

Book Review:

Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951

edited by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann
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Philosophical Occasions collects many items together which had previously appeared separately over many decades, as well as one item never before published. The items include a number of Wittgenstein's own writings, some letters from Wittgenstein to various people, as well as some notes by others of Wittgenstein's lectures, plus an updated version of G.H. von Wright's "The Wittgenstein Papers" (the nearest thing we have to an official register of the *Nachlass*). The book is clearly arranged with each item given a separate chapter to itself, in chronological order. Each chapter is prefaced with useful remarks about the nature of the item which follows, for example fixing the date and context of composition (in so far as this is ascertainable), giving the history of prior publication, giving cross-references to von Wright's MS/TS numbers in "The Wittgenstein Papers", and so on. The editors have also corrected numerous errors in the texts of previously published items; in some cases, new material has been inserted into previously published texts, and the editors have noted this, paragraph by paragraph (in a separate chapter at the end). These corrections and additions were based on comparisons with microfilms of Wittgenstein's original MSS or TSS. All texts written in German are printed in German with an English translation on the facing pages. Finally, there are both German and English indexes.

The book is not an introduction to Wittgenstein's work, and the editors have said so in their preface.

This book will be a useful companion to scholars already steeped in Wittgenstein's work. It includes Wittgenstein's "Some Remarks On Logical Form", "A Lecture On Ethics", "Remarks On Frazer's *Golden Bough*", "Notes For Lectures on 'Private Experience' And 'Sense Data'", "Cause And Effect: Intuitive Awareness", "Philosophy", and a previously unpublished MS, "Notes For The 'Philosophical Lecture'". While dedicated scholars will be familiar with these texts already (except, of course, the previously unpublished one), it is nonetheless extremely useful to have them together in one place at last, to say nothing of the luxury of an index as well. The editors are especially to be commended for providing German and English on facing pages.

The editors include two sets of Wittgenstein's letters, to Eccles covering the years 1912 to 1939, and to von Wright from 1939 to 1951. These are of no philosophical interest; they merely show that Wittgenstein could chat. I am puzzled why these were included by the editors, whereas no letters to Russell, Ogden, Ficker, or Engelmann, were included. For insights into the *Tractatus*, for example, one letter to Ficker or Engelmann is worth 30 doctoral theses. If any letters were to have been included in such a volume, a better selection could have been offered.

The editors list the publications in which Wittgenstein's correspondence has been published and express the hope that all of it will someday be published in a single edition. It is nonetheless to be desired that an intelligent selection will someday be offered including material of philosophical significance and excluding what is personal or chatty.

The editors include three sets of notes taken during Wittgenstein's lectures at Cambridge in the 1930s, by G.E. Moore, Rush Rhees, and Yorick Smythies. Given the number of notes of Wittgenstein's lectures available nowadays--new ones seem to crop up every few years--this seems an arbitrary selection. Certainly I do not begrudge having these notes to hand in one volume, but a line has to be drawn somewhere, and the editors offer no reason why they drew the line where they did. They could have included many more lecture notes, or none at all, and have maintained a coherent editorial policy either way. As it stands, the selection appears merely arbitrary.

In their preface, the editors remark that: "Wittgenstein's sometimes oracular, sometimes dialogical style makes the interpretation of even his most favored [polished] formulations problematic. It often seems important to know the context in which a problem arose for Wittgenstein or to see an earlier, even if inadequate, elucidation of the problem, to be able to understand the merits of his ultimate [sic] treatment of the problem. these considerations suggest a more liberal policy toward publishing material from the *Nachlass*. Our edition also provides some support for defenders of this view."

The problem with this view, however, is exactly mirrored in *Philosophical Occasions* itself: the result is not a coherent interpretation, much less a philosophy, but a mishmash. A case in point is the inclusion of a letter of Wittgenstein's, titled *Geleitwort zum Woerterbuch fuer Volksschulen*, incorrectly translated "Preface to the Dictionary for Elementary Schools". As the editors make clear in footnotes, it is not a preface and was not intended to be published. It is a cover letter to the board of education explaining why the proposed book was necessary; it is, to put it bluntly, a sales-pitch to the publisher. It is of no philosophical interest and is out of place in this volume.

Another case in point is Wittgenstein's letter to the editor of *Mind* (1933) in which he states that people (Braithwaite in particular) ought not to summarize or speculate about Wittgenstein's philosophical views; people must wait until he publishes. "That which is retarding the publication of my work, the difficulty of presenting it in a clear and coherent form, *a fortiori* prevents me from stating my views within the space of a letter. So the reader must suspend his judgement about them." He had still not published by his death in 1951.

Wittgenstein's letter to *Mind* is more than a little ironic considering that, of all the philosophical works he published-- the book review (1912), the *Tractatus* (1922), and the "Remarks on Logical Form" (1929)--, two thirds of them are reprinted in *Philosophical Occasions*, and that they amount, in total, to less than 9 pages (7 of which he repudiated). It might be fair to assume that had Wittgenstein lived another 20 or 30 years, either he would still not have published his magnum opus, or he would have published it and later repudiated it--the one certainty is that he would not have stopped thinking.

The editors apparently hold the opinion that having the entire *Nachlass* to hand in a definitive edition will solve the problems of interpretation. I disagree. The *Nachlass*

consists of over 120 notebooks, manuscripts, and typescripts, comprising nearly 30,000 pages in all ('scribble, scribble, scribble, eh, Mr. Wittgenstein?'). Springer Verlag of Vienna is undertaking the monumental task of publishing a definitive edition, in German and English. They foresee the publication of two to five volumes per year; the first 15 volumes will cover only the years 1929 to 1933 of Wittgenstein's hand-written notebooks. I submit that, even after the Springer Verlag edition is completed, no one in his right mind is going to read the whole thing in order to unravel the 'final interpretation' of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

The point is, we have to draw the line somewhere, for even were we to have the complete *Nachlass* to hand, in a definitive edition, we would still be faced with all the problems of interpretation which face us already, as well as new ones which will no doubt arise from the portion of the *Nachlass* with which we are not yet familiar. The brute fact is, we are going to end up with a mishmash no matter what, and I for one would rather see a smaller, better organized mishmash, than a bulkier, sillier one. I do not see the point of including a sales-pitch for a schoolchildren's speller and a letter which says 'wait 'til I publish.'

The editors themselves view *Philosophical Occasions* as "a stopgap measure", not a detailed appreciation or investigation of Wittgenstein's work, but rather "a transitory ... volume in the publication history of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*." In this, I have no point of disagreement with them and commend them for a generally useful reference volume compiling otherwise scattered items (although a few of them are of dubious scholarly value, and the letters to Ficker, at the very least, are sorely missed). I only wish to add that, sooner or later, we are going to have to face the fact that a final interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy is not on offer, not because too little of the *Nachlass* has been published, but precisely the reverse, because so much already has been. The editors describe von Wright's "The Wittgenstein Papers" as archaeological. The image of unearthing, identifying, and cataloging fragments is apt--as far as it goes. However, we must remember that the fragments do not, and never did, belong to a single complete pot. Wittgenstein cut up his TSS and pasted them into new arrangements again--and again, and again, and again, and again. Therefore, we should not be seduced into thinking that there must be a single, comprehensive, consistent account of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which will become apparent upon publication of the whole *Nachlass*, or that Wittgenstein *himself* commanded any such overview. "I still keep getting entangled in details without knowing whether I ought to be talking about such things at all; and I have the impression that I may be inspecting a large area only eventually to exclude it from consideration." *

What the *Nachlass* will show is just the history of the thinking through of the *Nachlass*.

* Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (translated by Peter Winch as *Culture and Value*), p.65:1; the remark quoted dates from 1947.