inserting text, using both the recto and the verso pages. This reworking proceeded in the second half of Ms114 and in the first half of Ms115, via Mss156a-b and Mss145-147, and subsequently in Ms140. In a controversial edition, which leaves out, among others, the chapters on “Philosophy” and “Phenomenology”, so unrevised as all Part II of the *Grammar*, Rhees tried to follow Wittgenstein’s puzzling editorial instructions.

In the course of 1934, while dictating the “Blue Book” (Ts309: 1933-34), Wittgenstein apparently gave up from such a revision. The “Brown Book” (Ts310: 1934-35), along with Mss148-152 and the first part of Ms157a, covering the years 1934-36, will bring a turning point. Wittgenstein’s unsuccessful attempt to revise in German the “Brown Book” in the second half of Ms115 (cf. Ms115, 292), as well as in Ms141, leads to a new reworking in Ms142 (November-December 1936): the manuscript source of the so-called “prewar version” (first half) of the *Philosophical Investigations* (corresponding to §§1-188). The typescript of that first half, Ts220, was presumably dictated in 1937.

Even retrieving remarks of the early “volumes”, Wittgenstein surpasses in Ms142/Ts220 the *static integrality* of Ts213, which results from its *division*, carrying through a *serial* organization. This (finite) *seriation* permits, on the one hand, to conceive a *multiplicity* of phenomena in flux and, on the other hand, to realize the *possibility* of *infinite deconstruction*. Defined as “a ‘dynamical’ theory of the proposition, etc.”, in spite of this, “it does not appear like a theory” but as an *evidence*, the “form of presentation” (*Form der Darstellung*) Wittgenstein has “found” shall be understood according to his notion of “idea” or “ideal”: a *prototypification* of experience. (Ms142, 99, §105; Ts220, 74, §93: Ts226, 71-72, §113; and cf. e.g. Ts233b, 16-17, §109 [from Ts239, 74] [Z, §444]; cf. in addition Ms142, 77-91; Ms157a, especially, 55v-57v.)

In Wittgenstein’s “Preface” to the “prewar version” of the *Investigations*, dated “August 1938”, linking up Ts220 with Ts221 (whose reworked cuttings, Tss222-224, have been published in Part I of the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*), the whole first half is designated as a “fragment”. And Wittgenstein stresses that “this fragment” makes clear his “method”. (Ts225, 2; cf. drafts in Ms117, 110-126, Ms159, 34r-41r; cf. also the very similar “Preface” to Tss227ab, 1-4: PI, vii-viii; and see the interpretation of Nedo, 1998, xv-xviii.) The second half was not included in further versions of the *Investigations*, whereas the first half is on its basis. Wittgenstein’s book project is a “fragment”, indeed: of his view that philosophy is a “fragment” of experience.<sup>1</sup>

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