Introduction

This book is not about Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy. It is about his literary heirs and editors and how they made the books the world has come to know as Wittgenstein’s later works. The one philosophical book published during his lifetime (in 1922) was the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. In 1929, Wittgenstein returned to philosophical writing and created an oeuvre of 20,000 pages during the subsequent twenty-one years. When he died in 1951, the copyright to this philosophical work was passed on to three of his students and friends. Wittgenstein’s wish was that they publish what they thought fit. This is the starting point for the present Element. It sketches what happened to Wittgenstein’s writings on their journey into the public sphere, from the day of his death in 1951 until the death of the last of the three literary heirs in 2003. Given that their editorial interventions are not always obvious in the printed volumes, the account presented in this Element could also serve as an editorial note to the study of Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

The main source for the story presented here is the extensive correspondence between Wittgenstein’s literary heirs: Rush Rhees, Georg Henrik von Wright and Elizabeth Anscombe.

1 I have had the good fortune to study these fascinating documents of philosophical inheritance for more than ten years. I wish all young scholars a similarly rich adventure in reading and research.

1 Publishing the Philosophical Investigations

1.1 The Birth of Wittgenstein’s Nachlass

Imagine that you have inherited the papers of your philosophical mentor and have been instructed to publish from them what you ‘think fit’. What are your guidelines for deciding what to publish?

Would you try to think about what your mentor would have consented to publishing or would you maybe consult an archivist or scholarly editor who could tell you how to handle your deceased mentor’s writings in a professional way? If you choose the latter, would it irritate you that your mentor appointed you for the task and not an institution with a professional staff? Would passing on the task to a professional do justice to your mentor’s will? By the same token, if you choose to let your own judgement rule, which parts of your mentor’s writings should be made available and would your justification suffice? If your mentor is a philosopher of considerable interest, would it be irresponsible not to follow the method recommended by the professional scholarly editor? But then again, what does ‘professional’ mean in the context of your mentor’s philosophy?

Elements in the Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein

Such were the questions that Rush Rhees, Elizabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright were confronted with as soon as they became Ludwig Wittgenstein’s literary heirs in April 1951. They were appointed in Wittgenstein’s will with these words:

I give to Mr. R. Rhees, Miss Anscombe and Professor G. H. von Wright of Trinity College Cambridge all the copyright in all my unpublished writings and also the manuscripts and typescripts thereof to dispose of as they think best but subject to any claim by anybody else to the custody of the manuscripts and typescripts.

I intend and desire that Mr. Rhees, Miss Anscombe and Professor von Wright shall publish as many of my unpublished writings as they think fit, but I do not wish them to incur expenses in publication which they do not expect to recoup out of royalties or other profits.²

With these sentences, Wittgenstein ensured that his notebooks, ledgers, typescripts and collections of clippings would be taken care of – about 20,000 pages of philosophical writing – a corpus that scholars refer to as Wittgenstein’s Nachlass.³

As of today, the entire Nachlass is available in an electronic edition and parts of it are presented in dozens of printed volumes.⁴ A scholarly milieu has also evolved, allowing for research on Wittgenstein’s writings, their history, the structure of the Nachlass and critical comparisons of manuscripts and published volumes. Hence, the story you are about to read – of the posthumous editing that began with Wittgenstein’s own wish to have his texts published – is a success story: it reflects a continuous movement towards the greater accessibility of Wittgenstein’s work. But as you will see, the process of editing and publishing Wittgenstein’s papers was also a continuation of Wittgenstein’s own struggle to make his work available in the right way.

1.2 Time Was Short

Wittgenstein died in Cambridge on 29 April 1951. The funeral took place the next day and it was then that Anscombe surprised von Wright with the news that they, together with Rhees, had been appointed as Wittgenstein’s literary heirs.⁵ In contrast to von Wright, Anscombe and Rhees had discussed the issue with Wittgenstein.⁶ Up until three months before his death, he had lived at Anscombe’s house in Oxford and worked with her on the English translation

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³ Wright, ‘Wittgenstein Papers’, 483–503; updates of the catalogue have been published in Wright, Wittgenstein; PO 1993; BEE; PPO 2003 and on www.wittgensteinonline.no.
⁴ Pichler, Biggs and Szeltner, Bibliographie, pp. 2–20.
⁵ Wright, Mitt Liv, p. 158.
of a book he was preparing. In February 1951, Wittgenstein moved to the house of his medical doctor in Cambridge and there he told Rhees that ‘care should be taken in what was published and how it was presented.’ Being personally instructed or not, all three of Wittgenstein’s literary executors were aware that their first task was to publish the typescript they knew Wittgenstein had developed for publication under the title *Philosophical Investigations* – the result of more than sixteen years of writing.8

Something else the literary executors knew at the time of Wittgenstein’s death was that they should not postpone publishing the *Philosophical Investigations*: in the heyday of Ordinary Language Philosophy at Oxford, the historiography of twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon philosophy was in the making. In this context, many regarded Wittgenstein primarily as the one who had elaborated Russell’s logical atomism and then paved the way for the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle. Ordinary Language Philosophy was seen to have the task of working out what Wittgenstein had hinted at in his lectures and fragmentary writings.9 But Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright were sure that this would be a gross misinterpretation of their teacher’s philosophy and they wanted to prevent readers from this misunderstanding.10 This is why only four days after Wittgenstein’s death, Rhees hurried from Swansea to Oxford and, together with Anscombe, took Wittgenstein’s typescript to the headquarters of Blackwell Publishing.11 The director Henry Schollick ‘was very keen indeed on getting the book’12 and he gave Rhees and Anscombe yet another reason to act quickly: scholars had approached him about publishing lecture notes and dictations of Wittgenstein’s lectures that had been circulating privately for some time. Wittgenstein’s true literary heirs were alarmed and claimed exclusive authority in a letter to the journal *Mind*:

> He [Wittgenstein] desired and planned for the publication of his work, and in his will he named us as his literary executors. We are taking immediate steps to publish a book, left by him in a fairly finished state, which supersedes the works now in private circulation.13

If Wittgenstein’s will were the birth certificate of his *Nachlass*, then this note is the public announcement of its existence by those who were given the task to care for it.

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7 Ibid, 30.
8 PU 2001, 12–33; Wright, ‘Wittgenstein Papers’, 57; Wright, *Mitt Liv*, p. 158; Wittgenstein’s typescript used for printing has been lost, but a version of it is Ts 227a. See Sections 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 3.2, 5.2, 6.4 and A.5, A.6 and A.8 in the present Element.
13 Anscombe, Rhees and Wright, ‘Note’, 584.
1.3 Preparing the Typescript

Shortly after Wittgenstein’s death, von Wright took early retirement as a professor of philosophy at Cambridge. He had assumed the position only three years before, when Wittgenstein retired, but now wanted to move back to Finland. In the meantime, at Anscombe’s Oxford townhouse, where Wittgenstein had left some of his papers, Rhees and Anscombe prepared the typescript for printing the *Philosophical Investigations*. Both of them were familiar with the text: Rhees had witnessed its development and discussed it with Wittgenstein since reading the earliest version in 1937 and Anscombe, under Wittgenstein’s direct supervision, had translated the latest version from 1945 from German into English.

While editing the typescript for print, Anscombe and Rhees remembered what Wittgenstein had told them on independent occasions: that he wanted the book to include his more recent work on the use of psychological concepts. This was the topic he had been working on in Ireland since his early retirement in 1947. Now, in among the papers, Rhees and Anscombe identified another typescript that they regarded as the latest elaboration of Wittgenstein’s work on psychological concepts. Anscombe thought this later typescript ‘transcends everything he ever wrote’. They added it to the *Philosophical Investigations* and stated in their preface: ‘[I]f Wittgenstein had published his work himself, he would have suppressed a good deal of what is in the last thirty pages or so of Part I and worked what is in Part II, with further material, into its place.’

Scholars, among them von Wright, later questioned the validity for this claim as well as the decision to include Part II: there is no written evidence from Wittgenstein that he actually planned the inclusion or even how it might be included, but there is no doubt that the editorial choices Rhees and Anscombe made have had a considerable impact on shaping the appearance of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. The inclusion of Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* also reveals how Rhees and Anscombe understood their task, namely, as continuing the work on the typescript just as they thought Wittgenstein would have done it. This understanding also comes to expression in how they treated the actual typescripts: after they had inserted their last instructions, Anscombe took Wittgenstein’s typescripts to Blackwell for typesetting – and thereafter the typescripts were never seen again. This illustrates that Rhees and Anscombe

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16 PU 2001, 27–33. 17 Ms 144. See Sections 3.1, 4.1, 5.2, 6.4 and A.9 in the present Element.
18 Erbacher, dos Santos Reis and Jung, ‘BBC radio talk’, 239. 19 PI 1953, vi.
regarded the papers they had inherited as working material they had to use to finalize Wittgenstein’s book. They continued the actual practice of ‘doing philosophy’ just as they had witnessed it, thus bringing Wittgenstein’s book to the publisher in the same way they thought Wittgenstein himself would have done.

1.4 ‘Free but Excellent Renderings’

The English-speaking academic world eagerly awaited the Philosophical Investigations, but there were very few in Wittgenstein’s homeland of Austria who even knew of its existence. This is no wonder, as Wittgenstein had taught at Cambridge for more than fifteen years. But when writing, he had stuck to his mother tongue, German. That is why he looked for a translator and wanted to publish a bilingual book. In 1938, however, none of the candidate-translators had delivered a satisfactory result. But in 1946, when reading the then-current version with Anscombe, Wittgenstein was impressed by her ability to render his thoughts into English.

By 1950, if not earlier, Anscombe committed herself to translating Wittgenstein’s book. To study Viennese German, Wittgenstein arranged for her to stay at the house of a good friend in Vienna. Anscombe spent several months there and Wittgenstein was also present for part of the time. Both of them returned to England in April 1950 and Wittgenstein moved into Anscombe’s house to resume the translation project. It is said that Part I of the Philosophical Investigations was finished under Wittgenstein’s guidance. But regardless of how far Wittgenstein and Anscombe actually got before his death, the cooperation surely sharpened Anscombe’s comprehension of the literary qualities in Wittgenstein’s writings. In particular, she found ‘a special daylight character: tough, lucid, crisp, lively and serious’. To her, this was a combination of a colloquial language and a high literary style that she regarded as being impossible to recreate in English:

Good English, in modern times, goes in good clothes; to introduce colloquialism, or slang, is deliberately to adopt a low style. Any English style that I can imagine would be a misrepresentation of this German.

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23 Manuscripts that contain Wittgenstein’s English: Ms 139, Mss 147–51, Mss 158–61, Ms 166, Ms 181, Ms 301.
25 Rhees was eventually chosen at that time and his translation with notes in Wittgenstein’s hand is part of Wittgenstein’s Nachlass: Ts 226. Erbacher, ‘Literary Executors’, 7–8, 29. See Sections 1.5, 3.1 and A.6 in the present Element.
28 Erbacher, dos Santos Reis and Jung, ‘BBC radio talk’, 233.
29 Ibid, 238.
Although Anscombe said that all she ‘could do, therefore, was to produce as careful a crib as possible’, she probably strove for something similar to what she admired as Wittgenstein’s ‘free but excellent renderings’ in the English translation of the *Tractatus*.\(^{30}\) To have discussed with Wittgenstein the ways in which his thoughts could be formulated in English might have taught her both the freedom and the scrutiny needed for her translation work after Wittgenstein’s death. The first results from the learning experience are exemplified by her work on English versions of the remarks that she and Rhees had selected as Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

When preparing the translation of both parts of the book, Anscombe searched tirelessly for ways to improve it, including on the very day the book went to press in 1953. After publication, she continued making improvements by weeding out mistakes for the American edition and publishing a list of corrections.\(^{31}\) Anscombe’s eventual achievement was so convincing that her translation ‘has been universally accepted as if it contained the *ipsissima verba* of Wittgenstein’.\(^{32}\)

### 1.5 Wittgenstein and Anscombe

Elizabeth Anscombe, the daughter of a schoolmaster and a headmistress, fell for philosophy in her youth, after reading a book called *Natural Theology* by a nineteenth-century Jesuit.\(^{33}\) In 1937, at the age of eighteen, she began studying classics and philosophy at St Hugh’s College in Oxford.\(^{34}\) Her extraordinary capacity for grappling with philosophical questions was already evident in her final exam but it was only later, in Wittgenstein’s classes, that she experienced the ‘extraction’, as she put it, of the ‘central nerve’ of her original philosophical puzzlements.\(^{35}\) Wittgenstein, in turn, valued Anscombe and considered her to be one of the best students he had ever had.\(^{36}\)

Having received a studentship from Newnham College, Cambridge, Anscombe attended most of the lectures Wittgenstein gave after he returned from a prolonged leave of absence during World War II and she met with him for philosophical discussion outside class. Then Anscombe started to learn German, as she remembered:

> I told Wittgenstein, and he said ‘Oh, I am very glad, for if you learn German, then I can give you my book to read.’ This had been my hope, and it spurred

\(^{30}\) Anscombe, *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, p. 17.


\(^{32}\) Kenny, ‘Brief History’, 342. \(^{33}\) Anscombe, *Metaphysics*, p. VII.


\(^{36}\) WC 2012, 374.
When Wittgenstein retired early in 1947, Anscombe continued to discuss and work with him.38 She understood that Frege’s work was not merely one influence among others, but had to be recognized as the historical background of the Tractatus and that the Frege-oriented reading of the Tractatus provided the background for understanding the Philosophical Investigations.39 Later, she championed this reading and put it in the context of the longue durée of the history of philosophy. For her, Wittgenstein was a truly great philosopher – on a par with the greatest philosophers of the past.40 As she told her daughter, it was only through walking and talking with him that she recognized the significance of the great ancient philosophers.41 Her early writings bear witness of how she let, for instance, Parmenides’s or Aristotle’s questions mingle with her acquisition of Wittgenstein’s thought and the philosophical analysis of her day.42

2 Perspectives on Philosophical Investigations and the Tractatus

2.1 The Literary Executors’ First Conference

While Anscombe was immersed in translating, Rhees and von Wright began exploring the papers they had inherited, grappling with the question of what could be published next. It was clear to them that Philosophical Investigations was Wittgenstein’s second great work after the Tractatus and that it occupied a unique place in his Nachlass.43 But it was also obvious to them that they ought to publish other parts of the Nachlass as well.44 There were several candidates:

39 Anscombe, Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, pp. 12–20, 98–112; Erbacher, dos Santos Reis and Jung, ‘BBC radio talk’, 229.
40 Anscombe, Plato to Wittgenstein, pp. xiii–xx. 41 Ibid.
Firstly, there was a ledger that apparently stemmed from the first year of Wittgenstein’s return to philosophical writing in 1929.45

Secondly, Rhees, who was also heir to Wittgenstein’s library, received from Trinity College a box that he expected to contain some of Wittgenstein’s books. Yet when he opened the box in December 1951, he found a number of small notebooks and larger ledgers written in Wittgenstein’s hand.46 Then he recalled that Wittgenstein ‘used to carry the smaller ones in his pocket; and some, at least, of the notes he made in them were copied – or revisions of them were written – into the larger note books’.47 Rhees recognized remarks on mathematics that stemmed from the time when Wittgenstein had visited him in Swansea in 1942–3. But the dating in the manuscripts revealed that the material covered a time span between 1932 and 1947. Rhees was immediately convinced that this material would have to be put into a book, but only after careful study.

Third, the literary executors became aware of further writings by Wittgenstein kept in Austria. Simultaneously to Rhees’s inquiries, von Wright began an exchange with Wittgenstein’s sister, Margarete Stonborough, who lived in Vienna. Being grateful for what the literary executors were doing to commemorate her brother, she invited them to Austria.48 Von Wright arrived first in the early summer of 1952 and Wittgenstein’s sister showed him notebooks from Wittgenstein’s time as a soldier in World War I.49 Wittgenstein had been a volunteer in the Austrian Army when war broke out, but had continued the philosophical work that he had begun as a student of Russell and Moore.50 Thus, in the wartime notebooks, von Wright could see the traces of the thinking that had led to the Tractatus. What is more, Mrs Stonborough showed him another manuscript, one that was inscribed for her with ‘Christmas 1936 a poor present’.51 But that manuscript was nothing less than a beautiful copy of 188 handwritten paragraphs constituting the very first version of the Philosophical Investigations, written in Skjolden, in Norway, in the winter months of 1936.52

46 These may have included Ms 125. See Sections 2.3 and 2.4 and A.7 in the present Element.
48 Von Wright, Mitt Liv, pp. 175–8.
51 Ms 142, flyleaf.
52 Ms 142, edited in PU 2001, 51–204. See Sections 2.4, 3.2, 6.4 and A.5 in the present Element.
All this material, although only a fraction of the *Nachlass*, was considered for publication when Anscombe and Rhees joined von Wright in Austria.\(^{53}\) The three executors stayed in the Wittgenstein family’s magnificent Villa Toscana. Here they conferred for ten days and decided that the next book ought to present Wittgenstein’s writings on the foundations of mathematics. Since Wittgenstein’s ideas on this topic had undergone long development, they began by selecting remarks from the material Rhees had received from Trinity College. This was the first of Rhees, Anscombe and von Wright’s many ‘editorial conferences’ that took place approximately once a year in Cambridge or Oxford.\(^{54}\)

2.2 Portraits of the Man

Before the literary executors began preparing the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, the proofs for the *Philosophical Investigations* had to be corrected. Von Wright helped with proofreading and Anscombe kept on improving her translation until the book appeared in May 1953.\(^{55}\)

In the meantime, the literary executors learned of even more writings by Wittgenstein. For instance, they received material from the time before World War I, which included a manuscript Wittgenstein had put together as a student and a text he had dictated to Moore in Skjolden in 1913.\(^{56}\) Von Wright was intrigued by how these works shed further light on the origins of the *Tractatus* and wondered how best to publish them.\(^{57}\)

Coinciding with this historical interest, the literary executors were compelled to deal with biographical accounts of Wittgenstein. Journal articles about Wittgenstein offered, on one hand, new and interesting biographical facts, but on the other, could distort the picture of the man the literary executors had known.\(^{58}\) While Anscombe published rectifications of false claims as soon as they came to light, von Wright thought about writing a biographical account of Wittgenstein himself.\(^{59}\) Then, as if out of the blue, the later Nobel laureate in economics, Friedrich August von Hayek – a remote cousin of Wittgenstein – contacted von Wright concerning his own plan to write a biographical sketch.\(^{60}\)

Hayek had received chronologies and documents from Wittgenstein’s close friends in Austria and England, including his correspondence with Russell that would provide the backbone for his biography.\(^{61}\) It did not take Hayek long to

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\(^{57}\) Wright, ‘Correspondence with Anscombe’, 1953–60.  
\(^{59}\) Anscombe, ‘To the Editor’, 97–8.  
\(^{61}\) The complete correspondence of Wittgenstein is edited in *GESAMTBRIEFWECHSEL* (2011).
compose a draft that he sent around for comments. But things did not go as he expected; after the literary executors and Wittgenstein’s sister Margarete read the draft, they concurred that Hayek’s biographical project should be stopped. They thought Wittgenstein would have loathed a biography that dealt with his personal life and was not seriously in touch with his philosophical work. Hence, the literary executors did not permit Hayek to quote from Wittgenstein’s letters to Russell before the letters had been published by themselves. They thus thwarted Hayek’s plans.

Hayek himself probably realized that the endeavour he had launched into required much more research than he initially envisaged. However, the material he had gathered was of great value to subsequent biographers. Indeed, von Wright himself used it when writing his own biographical sketch shortly thereafter. In contrast to Hayek’s draft, von Wright’s account was acclaimed by many – among them Margarete Stonborough and Hayek, too – and it soon became a classic of the genre.

### 2.3 A Proper Picture of Wittgenstein’s Life Work

By the spring of 1953, when the *Philosophical Investigations* were about to appear in England, almost a year had passed since the literary executors met in Austria and decided that their next volume ought to consist of Wittgenstein’s remarks on the foundations of mathematics. During that year, Anscombe’s husband Peter Geach read the ledger from 1929–30, the first year after Wittgenstein’s return to philosophical writing. At the time of Wittgenstein’s death, this ledger was kept by G. E. Moore, who was supposed to turn it over to Wittgenstein’s executor. Moore gave it to Rhees in 1951 and the literary executors referred to it thereafter as the ‘Moore volume’. Now, after reading the Moore volume, Geach urged the literary executors to publish it. Von Wright then reread it and concurred that they ought to make the Moore volume their next publication:

The M-V in many ways represents a ‘middle case’ between the W. of the Tractatus and the W. of the Untersuchungen. It is often interesting from the point of view of illuminating the earlier work and sometimes also as an anticipation of the later thoughts from the Blue Book onwards. It gets additional interest from the fact that it deals fairly extensively with certain

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62 Hayek, *Draft Biography*, pp. 28–82.  
63 Hayek, *Draft Biography*, p. 86.  
64 Wright, ‘Biographical Sketch’, 527–45.  