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Some Early Reactions to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

Abstract: Upon completing the manuscript of the *Tractatus* in the summer of 1918, Wittgenstein shared it with some friends and submitted it to publishers. This evoked four letters from Frege and a long Introduction from Russell. After the book was published, it received seventeen reviews, some well-known, others nearly unknown, as well as early reactions from within the Vienna Circle. I will recount some of these early reactions, emphasizing their variety and their insights. I will also list some reviews discovered since the publication of my book *Tractatus in Context*.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Ludwig; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; book review; Frege, Gottlob; style; Ficker, Ludwig von; Vienna Circle; clarity; Russell, Bertrand

Introduction

Wittgenstein completed the draft of his book in the summer of 1918 while on leave from the front. Before returning to duty in October he submitted the manuscript to Jahoda & Siegel, which was a literary publisher and the publisher of Karl Kraus' work. Wittgenstein received a letter of rejection ("allegedly for technical reasons") on October 25. Despite the rejection, Wittgenstein told Engelmann he "would dearly like to know what Kraus said about it".¹ Allan Janik has noted, however, that Jahoda & Siegel was not so much a publisher as a printer.² Thus, the "technical reasons" for which they rejected Wittgenstein's work may well have been that they did not have the specialized editing capacity necessary for this project. Likely Kraus never saw the manuscript.

Wittgenstein then had a copy of the manuscript sent to his friend Paul Engelmann. Engelmann's return letter reads:

1. Dear Mr Wittgenstein, I am very pleased to hear,
2. through your family, that you are well. I

Note: Presented at the 44th International Wittgenstein Symposium in Kirchberg, Austria, August 2023. Many thanks to the organizers, as well as the attendees who participated in the discussion.

¹ CPE 1967, 15.

² Janik and Berger 1989, 6.

3. hope that you do not take it badly that I have
4. not written to you for so long, but I had so
5. much to write that I preferred to leave it to
6. a reunion that I hope will be soon. But I must
7. now thank you with all my heart for your
8. manuscript, a copy of which I received some time
9. ago from your sister. I think I now, on the
10. whole, understand it, at least with me you have
11. entirely fulfilled your purpose of giving
12. somebody some pleasure through the book; I am
13. certain of the truth of your thoughts and
14. discern their meaning. Best wishes,
15. yours sincerely, Paul Engelmann.³

Ray Monk originally took the numbered lines to be a joke on Engelmann's part parodying the numbering system of the *Tractatus*. Yet Wittgenstein thanks Engelmann for the "kind postcard of April 3rd and for the favorable review".⁴ It turns out that the line numbers and formatting are part of the military postcard itself (as well as a pre-printed warning: "No writing between the lines!"), designed to control the length and format of the message.⁵ Wittgenstein's Austrian unit was captured by the Italians on November 3, 1918, and he was sent to a POW camp near Cassino in January of 1919. There he met fellow prisoner Ludwig Hänsel in the second week of February. Soon, Hänsel wrote a letter home to his wife: "I have come to know a young (30-year-old) logician who is more significant in his thoughts than all those of roughly the same age whom I have gotten to know so far – serious, of noble simplicity, nervous, with childish capacity for enjoyment. His name is Wittgenstein".⁶ Wittgenstein showed him a copy of his manuscript the next week and Hänsel spent most of March reading it. He calls it "Wittgenstein's interesting book". At first, Hänsel is "gradually more firmly against Wittgenstein's 'silence'". But then "I even try to think myself into the silence".⁷ Franz Parak was another fellow prisoner at Cassino. While Parak's recollections are written later and undated, he says that though he lacked "the philosophical prerequisites" he was "one of the first to read the [material] that would later become the famous Trac-

3 Letter dated April 3, 1919, translated in Monk 1990, 162. (I have made some small modifications to the translation to emphasize how Engelmann echoes the remarks in Wittgenstein's Preface.)

4 CPE 1967, 17. I also took it to be a parody; in Klagge 2016, 36.

5 Wolfgang Kienzler pointed out to me that the later German edition of Monk's biography removes this conjecture of a parody.

6 CLH 2003, 258 (February 20, 1919).

7 HBW 2012, 44–51.

tatus": "I naturally understood it just as little as a thousand later readers. But what inspired me was the language".⁸

Frege's Letters to Wittgenstein (1919 – 1920)

On June 28, 1919, Gottlob Frege wrote to Wittgenstein, "You certainly have long awaited an answer from me [...] on your treatise that you sent me". A letter from Wittgenstein's sister Hermine to Frege, dated December 24, 1918, indicates that Wittgenstein's "Arbeit [work]" had been posted to him.⁹ While we only have Frege's side of the correspondence, we can see, in four letters written over a period of ten months, Frege's fairly extensive reactions to Wittgenstein's work.

That we have these letters at all is a matter of considerable luck. In 1936, an attempt was made to gather all of Frege's "scientific" correspondence. Heinrich Scholz wrote to Wittgenstein inquiring whether he had letters from Frege that he could provide. Wittgenstein wrote back to Scholz that their "contents are [...] purely personal and not philosophical. For a collection of Frege's writings they are of no value whatsoever [...]".¹⁰ As we will see, this seems like a misrepresentation or a failure of memory after sixteen years. (Though Juliet Floyd offers a sort-of defense of Wittgenstein's decision on this.) In any case, more than fifty years later, in June 1988, the letters finally did come to light. They were part of a cache of some 500 letters that were found in the storeroom of a Viennese real estate firm and destined for shredding (Merkel 1989). The clerk assigned to do the shredding happened to notice that the letters were addressed to a "Mr. Wittgenstein" and recognized the importance of the name! Here are some excerpts from Frege:

28 June 1919

Dear friend,

You have surely waited long enough for an answer from me and have wanted a response from me concerning your *Abhandlung*, which you had sent to me. Therefore, I feel strongly that I bear a responsibility to you and hope for your forbearance. [...] I have been prevented from taking up your *Abhandlung* in more detail and accordingly can unfortunately supply no substantiated judgments concerning it. I find it difficult to understand. You put your propositions side-by-side mostly without substantiating them, or at least without substantiating them fully enough. So I often do not know whether I should agree, since their sense [*Sinn*]

⁸ Parak 1991, 147.

⁹ Frege 1976, 266.

¹⁰ Frege 2011, 73.

is not distinct enough to me. Out of a detailed substantiation the sense would arise more clearly. The linguistic usage of life is in general too shaky to be used unmodified for more difficult logical and epistemological purposes. It seems to me that elucidations are necessary in order to reveal the sense more precisely. You use quite a few words right in the beginning that obviously depend greatly upon their sense.

Right at the beginning I encounter the expressions “to be the case” and “fact [*Tatsache*]” and I suppose that *to be the case* and *to be a fact* are the same. The world is all that is the case, and the world is the totality of facts. Is not every fact the case, and is not what is the case a fact? Is [it] not the same when I say, [Let] A be a fact, as when I say, [Let] A be the case? Why this double expression? [...] Can one say, out of the composition of the expression “to be the case” there arises a sense? Is it a theorem that what is the case is a fact? I think not; but I would also not like to let it pass for an axiom, for [there] does not seem to me to be any knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] within that. [...] You see, I become entangled in doubt right in the beginning concerning what you want to say, and thus just do not progress. [...]

And so on. Frege continues in much the same vein. Then he concludes:

Yet I really do want to do you a friendly service with these lines, and now I fear you have been annoyed with pointed questions. Forgive them and keep our friendship, Yours, thinking of you often,

G. Frege¹¹

It is ironic that Frege focusses on the matter of clarity, since Wittgenstein himself had insisted on the importance of clarity from the beginning in his own work (Preface Paragraph 2 and 4.112).

After receiving this letter from Frege, Wittgenstein wrote to his sister Hermine: “Received Frege’s letter through you the day before yesterday. Admittedly, I never did think that he’d understand my work. But I was somewhat depressed about his letter all the same. I’ve already written my response, but I haven’t been able to send it yet”.¹² Unfortunately, Wittgenstein’s letter from August 3 in reply to Frege, indeed every one of his letters to Frege, has been lost. They were likely deposited in the library at Münster that was destroyed by allied bombing in 1945. Hence, it is fortunate after all that Wittgenstein refused to give Frege’s letters to Scholz in 1936, since they then would have been destroyed in the 1945 bombing too!

Luckily, however, Frege does quote portions of Wittgenstein’s response in his next letter.

¹¹ Frege 2003. An alternate translation with the German and a full commentary is available as Frege 2011. All review material quoted in this paper can also be found in the appendix to Klagge 2022 with full source information.

¹² CF 2019, 66.

16 Sept. 1919

Dear Mr. Wittgenstein,

[...] I am [...] glad to find a proposition in your letter, in which your manner of speaking seems to agree completely with my own. It is the proposition: "The sense of both those propositions is one and the same, but not the ideas that I attached to them as I wrote them". Here I concur entirely with you, in your leaving open the possibility of distinguishing the proposition from its sense, in two propositions having the same sense and yet still differing in [the] ideas to which they are attached [...].

Later, Frege continues:

You write then: "What corresponds to the elementary proposition when it is true is the obtaining of an object-state [*Sachverhaltes*]". With this you do not explain the expression "object-state", but rather the entire expression "the obtaining of an object-state". In a definition the explained expression must always be regarded as an inseparable whole. The parts, which one can distinguish in it grammatically, are not as such taken to have an individual sense. [...] But now I must wait first for what you say to that.

It must have been after writing his response that Wittgenstein shared his frustration with Russell: "I'm thoroughly exhausted from giving what are purely and simply explanations".¹³

Despite their different perspectives, not the least on the nature and requirements of clarity, Frege sought a profitable engagement:

I desire the exchange of views with you. And, in long conversations with you, I have recognized a man who has sought the truth as much as I have, to some extent in other ways. But precisely this allows me to hope to find with you something that can complete, perhaps even correct, that which has been found by me. So I expect, as I attempt to teach you to see through my eyes, myself to learn to see through your eyes. I do not give up the hope of an understanding with you so easily.

But Wittgenstein himself wrote to Russell two days before his release from prison camp: "I also sent my M.S. to Frege. [...] I gather that he doesn't understand a word of it all. So my only hope is to see *you* soon and explain all to you, for it is VERY hard not to be understood by a single soul".¹⁴ Wittgenstein seems not willing or perhaps not able to engage with Frege on these issues at this point.

¹³ WC 2008, 103; October 6, 1919.

¹⁴ WC 2008, 98; August 19, 1919.

Frege then addresses the first paragraph of Wittgenstein's Preface, in which he imagines that the book "will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it". Frege writes:

What you write concerning the goal of your book is alien to me. Indeed it can only be achieved if others have already had the thoughts expressed within it. The pleasure from reading your book can thus no longer be aroused by the content, which is already known, but rather only by the form, in which perhaps the individuality of the author is revealed. Therefore the book becomes more an artistic than a scientific achievement; what is said in it recedes behind how it is said. In my remarks I start from the assumption that you want to communicate a new content. And then, of course, the greatest distinctness [in expression] would be the greatest beauty.

Inadvertently, Frege has caught something important – while Frege considers the influence of style to be a hinderance, Wittgenstein considers it a virtue. Wittgenstein clearly worked hard to shape his insights into the best expression he could achieve. In the prisoner of war camp in 1919 Wittgenstein made some criticisms of stories that his fellow prisoner, Franz Parak, had written. McGuinness recounts: "When Parak protested that the whole *content* of his story [...] was being lost, Wittgenstein replied '*Die Sprache ist alles* [The language is everything]'"¹⁵

In pursuit of a common understanding of the issues, Frege wondered: "Am I one of those who will understand your book? Without your assistance, hardly". Likely with this in mind, Wittgenstein planned to travel to meet with Frege after he had met with Russell at The Hague in November. Unfortunately, the meeting with Frege had to be canceled when Wittgenstein's travelling companion, Arvid Sjögren, fell ill (von Wright 1996, 19–20).

In Frege's next letter, from September 30, 1919, he considers Wittgenstein's request for help getting the work published. Frege's suggestion, to break the work up into smaller self-contained pieces, misses Wittgenstein's point entirely and adds to his frustration. Wittgenstein writes to Ficker that Frege agreed "to take on the work, provided I would mangle it from beginning to end and, in a word, make a different work out of it".¹⁶

Apparently, Wittgenstein also expressed his frustrations to Frege in his reply, since Frege begins his final letter from April 3, 1920, with: "Many thanks for your letter of 19 March! Naturally I do not take your frankness amiss".

Finally, Frege addresses another touchy matter. Wittgenstein has learned that the publisher Wilhelm Braumüller will publish the book, but only on the condition

¹⁵ McGuinness 1988, 272. Hänsel reports the outcome of this dispute (HBW 2012, 58; June 22, 1919): Parak "does not improve his new short novel to Wittgenstein's satisfaction".

¹⁶ CLF 1979, 93.

that Wittgenstein pay for the paper and printing costs. Frege consoles him: “From what I have experienced, though, it is nearly impossible to publish a difficult work in our dismal scientific state of affairs, if one does not bear a considerable part of the cost”. But Wittgenstein refuses. In a letter to Ficker he explains that “it is indecent to force a work upon the world [...] in this way. The writing was *my* affair; but the world must accept it in the normal manner”.¹⁷ Wittgenstein wanted no part of what we would now call a “vanity” publication. Presumably Wittgenstein did not know that Whitehead and Russell had contributed financially to the publication of their 3-volume tome *Principia Mathematica*. Cambridge University Press projected a loss of £600 in publishing *Principia*. The publishers risked £300 of that projected loss, the Royal Society assumed £200 upfront, and the co-authors took on the remaining £100 together. (£100 in 1910 is worth £9731 or \$11,793 today – so, nearly \$6000 apiece.)

In any case, Frege ended his last letter to Wittgenstein, “With warm greeting in abiding friendship, Yours, G. Frege”. And Wittgenstein held Frege in high regard for the rest of his life, even if they never were able to see eye-to-eye on his *Tractatus*.

Having failed with Jahoda & Siegel, with Wilhelm Braumüller as publishers and having rejected Frege’s plan to carve up the work into separate parts, in October, Wittgenstein asked whether Ludwig von Ficker might publish the work in *Der Brenner*, a cultural periodical. Wittgenstein already knew Ficker from having had him distribute a considerable sum of money to Austrian artists before the war.

Röck’s Letter of Assessment to Ficker (1919)

Ficker then asked Karl Röck (1883–1954) to give him an assessment of the work. Röck was a magistrate in Innsbruck and a member of Ficker’s “Brenner Circle”. Why Ficker asked him is unclear, but he had philosophical and literary interests, and had recently edited the works of poet Georg Trakl. Here are the highlights:

2 December, 1919

Dear Mr Wittgenstein!

As Mr. von Ficker selected me to be a reader of your “Logisch-Philosophischen Abhandlung”, I may now be permitted to announce to you my judgement about the same.

Your sentences elucidate some things, most of all: how in a mathematical brain the concept of philosophy could reduce itself to a nearly endless, but still wittily numbered Tauto-logic, to a

17 CLF 1979, 93.

kind of hypnotizing machine. And your sentences elucidated this to me in such a way that I, who understand you, recognized them to be nonsensical; hopefully entirely in the sense of your number 6.54; although [this happened] not only at the end, but already in the beginning of reading you, and in spite of your almost seductive Preface, I recognized the nonsense of your sentences, so to speak, after the first 3 words, and in reading on I only confirmed that in your three prophecies 1, 1.1, 1.11 you in fact already say everything that you know to say. Everything else I sensed essentially only as merely a sound which you seemed to generate because you had heard some rumbling, no rattling, i. e., Russelling. (For my own person I had, concerning your Russell-echo-sounds, the acoustic impression as if I were hearing nobody else but a gone-crazy typewriter typing and rattling, a Type Underwood, which in typing on itself would, so to speak, insist on its right of self-determination.) And in doing this I now throw away, in obedience to your final demand, the logo-logical ladder you offer; I overcome your sentences and now I see and hear the world aright again.

And finally: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

While I, in this way, take to heart the Alpha and Omega of your philosophical *Abhandlung*, in an earnest and innermost way, I sign and remain

sincerely your

Karl Röck

Official of the Ministry of Finances,

by the way, somebody who has long been choked *through* the likes of you,

but even more *at* the likes of you,

and who has since been practicing equanimity in his being eternally

a student of philosophy

P.S. In retrospect the fear befalls me that my letter might awaken in you the belief that your *Abhandlung*, as I apparently read it with understanding, should have given me pleasure. But this belief would be *the* superstition.¹⁸

[...]

On the same day that he wrote this assessment, Röck noted in his diary: “ill-humored scornful reply delivered through Lechleitner to Ficker as an answer”. Certainly, Röck managed to capture the stylistic nuance of Wittgenstein’s work, unlike Frege. In a letter from Röck to Ficker from December 8, Röck mentions that he had heard that his report on Wittgenstein’s work “had in a way shaken” him [that is, Ficker]. Ficker never shared this assessment with Wittgenstein. It is not known how it might have influenced Ficker’s publishing decision, but what Ficker

¹⁸ This translation is by Wolfgang Kienzler and modified by this author. The original German letter is published in Nedo and Ranchetti 1983, 372, with a photo of a portion of the letter on 146. It is also available through the digital *Gesamtbrieffwechsel* (IEA 2004). The assessment in this letter uses many concepts and phrases from Wittgenstein’s book and even its epigraph, and also mimics their sounds. Where the *Gesamtbrieffwechsel* transcribed “logologische”, Nedo and Ranchetti had transcribed “hegologische”. However, a later entry in Röck’s diary (December 12, 1919) mentions “Philologie als Logologik”.

shared with Wittgenstein were his financial concerns. While Ficker dithered over the financial risk of publishing such a work, Wittgenstein did not press the matter further.¹⁹

In Ficker's own later account of this matter, he wrote: "Part of the blame for this embarrassing failure of mine was probably also due to the fact that under the constantly appearing crises after the catastrophe of the world war, I had to struggle to cope with the disruptions to my own existence. I succeeded only temporarily, only poorly, and so unfortunately, I was unable to propose myself as a suitable publisher for Wittgenstein's subtle work. That affected me. Maybe him too. In any case, I felt the urge to find a replacement for this failure on my part".²⁰ So, he asked if Rilke could help. But he could not.

Russell's Introduction (1921)

In December, Wittgenstein met with Russell in The Hague for about a week to discuss his manuscript. Shortly after their meeting, Russell reported to a friend:

I leave here today, after a fortnight's stay, during a week of which Wittgenstein was here, and we discussed his book every day. I came to think even better of it than I had done; I feel sure it is a really great book, though I do not feel sure it is right. I told him I could not refute it, and that I was sure it was either all right or all wrong, which I considered the mark of a good book; but it would take me years to decide this. This of course didn't satisfy him, but I couldn't say more.²¹

In any case, Russell agreed to write an extensive introduction, which would make the book more marketable. On this basis, Wittgenstein sent the book to Reclam Verlag in January, but then decided that Russell's introduction was not acceptable to him and so should only be used as a letter of recommendation to the publisher. Under those conditions, in May 1920, Reclam declined to publish the book.

When Wittgenstein completed his training as a school teacher and began his work in the fall of 1920, he gave up in disgust and left matters in the hands of Russell to see whether the manuscript could be published. A letter from Wittgenstein's sister Hermine at this time could not have helped his mood: "I have read through

¹⁹ Letter from Röck to Ficker quoted from the Commentary to the *Gesamtbriefwechsel*. For Ficker's publishing decision, see the letters from Wittgenstein to Ficker in December 1919 and January 1920, in CLF 1979, 95–98, and Ficker's letter from January 16, 1920, to Wittgenstein in Monk 1990, 183.

²⁰ CLF 1979, 211.

²¹ Russell 2001, 198 (December 20, 1919). See also Russell 2001, 197 (December 12, 1919).

your essay twice & the introduction by Russell. I had to laugh at myself because I knew from the beginning that I could not understand it and yet I could not stop [...]. I must talk with you about it sometime".²²

I here omit the Introduction that Russell wrote for Wittgenstein's book, since it is so well-known.²³ Wittgenstein did not like the Introduction, claiming its "refinement" was lost in the translation into German (for the original edition).²⁴ But that was a polite cover for deeper qualms, for he thought that "what remained was superficiality and misunderstanding". Wittgenstein realized that by rejecting Russell's Introduction, he was ensuring the book would not be published. Wittgenstein resigned himself to this fate by "the following argument, which", he wrote, "seems to me unanswerable" (WC 2012, 120):

Either my piece is a work of the highest rank, or it is not a work of the highest rank. In the latter (and more probable) case I myself am in favour of its not being printed. And in the former case it's a matter of indifference whether it's printed twenty or a hundred years sooner or later. After all, who asks whether the Critique of Pure Reason, for example, was written in 17xy or 17yz.

Russell's Introduction turned out to be necessary for the publication of the work, which was finally published as an extended journal article through the efforts of Russell's assistant, Dorothy Wrinch. It was published in German in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* in an issue dated 1921.²⁵

In January of 1922 Wittgenstein asked his friend Hänsel to see if he could get ahold of a copy of "*mein Zeug* [my stuff]" in Vienna. After searching diligently, Hänsel was unable to find that journal issue in the bookstores or libraries. In a letter from Ogden to Wittgenstein, dated April 10, 1922, Ogden reports that "the *Annalen* itself appeared" the same day that he received Wittgenstein's March 28 letter – so, in early April 1922.²⁶

Since this publication was not easily available, was only in German, and was carelessly edited, a book version, in German and English, was soon published by

22 Wittgenstein leaves the matter to Russell in a letter quoted in note 28 *infra*. Letter from Hermine Wittgenstein to Ludwig, in IEA 2004 (October 19, 1920). (Unaccountably and unfortunately, this letter is not included among the published collection of Wittgenstein's family letters.)

23 Details of the history and publication of Russell's Introduction can be found in the introduction to its reprinting in Russell 1988, 96–100. One of the things we learn there is that Russell had at one point briefly refused to have his Introduction printed with the new 1961 translation by Pears and McGuinness but then consented, in part because otherwise the Introduction (100) "will practically cease to be available". In fact, recent editions do omit his Introduction.

24 WC 2008, 119 (May 6, 1920). See also CPE 1967, 31 (May 8, 1920).

25 This publication is reproduced in facsimile in LPA 2004, 399–465.

26 See their correspondence in CLH 1994, 59–60. Ogden's letter is in IEA 2004 but not in CCO 1973.

Kegan Paul under the editorship of Charles K. Ogden,²⁷ again through the work of Dorothy Wrinch.²⁸ In a letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 18, 1962, Wrinch wrote: “It was my privilege to offer the manuscript of Wittgenstein’s *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* to the Cambridge University Press and, after they had declined it, in a letter dated January 14, 1921, to entrust it to my friend the late C.K. Ogden”.²⁹

Viennese Reactions (1922 – 1926)

In 1922, the *Tractatus* caught the attention of some scientifically-minded philosophers in Vienna. The mathematician Hans Hahn gave a seminar series focused on Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica*, and, in that seminar, Kurt Reidemeister gave a presentation on the significance of Wittgenstein’s work for modern logic and philosophy. Then the work seems to have been studied more carefully – “read aloud and discussed sentence by sentence” – in 1924 or 1925.³⁰ This led to the interest in Wittgenstein’s work taken by the Vienna Circle and its members. Karl Menger first began to read the *Tractatus* in 1925:

But I stopped after the first few pages [...]. I was greatly impressed by the Preface and especially by the beautiful remark that *what can be said at all can be said clearly*, followed by the even more impressive maxim, repeated in the last sentence of the *Tractatus*, that *whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent*. But when I started reading the first section of the book, sometimes referred to as Wittgenstein’s ontology, I did not find the clarifying or even clear ideas I had expected [...]. Nor was my experience unique. Before I entered the Circle, Hahn gave me a very brief synopsis of the latest discussions and asked me whether I had read the *Tractatus*. When I told him about my abortive attempt he said: “I must confess that after the first glance at the beginning of the *Tractatus* I did not think that the book was to be

27 Letter from Wittgenstein to Engelmann, dated August 5, 1922, in CPE 1967, 49: “The treatise [*Arbeit*] has already been printed once – in Ostwald’s *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* (No. 14). However, I consider this a pirated edition: it is full of errors. But in a few weeks the thing will come out in London, in both German and English”.

28 Wittgenstein left it to Russell (letter from July 7, 1920; WC 2008, 121): “...for the moment I won’t take any further steps to have it published. But if you feel like getting it printed, it is entirely at your disposal and *you can do what you want with it*”. Russell left the job to Wrinch, his assistant and former student, because he was spending the academic year 1920 – 1921 in China (Letters from Russell to Wittgenstein from June 3 and November 5, 1921; WC 2008, 125 and 127).

29 Von Wright 1996, 25n2, cites a Cambridge editor as conjecturing “on the evidence of the minutes of the meeting for January 14, 1921, that the work had been offered to the Press *without* the Introduction by Russell”.

30 Stadler 2001, 423, 233, and 197. The details here are not perfectly clear. Cf. also the account in Misak 2020, 173 – 175.

taken seriously. It was only after hearing Reidemeister's comprehensive report and carefully reading the *entire* work that I came to appreciate it as probably the most important philosophical publication after Russell's writings. The opening section belongs largely to that which according to Wittgenstein cannot be said.³¹

Despite the fame of the Wittgenstein family in Vienna, there do not seem to be any reviews or mentions of Wittgenstein's work in the popular press. But when Frank Ramsey was visiting Vienna in 1924, he was psychoanalyzed for six months by Theodor Reik, a student of Freud's. Reik asked Ramsey to lend him Wittgenstein's book and said, when he returned it, that it was an intelligent book but the author must have some compulsion neurosis – what we now call Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.³² Moritz Schlick's copy of the *Tractatus* has this inscription on the flyleaf in Wittgenstein's hand: "Every one of these propositions is the expression of an illness".³³ So, perhaps Wittgenstein agreed.

There was, eventually, mention of a book by Wittgenstein in the Austrian press. Among the "New Releases" listed in the *Burgenländische Lehrer-Zeitung* in October 1926 was Wittgenstein's *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen!* As for the later fate of the *Tractatus* in Vienna, it was consigned to "the depths of the cellar of the National Library, whither the Nazis had committed it to exile among generally undesirable works" (Janik and Veigl 1998, 18).

The *Tractatus* was finally published in book form in November 1922, by Kegan Paul under the editorship of Charles K. Ogden, with an English translation by Frank Ramsey. In a letter from November 15, Wittgenstein writes to Ogden from Puchberg, where he was teaching elementary school in rural Austria, acknowledging receipt of some copies of the book on the previous day: "They look really nice. I wish their contents were half as good as their external appearance".³⁴ Von Wright describes the fate of these copies: "He seems to have given all the copies away. One was given to a schoolmaster by the name of Josef Putre, with whom Wittgenstein had become friends during his time in Trattenbach; another went to Rudolf Koder, a schoolmaster in Puchberg; and a third to his young friend Arvid Sjögren. These

31 Menger 1994, 104–105.

32 Letter from Ramsey quoted in Misak 2020, 163. A "compulsion neurosis" has been characterized as a mental illness whose symptoms are either prohibitions and atonements (e.g., washing one's hands over and over) or symbolic substitute gratifications.

33 "*Jeder dieser Sätze ist der Ausdruck einer Krankheit*" – reported in Maslow 1961, x (Maslow's Introduction, dated "University of California, Berkeley; December, 1933"). Maslow's book was dedicated to Schlick, and he reports (xi): "Many details of my exposition of the *Tractatus* are derived from the lectures of and discussions with Professor Schlick". Schlick had visited UC Berkeley in 1931–1932 (Stadler 2001, 723). This is presumably when Maslow saw the inscription.

34 CCO 1973, 68.

last two men remained lifelong friends of Wittgenstein".³⁵ By January of 1925, Wittgenstein himself had no copies of the book.

Once the book was published, the philosophical world took notice. There were seventeen published reviews listed below, within the first two years:

- H. Wildon Carr [Unsigned], "Spinoza Inverted". Review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, December 21, 1922, 854.
- Richard Braithwaite, *The New Statesman: A Weekly Review of Politics and Literature* XX. No. 511. Saturday, January 27, 1923, 488 and 490.
- John W. N. Sullivan [S.], "A Logical Mystic". *The Nation and the Athenæum* XXXII. No. 17. January 27, 1923, 657–658.
- Walter J. H. Sprott, *The Cambridge Review* 44. No. 1085. February 2, 1923, 202–203.
- [Unsigned], *Oxford Magazine* 41. February 8, 1923, 205–206.
- H. Wildon Carr, *Nature* 111. No. 2782. February 24, 1923, 246–247. [Signed review by Carr – not the same as the one in the *Times Literary Supplement*.]
- B[ernard] M[uscio], *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* I. No. 2. June 1923, 145.
- Ralph Tyler Flewelling [Unsigned], "The Trend Toward Mathematical Philosophy". *The Personalist* Volume IV. No. 3. July 1923, 207–208.
- [Unsigned], *Psyche* IV. No. 1. July 1923, 94–95. [Ogden's journal – could he be the author?]
- Cassius J. Keyser, *The Literary Review* [supplement to *New York Evening Post*] 3. No. 51. August 18, 1923, 909. [Partly reworked into the other one.]
- Charlie D. Broad [C. D. B.], *International Journal of Ethics* 34. No. 1. October 1923, 98–99.
- A[braham] Wolf, *Science Progress: A Quarterly Journal of Scientific Thought, Work & Affairs* XVIII. No. 70. October 1923, 336.
- Frank P. Ramsey, Critical Notice in *Mind* 32. No. 128. October 1923, 465–478.
- Theodore de Laguna, *Philosophical Review* 23. No. 1. January 1924, 103–109.
- Cassius J. Keyser, *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society* 30. No. 2. March–April 1924, 179–181.
- S[cudder] Klyce, *American Review* 2. No. 2. March–April 1924, 226–236.
- Ugo Cassina, *Scientia: Rivista internazionale de sintesi scientifica* XVIII. No. 2. 1924, 127–128.

35 Von Wright 1982, 108.

Nine of these are listed and reprinted in the appendix to Klagge 2022. The unsigned one in the *Oxford Magazine* was recently discovered by Michael Kremer. The remaining seven were discovered by Tommi Uschanov.

I have space to mention only a few.

Carr's Review for *Times Literary Supplement* (1922)

This was an unsigned review. But the TLS recently revealed that the reviewer was H. Wildon Carr, Professor of Philosophy at University of London, long-time Secretary of the Aristotelian Society and its President from 1915–1918. Carr is known to students of Bertrand Russell's work as the "Mr. Carr" who asked questions after Lecture II in Russell's "Philosophy of Logical Atomism". This series of lectures, given in early 1918, was in fact organized by Carr himself.³⁶ Attending Russell's 1918 lectures was excellent preparation for reading and appreciating Wittgenstein's book.

Mr. Wittgenstein, in his preface, tells us that his book is not a textbook, and that its object will be attained if there is one person who reads it with understanding and to whom it affords pleasure. We think there are many persons who will read it with understanding and enjoy it. The treatise is clear and lucid. The author is continually arresting us with new and striking thoughts, and he closes on a note of mystical exaltation which reminds us vividly of Spinoza, the philosopher whom he has taken as his model. Yet the treatise is not addressed to the general reader; it is essentially a philosopher's book, and appeals to philosophers alone – that is, to those who in the full meaning of the word are accustomed to philosophize.

Here, we can see that Carr has a very different reaction from that of Frege on clarity and a very different reaction from Röck on the matter of pleasure!

The sort of appeal it will make, however, will depend entirely on the theory of language which a philosopher holds. It will appeal strongly to all those who agree with Swift's Houyhnhnm that "the use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts", and who was therefore at a loss to understand why anyone should say "the thing which was not". Those who hold this view of its purpose are chiefly concerned with the conditions for a logically perfect language. [...] To many philosophers to-day, however, this appears to be a complete misapprehension of the nature of language, and a misinterpretation of the need out of which it arose. They hold, on the contrary, that language in its universality and in its essence is the expression of intuitions. Its richness and value are therefore proportionate to the perfection of its expressiveness, and not in any degree to a possible precision in the application of sign to thing signified, as a means of conveying information concerning matters of fact. [...] They will be able to admire the intellectual concentration and penetration

36 Russell 1986, 349.

of Mr. Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", but they will lament the misdirection of energy.

And here, Carr sees the stylistic issue raised by Frege, though he seems not to appreciate the ambiguous position that Wittgenstein takes on this.

Braithwaite's Review for *New Statesman* (1923)

Richard Braithwaite gave a talk on Wittgenstein's logic for the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club on January 26, 1923. Braithwaite was at that time an undergraduate at King's College, Cambridge, studying mathematics and physics. But he would go on to become a Fellow of King's College in 1924 and a University Lecturer in Moral Sciences in 1928. The very next day Braithwaite published a review that went more fully into some of the points noted in his lecture.

Students of Mr. Russell's later philosophical works have been intrigued by mysterious references to a certain Mr. Wittgenstein, whose unpublished researches in logic, we were assured, were of the highest importance. Mr. Wittgenstein's work [...] is quite as exciting as we had been led to suppose it would be. Indeed more; for the theories, expressed in aphorisms after the style of Nietzsche numbered in decimals in the manner of *Principia Mathematica*, are not put forward tentatively as hypotheses, as is expected from one who would be classed with the Cambridge philosophical school, but as The Truth [...]

Mr. Wittgenstein's solution is that all philosophical questions are nonsense-questions, because they are based on a misunderstanding of the logic of verbal expression. [...]

Braithwaite offers an admirable summary of a number of points in the book. But then he turns to its concluding passages:

Mr. Wittgenstein's theory of symbolism leads him to a curiously mystical conclusion. For "the limits of my language (i. e., of possible expression) mean the limits of my world", and "the feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling". This mysticism, induced by a study of mathematical logic, seems as unnecessary to the main theory as that affected by many Idealists is to Absolute Idealism. Mr. Wittgenstein probably adopted it in order to have some lofty and comfortable resting-place when he had thrown away the ladder of his propositions up which he had climbed. For his propositions, being philosophical, are all senseless, and so must in the end be rejected.

And Braithwaite goes on to offer several more specific criticisms, and then concludes:

[...] As regards the fundamental symbolic doctrine we can only join in Mr. Russell's praise: "To have constructed a theory of logic which is not at any point obviously wrong is to have ach-

ieved a work of extraordinary difficulty and importance". A philosophical student will find Mr. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as stimulating as Samuel Butler's *Notebooks* and nearly as important as *Principia Mathematica*.

Flewelling's Review for *Personalist* (1923)

An unsigned review appeared shortly thereafter in *The Personalist*. The journal had provided unsigned reviews of Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World* and *Analysis of the Mind* in previous issues. The editor was Ralph Tyler Flewelling, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California and then President of the newly-formed Southwestern Philosophical Association. He founded the journal in 1920 and was an Idealist philosopher. It seems likely that the editor wrote the journal's unsigned reviews.

This review was part of a review of four recent scientifically-oriented books. The reviewer begins with this promising sentence: "There is a revival of interest in mathematical philosophy which gives great promise, for whenever in history there has been an advance in mathematical discovery, there has been renewed activity in the philosophical field". The first of the four books under review was by Cassius J. Keyser, who would later himself review the *Tractatus*. The second of the four books was Keynes' *Treatise on Probability*, which the author declares "an outstanding achievement in philosophic writing". But his judgment on the *Tractatus* is another matter.

The review is wholly critical, focusing on a familiar problem: "Thus he dallies with words in a hopeless non sequitur fashion. One wonders why he neglects to apply to himself his own statement: 'Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said can be said clearly'".

De Laguna's Review for *Philosophical Review* (1924)

The reviewer, Theodore de Laguna, received his Ph.D. from the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell in 1907 and taught at Bryn Mawr College until his death in 1930.

It is always well to have a theory pushed to extremes. Compromise may be wise in practice, but in abstract speculation it amounts only to a covering-over of the problems. The present work has the great merit of being uncompromising. It is the *reductio ad insanitatem* of the theory of logical atomism.

[...]

Mr. Wittgenstein writes in crisp aphorisms, without paragraphing. In order to show the logical interconnection of his propositions, he numbers them in a very elaborate fashion. Thus proposition 5.2523 is the third comment on the second comment on the fifth comment on the second comment on the fifth main proposition. This would be very illuminating if it were not for two circumstances: first, that to follow the numbers is a constant distraction from the sense; and, secondly, that the writer himself sometimes gets mixed up. (Thus 4.0411 properly attaches to 4.04, not to 4.041.) Ordinary paragraph-structure is almost as essential a part of our language-inheritance as sentence-structure; and it is to be hoped that Mr. Wittgenstein's example will find few imitators.

[...]

More than that, there is not a page which is not the product of hard thinking. The faults of the book are to my mind almost all illustrations of the weakness of a few initial assumptions. I do not think any serious student can work through the book the three or four times necessary to get a fair understanding of its drift, without being well repaid in stimulating suggestions.

Keyser's Review for Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society (1924)

Cassius Jackson Keyser earned his Ph. D. in Mathematics in 1901 from Columbia University, where he taught from 1900 until his retirement in 1927. He had conducted a seminar at Columbia on the newly published *Principia Mathematica*, and was an important figure in early work in semantics and in formal axiomatic systems. He advised Emil Post's dissertation at Columbia, "Introduction to a General Theory of Elementary Propositions" (1920), concerning the propositional calculus in *Principia Mathematica*.

The final number of Ostwald's *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* (1921) contains an article by Mr. Wittgenstein, a former pupil of Mr. Bertrand Russell, dealing with the nature of logic and with its relation to mathematics, philosophy, and natural science in a manner so original and profound as to make its publication an important event.

[...]

How can so small a work be so big? What is the art involved? The answer is found in a variety of considerations.

One of them is that Mr. Wittgenstein's thinking is confined to fundamentals. His book is addressed to none but the most seasoned of thinkers. The author will be content, he tells us, if only one person reads his book with understanding and pleasure.

[...]

But the chief secret of his being able to deal effectively with so many great matters in so brief a space, is to be found in the temperamental quality of his style. Wittgenstein is a mystic – a logical mystic – and like the great ones of that kind (Spinoza, for example, or Blaise Pascal), he is at once a slave of the propensity for condensation and master of the art. One may

say of his style what Porphyry said of the style of Plotinus: “Dense with thought, more lavish of ideas than of words”.

Wittgenstein’s style is not admirable. His book is not an exposition; it is rather a conglomeration of insights, often profound, intimately related, wide-ranging, fit material for a magnificent structure, but they are not so ordered and presented as to constitute a luminous whole. In order to understand the book it is necessary to read it again and again, forward and backward, up and down, in and out. Even then, despite Mr. Russell’s somewhat helpful introduction, some passages remain ambiguous, indeterminate, obscure; not because the subject is difficult, which it is, but because the author has not taken sufficient pains to be clear. Mr. Russell tells us that Mr. Wittgenstein’s theory of logic “is not at any point obviously wrong”. But upon the score of obviousness, he might have said with equal justice that the theory is not at any point obviously right. Mr. Wittgenstein deserves to be thanked for producing a book that every mathematical or philosophical logician must read, and to be at the same time reprimanded for allowing his lust for mystic condensation so to obscure his thought as to burden and sometimes to irritate the reader. Such a reprimand is not unjust, for it is of the very essence of the author’s teaching that “everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly” and “everything that can be said can be said clearly”.

[...]

Perhaps the most accurate statement about the *Tractatus* came shortly after it was published as a book. Though Wittgenstein was teaching elementary school in rural Austria, he came to Vienna for All Saints Day and made a point of meeting with his friend Ludwig Hänsel. Apparently, Hänsel praised the book, and in a letter to Hänsel a few weeks later, Wittgenstein wrote: “*In 500 Jahren werden wir vielleicht sehen, was an dem Buch war* [In 500 years, we will perhaps see whether there was something to it]”.³⁷ After 100 years, I think we can say with some confidence that there was indeed something to it.

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³⁷ CLH 1994, 70; letter dated November 29, 1922.

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