

Wittgenstein's Paperwork. An Example from the "Big Typescript"

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The edition of the *Nachlass* from the early thirties by Michael Nedo and the completion of the "Bergen Electronic Edition" (BEE) have provided Wittgenstein scholars with all the material required to investigate the author's philosophical development starting with his auto-criticism of the "Tractatus" and leading to his later views. Wittgenstein's strategy of dictating from his notebooks and cutting up the typescripts to rearrange paragraphs into sequences of remarks is well documented in Nedo's edition and the BEE provides convenient facsimile access to every page Wittgenstein wrote or edited throughout the process. Some researchers have begun to revise received opinions that were based upon the "books" previously published by the trustees. (Hrachovec 2002, 2004, Kientzler 1997, Nyiri 2002, Pichler 2004, Stern 2002) Yet, the scientific community has barely begun to discover the richness and density of the philosophical endeavor manifesting itself in this material.

There has, understandably, been an interest to trace the origin of remarks, well-known from the "Philosophical Investigations", providing some background to Wittgenstein's most popular ideas. Various doctrines of what is becoming known as the "middle Wittgenstein" have been noticed, but they have themselves been perceived as more or less consolidated theories. Wittgenstein's *editorial activity* has been recognized as a hypertextual undertaking *avant la lettre*, yet there has been insufficient attention to the philosophical impact of these hypertextual strategies themselves. It is all too easy to be caught by some provisional result captured on a printed page and to overlook the fact that some of its philosophical significance can only be recognized by considering its genesis.

1. Preliminaries

This paper is an attempt to show that close attention to Wittgenstein's workflow as he dissects and re-composes his typescripts reveals a hitherto largely unexplored stratum of his philosophy. Due to the complexity of the issue the textual basis of this presentation will be quite small, consisting of one of the initial sub-chapters of the "Big Typescript" (BT). We need both the BEE and the "Wiener Ausgabe" (WA) to develop our argument. The WA, in addition to the unedited version of the script, offers an extremely helpful feature, namely cross-references to their first-time appearance in the *Nachlass* for every paragraph. Given this one can easily locate the provenance of the remarks in the manuscripts. Using the search function of the BEE it is possible to quickly trace the remarks on their way to the typescripts (TS 208-211) based on Wittgenstein's dictation from those manuscripts. This does not yet lead to the arrangement of the BT, though. Copies of TS 211 have been cut up and the resulting snippets are then arranged according to the scheme laid down in the table of content of the BT. One can inspect this stage in item TS 212 which is a collection of those cuttings with hand-written headings for chapters and sub-chapters inserted. As the facsimiles clearly indicate, selections of cut-outs were clipped together for this purpose -- the impression of the rusty clips are still visible on the pages added to mark the structure.

If this is how Wittgenstein worked, an obvious question arises. Can we detect patterns governing those arrangements? The table of contents lists 19 chapters and 140 sub-chapters, to be sure, but those are extremely abstract and, conversely, highly specific terms ranging from "philosophy" and "grammar" to "the cardinals" and "proof by induction". This listing clearly serves as a first attempt to collect the available material under a manageable number of headings. It is not intended to express a continuous philosophical argument, even though its opening trias "Understanding" -- "Meaning" -- "Sentence. The Meaning of a Sentence" can be read this way. It is virtually impossible to extract one line of thought from Wittgenstein's free-wheeling, dense and occasionally cryptic remarks. Rush Rhees tried to give an exegetical overview in his summary to the "Philosophical Grammar", which is his attempt to trace all of Wittgenstein's revisions of the original BT. This overview runs for 25 pages (in the German edition) and it lacks any ambition to convey a systematic view.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that most commentators look at the BT as a huge collection of aphorisms, very loosely organized according to some top level keywords. Wittgenstein himself used it as a kind of quarry in his later attempts to shape his thoughts in a more orderly fashion. Little notice was therefore given to the internal arrangement of the cut-outs within the sub-chapters of the collection. It seemed as if those remarks were simply accumulated under some appropriate descriptive phrase. But there is more to this. If one looks closer at the typescript one notices a variety of discursive strategies governing the arrangement of the various pieces derived from copies of previous typescripts. I have, in an earlier paper, demonstrated how Wittgenstein constructs his initial argument against "private language" by means of a careful *grouping* of snippets extracted from antecedent work (Hrachovec 2002). Here, I will pick one sub-chapter and delineate the internal shape of what turns out to be a complex and coherent -- albeit small-scale -- exposition.

2. Understanding requires two Languages

Subsection I,3 is entitled "Das Verstehen als Korrelat einer *Erklärung*" (Understanding as correlate to an explanation). One reason to examine it in detail is that this section contains Wittgenstein's anticipation of a methodological strategy extremely successful in subsequent analytic philosophy. W.O.v. Quine's "Word and Object" introduces the thought experiment of a linguist confronted with some completely unknown jungle language. "Radical translation" is an attempt to figure out the meaning of the native's expressions, given their expressive behavior in an environmental context shared by the explorer. The crucial intuition is that "meanings" are not there to be discovered, they are constructed in an observer-language, imposed upon a web of supposedly meaningful activities of a linguistic community. Meaning arises at the interface of two languages. This is closely connected to Wittgenstein's point about understanding and explaining.

One would not notice this affinity by restricting oneself to the remark opening this section:

"Verstehen" damit meine ich eine Korrelation der Erklärung, *nicht* einer - etwa medizinischen - Beeinflussung.

Mit dem Worte "Missverständnis" meine ich also wesentlich etwas, was sich durch Erklärung beseitigen läßt. Eine andere Nichtübereinstimmung nenne ich nicht "Missverständnis".¹

No mention of interpretation or language diversity here. But look at the context of Ms 109 (Nov. 29th and 30th, 1930; WA 3.140 ff) from which this piece is taken. Wittgenstein is discussing rule-following and in particular how we can grasp a rule exemplified in some semiotic system, e.g. a piece of musical notation:

Wenn wir z.B. ein Musikstück von Noten lesen so beurteilen wir das Ergebnis nach der Intention die Noten in bestimmter Weise zu übersetzen. (WA 3.142.1) ²

Translation is the key to separating rule-following from mechanisms. Punch cards may well determine the output of a loom, yet it is not the actual result that can serve as a criterion of rule governed activities. What if the machine breaks and its *de facto* output is completely at odds with the intended one? The rules embodied in a punch card have to be taken as meaning projections, bridging the gap between, for instance, a carpet and our understanding of its anterior design. Wittgenstein's remark about understanding and explanation in MS 109 directly continues his discussion of the musical piece and the loom.

A musical score and a carpet can be said to contain semiotic content that has to be extracted by an act of understanding. Wittgenstein's main point is that this is not achieved by intuition, but by a special kind of discursive elaboration of the given data: they are treated as instances of rule-governed behavior. In other words: explanations are a means of making sense by using a language to discover specific communications of another language-like system. Wittgenstein's next paragraph elaborates on this. Unarticulated understanding is not his topic. It would not fulfill the requirement of possible translation.

Verständnis entspricht der Erklärung, soweit es aber der Erklärung nicht entspricht, ist es unartikuliert und geht uns deswegen nichts an; oder es ist artikuliert und entspricht dem Satz selbst, dessen Verständnis wir beschreiben wollen. (WA 11.21.2) ³

Wittgenstein -- this is the present claim -- does carefully compose the sequence of paragraphs. Consider his entries from February 9th and 10th, 1930 which are the *locus originarius* of the preceding quote (WA 3.192.7.1). They are mainly concerned with coming to terms with the common sense objection to his linguistic theory of meaning. It seems that no discursive articulation can capture the actual accomplishment of "catching the rule" or knowing the meaning of an expression since this is an *event* (within the mind or within communicative practice). Two pages of the manuscript are spent in discussing the merit of those intuitions an answer to which is given by the preceding quote in February 1930. It's reappearance in the BT does not carry over this context but treats it as an initial thesis. Anticipating later findings it is interesting to note that Wittgenstein is switching priorities between MS 109 and the BT. Some commonsense objections that preceded his proposition in 1930 are evoked as *counter-claims* in 1933.

3. Dialogue Dependence

There is a second set of assertoric statements that opens the sub-section under discussion here. The remarks WA 11.21.3 - 11.21.6 deal with an aspect of the linguistic approach to meaning that might be

called "dialogue dependence". Like the initial remark (WA 11.21.1) WA 11.21.3 - 11.21.5 are taken from a discussion of rule-following (January 29th, 1931. MS 110; WA 3.168.4-6). In both instances Wittgenstein picks remarks that generalize the issue, referring to understanding *in toto* rather than to particular cases of rule-following. Yet, in order to perceive the subtle difference between those two sets of remarks it is, again, helpful to cast a glance at their provenance. The first set was triggered by musical scores and machines, the second one arises in a discussion of an inter-personal event, namely the understanding and obeying of an order. Since scores and machines cannot talk back there is a shift of emphasis from translation to interpretational dialogue.

Wissen, was der Satz besagt, kann nur heißen: die Frage beantworten können "was sagt er?"

Den Sinn eines Satzes verstehen/kennen/, kann nur heißen: die Frage "was ist sein Sinn" beantworten können. (WA 11.21.3)⁴

We are given two independent, if closely connected theses on understanding. Firstly, it is articulated like an explanation and secondly it comes as an answer to a question demanding explanations. This might not seem a remarkable distinction and Wittgenstein in fact continues by treating WA 11.21.1 - 11.21.6 as *one* part of his argument. There is an interesting subtext, though. Erased by the technique of collage the background to the thesis of dialogue dependence is a discussion of the singularity of philosophical method.

To pick up this thread one has to take the hint of WA 11.21.6. This is a single sentence inserted from a sequence written between February 19th - 21st, 1931 (Ms 110, WA 3.216.7).

Das Triviale, was ich zu sagen habe, ist, daß auf den Satz "ich sage das nicht nur, ich meine etwas damit" und die Frage "was?", ein weiterer Satz, in irgend welchen Zeichen, zur Antwort kommt.⁵

To analyze this quote one has to be aware of the two respective contexts. In 1931 the issue is philosophical *vis a vis* everyday explanation, whereas the 1933 occurrence of the assertion follows a series of remarks lacking this distinction. Wittgenstein is considering a difference in explanation. Explanations of how to sew or to smoke *add* information to surface appearances, whereas rule-following *does not* enrich the content of the rule. "Translating" a command into an action stays within the scope determined by this command and this fits well into Wittgenstein's notion of non-revisionary philosophy. Explaining thought is not supposed to teach us more than we already know (WA 3.215.9). The dialogue dependence of meaning that manifests itself in the need to produce a sentence in response to the challenge "What do you mean by that?" is (imperceptibly) determined by Wittgenstein's refusal to countenance anything but ordinary language in philosophy. To sum up: the third sub-section of "Verstehen" in BT starts out with two sets of related claims concerning understanding: (i) it is a translational activity that (ii) does not assume a stance outside a given language. We can somehow understand the working of a loom, but it is more to the point to consider inter-personal conversation. And here, in order to explain one's meaning, as far as philosophy is concerned we are simply invoking statements of a familiar nature.

4. Objections

My working hypothesis is that Wittgenstein follows a particular dramaturgy in assembling his cut-outs into the BT. We have arrived at the most obvious evidence of this kind of procedure in the present text. After having put forward several theses on understanding, culminating in the claim that they amount, in fact, to a trivial statement, Wittgenstein switches sides and inserts four paragraphs questioning what has just been proposed. "Aber man kann fragen . . .", "Man will sagen . . ." and "Man möchte sagen . . ." ⁶ are the phrases he uses to raise doubts against the preceding remarks.

All but the first paragraph, which originally refers to an understanding of the rules of chess, are taken from the entries February 9th-10th, 1931 mentioned above. Inverting their previous order Wittgenstein uses them as objections *following* the claim that served as a *response* to those considerations in the first run. WA 11.21.8 - 11.22.1 are, according to the evidence in TS 212, transferred in a peculiar way: they are cut apart in a first move with the resulting (three) pieces subsequently being restored into the previous order. There is no duplication of contexts here, the argument is unaffected by the transfer. Explanation seems to be one step removed from the actual state/activity of understanding. It offers discursive articulations that have themselves to be *understood* in order to be successful. Wittgenstein keeps repeating that his investigations are not directed at psychological states and intuitions, yet, he is struggling with a related issue. The very fact of explicitly formulating one's understanding puts meanings apart from practice and makes them look provisional, in need of some non-discursive supplement.

5. Resolution

Wittgenstein has set the stage. He has built up a thesis and its anti-thesis. His next *Zettel* is a continuous segment that first appears as two handwritten pages on November 15th, 1931 (Ms 112, 91v-92v, WA 4.193.181-183) and is carried over into Ts 211, Ts 212 and Ts 213 in its entirety with very little changes. It seems that Wittgenstein was comparatively satisfied with this exposition and that it is positioned as a resolution to the foregoing conflict. The issues touched upon in the first part of the sub-section are taken up and put into perspective. Wittgenstein reminds himself that he is dealing with the grammar of "meaning" and he comes up with an explicit statement about the use of two languages:

Die Antwort auf die Frage 'wie ist das gemeint' stellt die Verbindung zwischen zwei Ausdrücken/zwischen zwei Sprachen/ her. (WA 11.22.2) ⁷

After thus reaffirming his initial maxim he proceeds to explain how we might be misled into thinking that such expressions conveying meaning are somehow incomplete and in need of additional consideration.

His point is that we tend to treat nouns like "sense" and "meaning" as terms referring to some thing called SENSE. A name requires something to refer to and by analogy we are tempted to search for "the meaning" of an expression as if we could find it in some objective realm. But consider how we deal with e.g. an arrow. It is meant to direct us into *this* direction, that is: it is employed this way. We understand it by conforming to this prompt. If someone picks out the symbol and treats it as one of the more common

nouns she might ask: "What is the meaning of this sign?" and feel like supplementing its "raw" notational appearance with some interior state "... als wäre der Pfeil gleichsam nur das Musikinstrument, die Meinung aber die Musik, oder besser: der Pfeil, das Zeichen - das heißt in diesem Falle - die Ursache des inneren, seelischen Vorgangs." ⁸ Even though Wittgenstein does not spell it out (he rarely does) these remarks are not just a rejection of the anti-thesis indicated above, they include an account of how their plausibility can be comprehended -- and dissolved. If I am right Wittgenstein's three-step composition is a micro-cosmos containing the essence of his philosophical message: We are deceived by inappropriate grammatical analogies; we can sort things out by paying close attention to how our language actually works; philosophy is words that remind us of insights at the surface of our linguistic practice.

6. Bonus Track

This leaves a final remark that does not seem to serve a particular purpose. It comes from MS 110 (August 4th, 1931; WA 3.324.6) and might have been appended to this sequence simply because of its reference to an arrow.

Was die Erklärung des Pfeils betrifft, so ist klar, daß man sagen kann: "Dieser Pfeil bedeutet/sagt/ nicht, daß Du dorthin (mit der Hand zeigend) gehen sollst, sondern dahin." - Und ich würde diese Erklärung natürlich verstehen.-

"Das müßte man aber dazuschreiben." ⁹

The 1931 manuscript provides a comment to which Wittgenstein's phrase "concerning the explanation of the arrow" refers to. He tentatively employs *names* to designate the meaning of an arrow's direction "A" for an arrow pointing to the right and "B" for one pointing into the opposite direction. This grammatical experiment connects to the foregoing discussion of misleading language use. One could let things rest here. If the BT is just a compilation there is no need for a coherent argument. Yet, if I have been right in my reconstruction of Wittgenstein's purpose one would hesitate to dismiss the remark as a simple appendix. And it does, indeed, play a more important role within Wittgenstein's textual arrangement. The point can only be seen by relating the claim of WA 11.22.3 to the argument of the rest of the sub-chapter.

Looked upon in isolation Wittgenstein's observation seem harmless, even a platitude. If meanings are given by sentences explaining symbols such sentences will contain phrases like "this arrow means ...", accompanied by appropriate verbal and physical prompts. "This arrow means A" is not an acceptable sentence according to Wittgenstein's critique of reified meanings, but it is not too difficult to imagine a scenario of overlapping intuitions. "This arrow means *right*, accompanied by a movement of one's arm is not incomprehensible. Wittgenstein might extend his concession: "Of course I would understand this explanation." There is an approved rendering of the meaning of an arrow: "that you should go *there*" and a deprecated account: "right" (cf. "A" means the direction --> in Ts 110, WA 3.324.4). Yet, there seems to be no big difference in actual use. Both forms of explanation will ordinarily succeed. If this is correct Wittgenstein is undercutting his own grammatical regime in admitting that "to get there" or "to the right" or "right" can all be conceived of as valid explanations of a given arrow. His aim is not to revise language but to avoid philosophical puzzlement arising from improper analogies. As long as no one treats "that

you go there" as a fact or "right" as a name we can allow language to work as usual. Wittgenstein, according to this reading, has found his way back to to surface.

Not quite. One final sentence, easily overlooked, remains to be accounted for. At a first glance it does not seem to carry much philosophical weight. My main argument can do without it. Yet, this is a very suggestive remark which can be enhanced to contain a splendid summary of the preceding discussion. It shows Wittgenstein at his best: finding an uncontroversial, temporary resolution to an irritating philosophical dispute. Remember that the problem at hand is the relation between (linguistically) articulated accounts of meaning and meaningful pursuits that seem to add something to the mere symbols. Wittgenstein has advised us to mind our grammar and directed our attention to language use. None of this removes a remaining doubt. Sentences put forward as contentful articulations and sentences as moves in language games are different. One might compare them to a physical coin and a coin within some system of monetary exchange. A coins "value" is not based upon its material composition, even though this is a necessary condition of its use. How should we respond to this incongruence?

Wittgenstein does not deny the problem. He offers an everyday remark that shows how we can easily reconcile the opposite sides. The difficult part is to understand how mere symbols attain meaning. But look at it the other way round to find the way out of the fly-bottle. Most of the time persons participate in meaningful interactions. Asked why they do something they ordinarily reply with sensible explanations. At times, however, these activities are disturbed. The Austrian colloquial meaning of the present sentence can be illustrated by the following episode. A child is given a slip of paper with a sketch of three red apples and sent to the grocery to buy such apples. The shopkeeper looks at the note and does not recognize the fruits. He asks what this sketch is supposed to show. The child answers "apples", to which the grocer replies "Das müßte man aber dazuschreiben." The main purpose of symbols is to support interaction. If signs are ambivalent, more signs can help. They have, of course, in turn to be understood, i.e. employed in language games. But there is no dogmatic divide between the undisturbed working of language and its ruptures. Meaning requires both elements, understanding signs and understanding the need to supplement signs with further notes.

It is a pity that this humble remark did not survive Wittgenstein's editorial revisions and drops out from later versions of his "Philosophical Grammar". A small detail, to be sure, but it serves to illustrate an important point. Wittgenstein's remarks are highly sensible to their local discursive context. When it dissolves, the remarks lose a considerable amount of their force.

7. Literature

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Notes

1. " 'Understanding' is here meant as correlation to an explanation, *not* to an - e.g. medical - influence. By the word 'misunderstandig' I mean therefore in essence something that can be removed by an explanation. Another non-correspondence I do not call 'misunderstanding'.
2. "Reading e.g. a piece of music from the score we judge the result according to the intention to translate the musical note in a certain way."
3. "Understanding corresponds to explanation; insofar it does not correspond to explanation it is unarticulated and does not therefore concern us; or it is articulated and corresponds to the sentence itself whose understanding we want to describe."
4. "Knowing the content of a sentence can only mean to be able to answer the question 'what does it say?'. To understand the meaning of a sentence can only amount to be able to answer the question 'what is its meaning'."
5. "The trivial thing I have to say is that, given the sentence 'I do not just *say* this, I mean it' and the question 'what?' another sentence, consisting of some signs, is given as response."
6. "But one can ask ...", "One wants to say ..."
7. "The answer to the question 'what is the meaning of this' establishes a relation between two expressions/between two languages/."
8. "... as if the arrow were only the musical instrument, whereas the meaning were the music, or better: the arrow, the sign - i.e. in this case - the cause of the inner, psychological event and the explaining words would follow as descriptions of this event."
9. "Concerning the explanation of the arrow it is obvious that one can say 'This arrow means/says/ not that you should go there (pointing with one's arm), but there.' And I would, of course, understand this explanation. 'But you should add this in writing.' "