

## *Introduction: Wittgenstein between the Tractatus and the Investigations*

DAVID G. STERN

### 1. The “Middle Wittgenstein”

The aim of this collection of 15 previously unpublished essays is not only to provide a wide range of fresh perspectives on Wittgenstein’s philosophical writing and teaching during his so-called “middle period” (roughly 1929–1936), but also to make the case for its interest and importance for our understanding of his philosophy as a whole. The exact dating of this stage of his work is itself debatable, precisely because it is understood as picking out the years after he began to rework his early philosophy, as set out in the *Tractatus*, and before he had arrived at the definitive formulation of his later philosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations*. For present purposes, we can regard it as beginning with Wittgenstein’s return to Cambridge, and full-time philosophical writing, in early 1929, and ending in late 1936, when he drafted an early version of the *Investigations*.

Contributors to this collection include representatives of a number of very different approaches to Wittgenstein interpretation, address a wide range of themes and topics, and often make strong claims that are challengingly incompatible with the views of other contributors. Nevertheless, they generally agree that the old schematic interpretations on which those years were a time of “disintegration and reconstruction”<sup>1</sup> in Wittgenstein’s philosophical development are misleadingly simple, and that the truth is not only much more messy and complicated, but also much more interesting. At first, these years were approached as little more than a period of transition between Wittgenstein’s early and later work, and the focus of discussion was usually the single “fixed

<sup>1</sup> The title of chapter 5 of Hacker 1986 (and chapter 4 of the first edition of that book).

point” or “pivot” on which the entire movement from the earlier to the later philosophy supposedly turned.<sup>2</sup> More recently, as previously unpublished material has become more readily available, there has been a growing recognition that the path from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* was a long and complicated one, with many turning points and branching paths along the way.

Over 40 years after scholars began to give serious attention to this stage of Wittgenstein’s career, the notion of the “Middle Wittgenstein” has become well established. But his work during those years remains much less well understood, or widely appreciated, than his earlier and later philosophy. We are still at a relatively early stage in identifying the principal features of Wittgenstein’s work during these years, and relating them to the main lines of his early and late masterpieces, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. In large part, this is because the 1930s were a period of rapid change for Wittgenstein. As a result, none of the publications from those years, each put into final form after his death, has the settled and polished character of a fully finished work. The middle Wittgenstein did not create a masterpiece comparable to the *Tractatus* or *Investigations* that can serve as a point of reference.

In view of this lack of agreement on such basic matters as to what to count as Wittgenstein’s principal work or works during these years, let alone a settled frame within which to map out the lay of the land, the principal purpose of this introduction is to place the discussion in *Wittgenstein in the 1930s* against the backdrop of previous work on the topic. Section 2 provides a brief outline of Wittgenstein’s teaching and writing during these years, and their relationship to the posthumously published selections from his papers that are usually relied on as the basis for interpreting his philosophical work during those years. Section 3 outlines some of the principal interpretative approaches to Wittgenstein’s philosophical evolution, and asks why so much discussion of the “Middle Wittgenstein” has focused on the nature of his relationship to his earlier and his later selves. Section 4 challenges the view, first put forward by Wittgenstein himself, that he was a solitary thinker, reviewing some of the wide range of writers that he quoted or discussed during these years. Finally, Section 5, an introduction to the individual chapters, includes a short summary of each one, with

<sup>2</sup> PI, §108.

particular attention to the areas where the collection as a whole makes a distinctive contribution to our understanding of Wittgenstein in the 1930s.

## 2. Wittgenstein's Teaching and Writing in the 1930s

When Wittgenstein moved to Cambridge in January 1929, he was returning to the place where – over 15 years before – he had studied under Bertrand Russell, engaged in discussions with G. E. Moore, and begun to develop his early philosophy. Returning to Cambridge and reengaging in philosophical activities marked a significant new phase in his philosophical career. The manuscripts from 1929 record his first steps away from the *Tractatus*; by the end of 1936, he had written an early version of the *Philosophical Investigations*, although the book did not take on its final form until the mid-1940s.

Upon returning to Cambridge, Wittgenstein received a research position at Trinity College and immediately began to draft new philosophical work. On February 2, 1929, Wittgenstein began writing – in the first of a series of large, hard-bound manuscript volumes – a sequential record of selected work in progress, often culled from smaller first-draft notebooks.<sup>3</sup> In January 1930 he also began to give lectures, in which he further developed the themes of his ongoing research. From 1929 to 1936, he usually spent half the year in Cambridge and most of the rest of the time in Vienna. In addition to writing, revising, and rearranging the many thousands of pages of manuscripts and typescripts from these years that make up a large part of his *Nachlass*, and his collaboration with Waismann while in Vienna,<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein also devoted a great deal of time and energy to his teaching in Cambridge. Thanks to

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the detailed indexes to the *Philosophical Remarks* and *The Big Typescript* in the Vienna edition of Wittgenstein's writing from this period, it is very easy to date each of the remarks in those books and track any given remark's context in the source manuscripts. All of this material is available in *Wittgenstein's Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition* (Wittgenstein 2000) and the online edition *Wittgenstein Source Bergen Nachlass Edition* (<http://wittgensteinsource.org>). Much of it has also been published in the Vienna edition of Wittgenstein's writing from the early 1930s (Wittgenstein 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Waismann's notes of their meetings, the manuscripts based on his work with Wittgenstein, and the book that he ultimately wrote based on this collaboration provide us with a detailed record of various stages of their relationship. See Waismann 1967, 1997, VW. Baker 1979 is an informative introduction to their relationship.

Moore, who attended his lectures from January 1930 to May 1933, we have an almost verbatim record of what Wittgenstein said in those classes.<sup>5</sup>

The following term, Wittgenstein decided that his class had become too large and instead began to dictate what we now know as *The Blue Book* (1933–1934) and then *The Brown Book* (1934–1935) to a small group of students; this material then served as the basis for discussion with the class as a whole. One member of this group was Francis Skinner, a close friend of Wittgenstein's who was a graduate fellow in mathematics at Trinity from 1933 to 1936. Skinner took many other lecture notes in the mid-1930s, and the two of them worked on revising and rearranging those notes into more polished texts. In 1935–1936, they studied Russian together and talked of moving to the USSR. Skinner died of polio in 1941, with Wittgenstein by his side. Shortly afterward, he gave Skinner's lecture notes and related manuscripts—the “Skinner Archive”—to a mutual friend, Reuben Goodstein, who kept it secret. The Archive was rediscovered in 2000, during a valuation of the Mathematical Association's materials stored at the University of Leicester, and it is currently held on loan at the Wren Library, Trinity College, where work is in progress on an edition of these materials.<sup>6</sup> An edition of extensive notes taken by Smythies at Wittgenstein's lectures in the late 1930s and early 1940s is now also available.<sup>7</sup> Once Skinner's notes are published, we will have a remarkably detailed record of Wittgenstein's teaching in English throughout the 1930s.

Wittgenstein's manuscript volumes played a number of different roles in his philosophical writing. First of all, they served as a diary-like record of new work. Later on, he used the manuscript volumes to rewrite, rearrange, or criticize his own earlier work. The manuscript

<sup>5</sup> For Moore's analysis and summary of those lectures, see MWL. For Moore's original lectures notes, see M. As almost all of Wittgenstein's manuscript volume entries from these years and Moore's lectures notes can be precisely dated, it is possible systematically to compare and draw connections between the topics that he covered in his lectures and what he said about them, and what he wrote at the time. A number of the papers in this collection use this information to explore the multifaceted relationship between Wittgenstein's writing and teaching. See notes 41 and 42 on page 16 for references to examples.

<sup>6</sup> They include a draft of a continuation of *The Brown Book* on topics in the philosophy of mind, and other previously unknown lecture notes and polished manuscripts. See Gibson 2010.

<sup>7</sup> WWCL.

volumes also served as a source from which he would select remarks that he would dictate to a typist, thus yielding several carbon copies of a chronologically ordered typescript, one of which could then be cut up, rearranged and retyped to produce a topically organized draft. Wittgenstein's principal posthumous publications from the early 1930s, the *Philosophical Remarks*, *The Big Typescript*, and *Philosophical Grammar*, were constructed by selecting, and then rearranging and revising, material taken from his manuscript volumes.<sup>8</sup>

The *Philosophical Remarks*, typed up in the spring of 1930, and assembled in its final order later that year, is the first synoptic collection and arrangement of material that Wittgenstein made from his manuscript volumes during the 1930s. It is likely that the initial typescript (TS 208), in which the remarks are arranged in the order they were composed, was only produced in order to provide Russell with material that he could consult in order to write a report on Wittgenstein's progress, and put in its published order as part of his application for the Trinity fellowship he held during 1931 to 1936. However, it does provide a convenient review of the work that Wittgenstein had done during the first year or so of post-*Tractatus* writing. One can trace a path that leads from the opening chapters of the *Philosophical Remarks*, via the treatment of those topics in *The Big Typescript*, *The Blue Book* and *The Brown Book*, leading up to the material we now know as the Early, Intermediate, and Late versions of the *Philosophical Investigations*, dating from the late 1930s, early 1940s, and mid 1940s respectively.<sup>9</sup>

While one can argue about the extent, and significance, of the similarities and dissimilarities between any two of these items, there can be no doubt that the *Philosophical Remarks* addresses many of the themes that would preoccupy Wittgenstein throughout the following decade. In retrospect, we can see it as a very early stage in a process of revision and rearrangement that would ultimately result in the production of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Yet, at the same time, there is an enormous distance that separates the two texts. Part of the difficulty in assessing the nature of this distance is that the *Philosophical*

<sup>8</sup> They also involve a substantial editorial contribution. For further discussion of how Wittgenstein's editors have shaped perceptions of his writing, and the construction of the books published under his name after his death, see Kenny 1976 and 2005, Hintikka 1991, and Stern 1996.

<sup>9</sup> See Wittgenstein 2001.

*Remarks*, like *The Big Typescript*, is a transitional collection of writing from Wittgenstein's manuscripts, in which a wide variety of ideas are explored in a highly provisional way. Seen in hindsight, it is easy for us to read it as setting out a much more worked out and coherent position than the text in question actually supports, for we can hardly help reading it as anticipating, or outlining, positions that have since become familiar. It is only too easy to read those books as early versions of the familiar positions that are usually attributed to the *Philosophical Investigations*. For this reason, we need to interpret these writings not only by means of the standard philosophical strategy of identifying the first formulation of views we recognize from the later work, but also by identifying the conflicting and often contradictory impulses at work in Wittgenstein's writing from the 1930s.

### 3. Debates over the “Middle Wittgenstein”

The great majority of the books and articles that have been written on the middle Wittgenstein take one side or another in a series of running debates over the relative importance of the many new themes that emerged during those years, with a particular focus on identifying certain turning points, such as the transition from the early to the later philosophy, or alternatively, the beginning and end of the middle period. However, in retrospect, the substance of those disagreements is much less significant than the fact that there was widespread, if tacit, agreement that interpreting the “Middle Wittgenstein” was a matter of giving an account of the *development* of his philosophy during those years.<sup>10</sup> Talking of the “Middle Wittgenstein,” or of the development of his philosophy, may seem like a neutral way of describing this stage of his career. However, those very expressions lend themselves to thinking of Wittgenstein's writing and teaching during those years as structured in a certain way, as developing *from* a starting point *to* an end point, *from* the early philosophy *to* the later philosophy, or *from* the *Tractatus* *to* the *Philosophical Investigations*. The work done in between, whether in his manuscript volumes, or the various collections of remarks assembled in other manuscripts or typescripts, or in his

<sup>10</sup> Leading examples include Hacker 1972, Kenny 1973, Hintikka and Hintikka 1986, Nyíri 1986 and 1992, Hilmy 1987, Pears 1987 and 1988, Monk 1990, Rothhaupt 1996, Sedmak 1996, and Kienzler 1997.

lectures, will then be seen as a matter of his taking a path that leads away from the earlier masterpiece and toward the later one.

Joachim Schulte is one of the few writers on this topic to have drawn attention to the particular difficulties that stand in the way of giving one's full and undivided attention to any one part of Wittgenstein's writing, and especially those texts written after the *Tractatus* and before the *Philosophical Investigations*. He frames this challenge in the following terms:

A general problem of reading and interpreting Wittgenstein [is] that it is enormously difficult to read a text as a complete and unified work and at the same time as a transitory stage within the author's oeuvre as a whole. Early or intermediate stages will appear as something superseded by later insights. The first and last versions will be allotted special status while what happened in between will appear to be of minor relevance.<sup>11</sup>

It is particularly difficult to give one's full and undivided attention to any one part of Wittgenstein's writing from the 1930s, without seeing it as an intermediate step between a well-known point of departure and an equally familiar destination. It is only too easy to assume that what he wrote during these years must either consist of steps toward familiar ideas in the later work, or sets out transitional views that would soon be discarded.

However, during the first half of the 1930s, Wittgenstein frequently explored ideas that he would later reject, and often made use of methods and techniques that are neither Tractarian, nor characteristic of Wittgenstein's later philosophy in general, and of the *Philosophical Investigations* in particular. Indeed, in addition to the specific danger Schulte identifies in the passage quoted above, that of seeing the intermediate stages as superseded by later insights, we also have to beware of the complementary pitfall of approaching the work from the 1930s as a summary or outline of central ideas in the later work. Striking examples of such "transitory stages" in Wittgenstein's work in the 1930s that are discussed in this collection include the notions of the calculus conception of language,<sup>12</sup> the "logical structure" of a hypothesis,<sup>13</sup> "committing oneself" or "being committed" by one's use of

<sup>11</sup> Schulte 1998, 380.

<sup>12</sup> See in this volume: Stern, ch. 1; Pichler, ch. 2; Boncompagni, ch. 4; Biletzki, ch. 10.

<sup>13</sup> See in this volume: Engelmann, ch. 3.

language,<sup>14</sup> and the distinction between the use of “I” as subject, and as object.<sup>15</sup>

One group of Wittgenstein interpreters, including the early Baker, Hacker, and Glock<sup>16</sup> maintain that Wittgenstein’s later philosophy emerged in the early 1930s, and that it is already clearly stated in works by Wittgenstein and Waismann from 1932 to 1934.<sup>17</sup> On this reading, we can already find robust formulations of many central commitments of the later Wittgenstein in his “middle period” writings. If one draws a dividing line in the early 1930s, then one will presume that, other things being equal, all material written after that point states the views of the “later Wittgenstein” and can be mined for statements of the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical methods and his views about the nature of grammar and rules of language. This will lend substantial support to a reading of the *Philosophical Investigations* on which the identification of grammatical rules, and their use, in a memorable turn of phrase, to police the bounds of sense, plays a central role.<sup>18</sup>

If we follow Hacker’s reading we will construe Wittgenstein, not only in the early 1930s, but also throughout the rest of his career, as a philosophical grammarian, using the rules of our ordinary language to make clear the bounds of sense and so rule out certain philosophical claims and theories as mistaken. In that case, we will be inclined to draw a sharp line between scenarios that are logically possible, and thus conceivable, on the one hand, and those that are logically impossible, ruled out by the grammar of our language, on the other. Traditional philosophy makes claims that may appear attractive, but on closer examination they prove to be nonsense, for they break grammatical rules. The task of the Wittgensteinian philosopher is, accordingly, to provide arguments that make these errors clear.

At first sight, Cora Diamond’s much-discussed reading of Wittgenstein,<sup>19</sup> with its stress on the unity of his philosophy, and the “resolute” interpretations of Wittgenstein’s work it has inspired may

<sup>14</sup> See in this volume: Boncompagni, ch. 4.

<sup>15</sup> See in this volume: Sluga, ch. 7; Child, ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Baker and Hacker 1980, 1980a, 1985; Hacker 1972, 1990, 1996, 2012; Glock 1990, 1996, 2001a, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> See Baker’s preface to VW.

<sup>18</sup> Baker later described the view that he had once shared with Hacker as one on which “Wittgenstein polices the bounds of sense” (Baker 2004, 94).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Diamond 1991, Crary and Read 2000.

appear to be contradicted by the fact that a significant part of his writing from the 1930s turns on his criticism of his earlier views. Early critics of her reading, including Hacker, observed that “defenders of Diamond’s interpretation have produced no evidence at all from the post-1929 documents to support their view.”<sup>20</sup> Those critics also argued that there was no trace of the argumentative strategy Diamond attributes to the *Tractatus* in the *Nachlass* materials from 1929 and the early 1930s. Diamond has since replied that an insistence on the unity of Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be reconciled with a recognition that it did change and develop in crucial respects, especially his conception of clarification.<sup>21</sup> This approach, which Conant has dubbed “mild mono-Wittgensteinianism,” faces, as he puts it, the challenge of both doing “full justice to the profound discontinuity in Wittgenstein’s thinking without neglecting . . . the extent to which it is folded within a fundamental continuity in his philosophy” while also doing “full justice to the profound continuity in his thinking without minimizing . . . the extent to which it is folded within a fundamental discontinuity in his philosophy.”<sup>22</sup> With this acknowledgment of the complex interplay of continuity and discontinuity in the development of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, by not only Diamond and Conant, but also other resolute readers such as Kuusela and Cahill, we have moved a considerable distance from the radically unitary reading that Diamond and other New Wittgensteinians originally seemed to be advocating. Instead, we are back where we started, with the task of mapping out the similarities and dissimilarities between Early, Middle, and Later Wittgenstein, and looking for turning points in his writing.

On the other hand, if we follow Diamond and Cavell<sup>23</sup> in reading Wittgenstein as giving up the idea that it is the rules of our ordinary language that enable us to demarcate sense and nonsense, we also have to give up the correlative notion that there is a clear boundary between sense and nonsense. Whether or not a particular form of words makes sense does not simply depend on the rules of our language, but on the particular circumstances in which we are drawn to utter them, and the reasons we have for finding them attractive. Our attention turns from the question of whether the words under examination are

<sup>20</sup> Hacker 2001, 139; see also 126–140.

<sup>21</sup> Diamond 2004; see also Conant 2007, 2011, Kuusela 2008, 2011, and Cahill 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Conant 2007, 31–32; see also notes 19 and 136. <sup>23</sup> Cavell 1962, 1979.

grammatically well-formed to the fantasies, or illusions, that motivate us to say such things, and lead us to offer another form of words when it turns out that our first formulation misfires.

In a discussion of the relationship of Wittgenstein's teaching during 1932–1935 to his earlier and later philosophy, Alice Ambrose observed that both of the standard approaches to Wittgenstein's philosophy—the one-Wittgenstein view on which “Wittgenstein's concerns, earlier and later, are conceived as being the same” and the two-Wittgensteins view that there is a “discontinuity between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*” – “ignore the iconoclastic ideas which came out in lectures, dictations and discussions” during those years.<sup>24</sup> To regard Wittgenstein's philosophy as fundamentally continuous is to fail to recognize that a “quite new conception of philosophical statements was being formulated, and was illustrated in the treatment of certain problems.”<sup>25</sup> But to see Wittgenstein as the author of two very different philosophies, an early one set out in the *Tractatus* and a later one in the *Philosophical Investigations*, still has the effect of pushing the work he did during those years out of sight, she contended. If one only reads the lecture notes, dictations, and other writings from that period for those places where he criticizes his own earlier work, or moves toward his later philosophy, one will miss much of what is most interesting, and distinctive, about his teaching in the first half of the 1930s. As Volker Munz argues in his contribution to this collection, it is “misleading to only approach the middle period as a link between the early and later Wittgenstein” because he not only rejected central Tractarian views and began to introduce new ideas and methods. He “also developed and discussed issues in a very different way from anything in his later writings. Such topics include his treatment of solipsism, the ‘I’, the concept of pain, and the relation between rules and general descriptions of human behaviour . . . The middle period must, therefore, be seen as a phase in its own right, and not merely as a transition from the early to the later Wittgenstein.”<sup>26</sup> Many other contributors to this collection also make the case that Wittgenstein's discussion of philosophy of their chosen topic in the early 1930s has a distinctive character that is significantly different from anything found in his earlier or later work.

<sup>24</sup> Ambrose 1972, 16–17. In Flowers 1999, 2, 266–267; 2016, 2, 553.

<sup>25</sup> Ambrose 1972, 17. In Flowers 1999, 2, 266; 2016, 2, 553.

<sup>26</sup> See Munz, this volume, ch. 9, section 1.