

# A Note on the History of F. A. von Hayek's Unpublished 'Sketch of a Biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein'

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Friedrich August von Hayek (1899–1992) is best known for his achievements in economics and theory of money which were awarded with the Nobel Prize in 1974. It is less well known that v Hayek was also a cousin once removed of Ludwig Wittgenstein and that he prepared an extensive biographical essay on his distant relative. This essay has not been available for investigation nor has it been described in detail, although McGuinness (1988) refers to it as well as to related correspondence (see also v Wright, 1982) and some anecdotes that it contains have been briefly reviewed (Bayne, 2010). The von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives in Helsinki (WWA, Wallgren and Österman, 2010) keeps three drafts of v Hayek's essay together with correspondence related to its history (table 1). These documents tell a short story of Hayek's envisaged biography and shed light on its sources as well as on the reasons for its eventual abandonment.

It is not a close personal relationship with Wittgenstein that forms the basis of v Hayek's sketch. Indeed they met only a couple of times over the course of 30 years and it does not seem that the conversations between them were particularly serious, be it on philosophy, politics, economics or art (Hayek, 1977). Nevertheless, the encounter with Wittgenstein must have made great impression on v Hayek. In a later publication he remembers that he was first and foremost struck by Wittgenstein's "radical passion for truthfulness" (Hayek, 1992, p.177). Although not the main source of his biographical essay, v Hayek's personal acquaintance with Wittgenstein might therefore well be seen as the spring for the motivation to write a factual account of Wittgenstein's life.

V Hayek structures the writing process of the biographical account in several steps. He starts by gathering recollections and other biographical material from Wittgenstein's friends and colleagues to form an empirical basis for his biography. In a second step he wants to merge the obtained facts and memories into a summarizing document. This document shall, thirdly, be sent out again to friends and colleagues of Wittgenstein to ask for further corrections and remarks.[4] In accordance to this plan v Hayek writes around beginning of 1953 to a great number of possible informants telling his intentions and asking for support.

First responses to v Hayek's enquiries are positive and indeed supporting. Russell, for example, permits on his part the use a full transcript of his correspondence with Wittgenstein [9]; Engelmann provides long recollections of his encounters and sends later samples of handwriting in postcard and letter as well as photographs.[27-29] Not least Ludwig Hänsel is most informative. Apart from his personal recollections he provides further addresses and valuable documents such as Wittgenstein's dictionary, reports on Wittgenstein in his time as teacher, letters from Keynes, Ramsey and Schlick and a curriculum vitae written by Koder and Margarete Stonborough and himself.[19-26,35]

V Hayek learns from his investigations that Georg Henrik von Wright collects material for a biographical ac-

count on Wittgenstein, too.[4,19] In order to find out whether he is undertaking work that has already been done he writes to v Wright.[4] Like the others, v Wright initially reacts positive towards v Hayek's project. He affirms that it would be of great value, if v Hayek could write a short biography providing a correct account and reliable facts about main events in Wittgenstein's life, his character and his views. He also explicates that his own work on a biographical sketch would not render v Hayek's undertaking in any way superfluous.[5]

From this first supportive letter a regular exchange between the v Hayek and v Wright expands during the first half of 1953. In early Mai v Wright sends his then still unpublished biographical sketch to v Hayek who uses it to improve his own sketch.[8,9] And by the end of Mai v Hayek sends in return a first fragment of his sketch, which is then extensively corrected and annotated by v Wright.[1,9]

All in all, v Hayek's project starts very promising. Within a short period of time contact is established with many who knew Wittgenstein in different periods of his lifetime, and the inquiries show a dynamic growth. After only half a year a draft has already been produced covering Wittgenstein's life up to the year 1929. – But already in March 1953 v Hayek has received a letter that communicates a first hint of objection.

On 8<sup>th</sup> March Hänsel writes that he read v Hayek's draft together with Wittgenstein's sister Margaret Stonborough.[20] Indeed v Hayek had also written an enquiry to her. When he had not received answer, he had attributed it to her health.[5,6] But now it rather seems that her reluctance to v Hayek's overall intentions had caused first her silence and then, after having seen a first draft of the essay, an increasing activity to express her averseness. According to Hänsel Mrs. Stonborough was convinced that it is impossible to characterize her brother adequately in the way v Hayek tried to do.[20] In a letter to v Wright she makes clear that she is against any biographical sketch of Wittgenstein written by somebody who did not know him. Anyone who would attempt such a biography would lack seriousness and seriousness it is what Wittgenstein's biography would demand.[31]

Mrs. Stonborough now also answers v Hayek directly. She expresses that she as well as her sister object to Hayek's ambition on the whole. In her opinion Wittgenstein himself would have been angry about it would have done anything to prevent it. The reverence for this attitude would demand silence.[32]

In a reply v Hayek tries to appease Mrs. Stonborough, but he also makes her understand that he will go on writing in any case. Perhaps it was this fact that made her raising the matter again in a letter to v Wright. Roughly one month after mentioning her objection for the first time, she now underlines how deeply she feels about the project and how much she is against it.[32] Simultaneously, v Hayek receives a letter from Hänsel that too contains a message concerning Mrs. Stonborough's sorrows: Hänsel suggests a distanced description in the essay and with little details

from Wittgenstein's personal life; and he asks for permission to pass everything to Wittgenstein's sister before it is published.[22]

At the latest with this letter from Hänsel v Hayek must have been troubled. He now informs on his part v Wright about the affair and spells out his arguments for reassuring Mrs. Stonborough. He explains that he understands her attitude and it is therefore that he wants to collect the empirical material before publishing anything.[10] Perhaps this letter is meant to motivate v Wright to mediate in the case. But v Wright's immediate response to the indirect proposal is either silence, or not documented. The material at WWA shows that the intensity of correspondence between him and v Hayek reduces from now on and that v Wright's letters become more formal in their tone of voice.[11,13] There seems to be not any letter to v Hayek in which he explicitly takes up the conflict between Mrs. Stonborough's demand for silence and the ambition of a biographical account.

Finally, the case is decided in October 1953. In his letter from 13<sup>th</sup> October v. Wright informs v Hayek that the literary executors do not wish to permit extensive quotations from the correspondence with Russell before it is published.[13] Since Hayek's sketch rests fundamentally on quotations from this correspondence publication is thereby impossible for the time being. V Hayek does not seem to give up hoping to resume the biography. However, he sends a second draft including v Wright's first corrections together with a large amount of biographical material to v Wright. He additionally explains that he has no ambitions to compete and that he would be glad to turn over his material if the end would be best served by this.[14] V. Wright seems to be very thankful for the valuable documents and makes further corrections on v Hayek's second draft; although not as many as the first time.[2]

The denial of the permission to use Russell's correspondence is indeed the end of the v Hayek's biography. In 1954 v Wright publishes his biographical sketch which Mrs. Stonborough appreciated very much.[33] Six years later, when Russell's correspondence is still not published, v Hayek finally summarizes what he had written so far and hands it over to Thomas Stonborough together with other biographical material.[3,36] This third draft of the sketch from November 1959 is received by v Wright in 1967, around the time when he started the Wittgenstein Archives.[3] Another ten years later v Hayek publishes his personal recollections on Wittgenstein in a short impressionistic note (Hayek, 1977), a way of expressing remembrance that also Mrs. Stonborough welcomed.[20,33]

This brief episode in the history of caring about Wittgenstein's legacy is not only a historical anecdote; the example can also be viewed in its philosophical or, more precisely, ethical significance. For it is, regarding each actor involved, a story on how to use words with seriousness, sensitivity, integrity. At the bottom of this story of not publishing lays therefore the consideration of what shall and shall not be said, in this case concerning the writing of biographies (cf. McGuinness, 1988, p. xi). In this respect a comparison of a) the primary recollections that v Hayek obtained, b) his unpublished biographical essay and c) v Wright's published sketch would be of high interest. It might show differences between first hand accounts and different ways of abstracting from them when writing more objective reports. Last but not least it would give an indication not only about what v Wright wrote in his biographical sketch, but also whereof he was silent.

Table 1: Documents related to "An unfinished draft of a sketch of a biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein" kept at WWA

No.	Item	Date	Attachments	Pages	
[1]	H1	Fragment of a draft of a biography of LW, without title, carbon typescript	until mai 1953	12 *	
[2]	H2	"Ludwig Wittgenstein", carbon typescript	until october 1953	2 pages carbon typescripts of insertions by vHayek, 1 page comments	31
[3]	H3	"Unfinished draft of a sketch of a biography of Ludwig Wittgenstein" (copy of ) typescript	November 1959		45

*Related correspondence*

No.	Item	Date	Attachments	Pages	
[4]	H-W-1	typescript	1-28-1953	1	
[5]	W-H-1	2 carbon typescripts	2-22-1953	2	
[6]	H-W-2	typescript	2-27-1953	1	
[7]	W-H-2	carbon typescript	3-9-1953	2	
[8]	W-H-3	carbon typescript	5-7-1953	v. Wright's biographical sketch in swedish	1
[9]	H-W-3	typescript	5-30-1953	H1, 1 page comments on v Wright's biographical sketch	2
[10]	H-W-4	handwritten letter	7-2-1953		2
[11]	W-H-4	carbon typescript	7-31-1953		2
[12]	H-W-5	handwritten letter	8-12-1953		1
[13]	W-H-5	carbon typescript	10-13-1953		1
[14]	H-W-6	typescript	10-17-1953	H2, 3 copies of photos (by additional post: copies from Wittgenstein's letters form Ramsey, Keynes and Schlick, dictation to Moore; extracts from Pinsent's diary)	1
[15]	W-H-6	carbon typescript	11-7-1953		1
[16]	W-H-7	carbon typescript	12-9-1953		1
[17]	H-W-7	typescript	12-15-1953		1
[18]	W-H-8	carbon typescript	12-29-1953		1
[19]	Hä-H-1	copy of letter (+ handwritten duplicate)	1-28-1953	3 pages Wittgenstein's curriculum vitae	3
[20]	Hä-H-2	copy of letter	3-8-1953		2
[21]	Hä-H-3	copy of letter	5-16-1953		1*
[22]	Hä-H-4	copy of letter	6-25-1953	W.'s correspondence with Ramsey and Keynes (11 items); Schlick (5 items)	2
[23]	Hä-H-5	copy of letter	7-5-1953		2
[24]	Hä-H-6	copy of letter	7-7-1953	"Wörterbuch" by Wittgenstein, corrections, correspondence and contract with publisher	2
[25]	Hä-H-7	copy of letter	7-20-1953	4 pages recollection of J. Putre	2
[26]	Hä-H-8	copy of letter (+ 1page handwritten duplicate)	9-19-1953		1
[27]	E-H-4	copy of letter	6-12-1953		3
[28]	E-H-3	copy of letter	4-23-1953	Feldpostkarte, Brief by Wittgenstein	3
[29]	E-H-2	copy of letter	3-8-1953		5
[30]	E-H-1	copy of letter	2-16-1953		3
[31]	S-W-1	handwritten letter	5-1-1953		4
[32]	S-W-2	handwritten letter	6-12-1953	1 page duplicate of a letter to v. Hayek 1 page beginning of a letter to vWright	4
[33]	S-W-3	handwritten letter	11-30-1953		3
[34]	F-H-1	copy of letter (and handwritten duplicate)	12-4-1953		2
[35]	Suppl. 1	Reports on Wittgensteins as teacher, photocopies of typescript	5-7-1953, 3-27-1953, 3-22-1953, 4-17-1953	4 pages by J.Putre, 1 page by M. Scherleitner, 1 page by N. Rosner, 2 pages by G. Berger	9
[36]	Suppl. 2	fotocopy of typescript	November 1959	List of items sent from F.A.v.Hayek to T. Stonborough,	1

H = F.A. v Hayek, W = G. H. v. Wright, Hä = L. Hänsel, F = L. Ficker, E = P. Engelmann, S = M. Stonborough, Suppl. = supplementary item, \* = incomplete item

*F.A. v. Hayek's drafts*

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