

Mauro Luiz Engelmann

Wittgenstein's Philosophical Development: Phenomenology, Grammar, Method, and the Anthropological View.

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The recent uptick in interest in Wittgenstein's 'transitional philosophy' has not yielded much by way of close textual studies. Compared with how the pre-*Tractatus* and post-*Investigations* writings have been treated, to say nothing of the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* themselves, the coverage remains as spotty as ever. In this volume Mauro Engelmann aims to fill some of the gaps. He works through the material that Wittgenstein piled up between 1929, when he returned to philosophy, and 1937, when his later thought was mostly in place. Instead of mining already mined veins, Engelmann scrutinises manuscripts and posthumously published books from the period with an eye to shedding light on Wittgenstein's progress and remedying common misunderstanding of what he was thinking.

In Engelmann's view, Wittgenstein set out in 1929 to answer the objection that Frank Ramsey pressed in his 1923 review of the *Tractatus* about the possibility of analysing necessary properties of space and time (2, 8, 27). Wittgenstein is regarded as attempting 'to complement the notation of the [*Tractatus*] with a clear presentation of the necessity involved primarily in the forms of space and color' as manifested in the visual field, the place where 'we find the most elementary forms that need scrutiny' (23). Within the year however, Wittgenstein had, Engelmann argues, given up the search, the 'biggest difficulty' being that 'the numerical representation of [visual] phenomena by means of the system of coordinates does not represent them correctly' (41–42).

What happened when Wittgenstein 'abandon[ed] the phenomenological language [he wanted to pin down]' was that he '*abandon[ed] the idea that notations (symbolisms) have a fundamental role in philosophy*' (43, Engelmann's italics). This in turn prompted him to adopt the goal of eliminating 'confusions in language without constructing a new symbolism' (44). Out went the notion of 'a complete logical-phenomenological notation' (44), and in came the notion of 'a general "grammar" of language' (47), i.e. 'a "*perspicuous*" representation of the grammatical' (49) comparable to the representation of colour by the colour octahedron (described in §39 of *Philosophical Remarks* as grammar). At this juncture 'tautologies are only a part of what indicates the essence of the world which philosophers wrongly attempt to describe' and it is 'the rules of the comprehensive "grammar" that fulfil this task' (64).

The next shift in Wittgenstein's philosophy that Engelmann discerns was occasioned by his reflection on Russell's causal theory of meaning, a theory deemed inadequate because it 'subordinates questions of logic and language to... mechanical explanation' (70). Contrary to Russell, who defended a theory that handled internal relations psychologically, Wittgenstein opted for 'the calculus conception', which handled the relations non-psychologically (92). Soon, however, Wittgenstein realised this conception 'does not stop worries about the whole system of rules' (99) and dropped it in favour of 'the genetic method', the object of which is to trace

linguistic blunders to their source, ‘to portray the physiognomy of each error’ (quoted, 105). In 1931/1932, then, Wittgenstein strives ‘to *dissolve* – in contrast to solving – philosophical problems’ (109).

The last move during the period, as Engelmann understands it, was triggered by Wittgenstein’s discussions with the economist Piero Sraffa. He is seen as responding to Sraffa’s criticisms of his thinking by adopting ‘the anthropological view’ and exploring the linguistic behaviour of imaginary tribes in much the same way that Sraffa explores the economic behaviour of imaginary societies. The upshot was that the genetic method is no longer mobilised ‘at the service of the calculus conception’ (114) and language is treated as embedded in everyday life and possible ‘without sentences’ and ‘grammar’ (157, 167).

In the remaining chapters of the book Engelmann examines Wittgenstein’s philosophy subsequent to *The Big Typescript*, a work drafted in 1933. He reckons *The Blue Book* to be ‘the first work that expresses the centrality of the genetic method in Wittgenstein’s philosophy’ (172–173) but thinks that – though ‘an interesting experiment’ – it has ‘the non-trivial shortcoming’ of not identifying which ‘misleading analogies underlie philosophical questions or puzzlement’ (190). It is only in *The Brown Book*, Engelmann avers, that Wittgenstein gets matters straight and draws on ‘the anthropological view’ to introduce philosophical temptations in an appropriately logical order (191). The sole remaining snag is that the discussion is ‘boring and artificial’ (quoted, 207) and could not be left as it was. Whence we have the pre-war version of the *Investigations* with its ‘center of gravity in the genetic method associated with the anthropological view’ (261).

This account of Wittgenstein’s developing philosophy touches on important facets of his thinking. The nature of visual space is initially at the centre of his investigations, the calculus conception and ‘grammar’ are to the fore in the next few years, philosophers’ linguistic errors are exposed in *The Blue Book*, and primitive languages figure prominently in *The Brown Book*. Somewhat less obvious is whether the material divides up as neatly as Engelmann suggests. No doubt some structuring of the material is necessary on pain of ending up with a litany of facts but I am disinclined to go as far as Engelmann. The shifts of doctrine/method he discerns, some of them at least, seem just as well regarded as reflecting Wittgenstein’s changing philosophical interests.

Here I can only mention some questions that struck me as I read along. Did Wittgenstein seek in 1929 to specify a phenomenological language rather than clarify the geometry of the visual field? Was it only in 1931 that he began warning against ‘false analogies that can bring one to philosophical puzzlement’ (104)? Did the calculus conception fall completely by the wayside in the mid-1930s? Are ‘[t]he genetic method and “grammar” ... united in [*The Big Typescript*] by means of the old idea of a perspicuous representation of “grammar” modified by the notion of “calculus”’ (116)? Is the critique of the *Tractatus* in the *Investigations* ‘grounded on the genetic method’ as opposed to, as in *The Big Typescript*, ‘the calculus conception’ (209, Engelmann’s italics)? Was Wittgenstein exercised in the *Investigations* by the question of how philosophical problems are generated or just by what lies behind them (258)? And are his primitive languages not more properly understood as ‘objects of comparison’ (§133) than ‘anthropologically’?

To my way of thinking, however, the importance of Engelmann's discussion lies less in the way he divides up the philosophy than in his examination of the texts themselves. He goes through material not often considered and provides many useful passages from the *Nachlass*. In particular his consideration of Wittgenstein's remarks on visual space (and its 'objectivity') struck me as singularly helpful and I very much appreciated his account of the transitional remarks on intentionality, 'the autonomy of "grammar"', grammatical mistakes and 'comparing and recognising'. I would also mention his pages on Wittgenstein's dealings with Friedrich Waismann and Sraffa.

Another thing that emerges from Engelmann's discussion is just how intensely Wittgenstein applied himself to philosophical problems and the complexity and depth of his investigations. He paints a picture of a working philosopher who, far from dismissing philosophical worries or making do with oracular pronouncements, doggedly wrestles with the problems in the hope of achieving a standpoint where they are no longer troublesome. A striking example is Wittgenstein's protracted examination, deftly outlined by Engelmann, of the problem of demarcating the inexactness of visual phenomena, a problem Wittgenstein came to believe, after much toing-and-froing and attention to technical niceties, is 'impossible' (41, 110). In later work Wittgenstein compresses the details and is easily misread as improvising on the spot rather than, as the background provided by the *Nachlass* material reveals, reporting the outcome of painstaking philosophical analysis.

Engelmann is well aware of recent debates over how Wittgenstein's remarks should be read but resists the temptation to address them head-on. He repudiates the idea of 'one dramatic' change and naturally enough – given his identification of four distinct stages in Wittgenstein's development – discounts the idea of a single 'subtle' change (1). Without belabouring the point, Engelmann shows that standard hypotheses about what Wittgenstein was up to in the early 1930s, however popular, leave much to be desired. As he interprets the documentary evidence, the philosophy dramatically shifted as a result of small faltering changes and Wittgenstein is ill-described as 'resolutely' thinking all he says is gibberish or 'irresolutely' believing truth can be packaged in nonsense.

While *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Development* is, no two ways about it, tough sledding, it repays reading and rereading, and doubly so when the footnotes, which include much valuable information, are carefully worked through. Unlike dozens of easily negotiated but ultimately thin books on Wittgenstein, Engelmann's book is difficult but worth it. Eschewing the option of skating over the hard bits and making do with a few choice quotations, he forces the interested reader to grapple with the issues. Those who disagree most with him will probably get most out of the book. But anyone who sticks with him will, I fancy, acquire a better feel for what Wittgenstein was thinking during the period and end up with a richer, even a new, view of the kind of philosopher he was.

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