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052185086X - Wittgenstein's Tractatus: An Introduction

Alfred Nordmann

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Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is one of the most important books of the twentieth century. It influenced philosophers and artists alike and it continues to fascinate readers today. It offers rigorous arguments but clothes them in enigmatic pronouncements. Wittgenstein himself said that his book is "strictly philosophical and simultaneously literary, and yet there is no blathering in it." This introduction considers both the philosophical and the literary aspects of the *Tractatus* and shows how they are related. It also shows how the work fits into Wittgenstein's philosophical development and the tradition of analytic philosophy, arguing strongly for the vigor and significance of that tradition.

ALFRED NORDMANN is Professor of Philosophy at Technische Universität Darmstadt. He has translated and edited works by Wittgenstein, has published on the philosophy and science of Heinrich Hertz, and is president of the Lichtenberg Society.

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An Introduction

ALFRED NORDMANN

Technische Universität Darmstadt



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It requires no art to say something with brevity when, like Tacitus, one has something to say. If, however, one has nothing to say and still writes a book, giving the lie to truth itself and its *from nothing nothing can come*, now that's what I call an accomplishment.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1775/76)

My difficulty is only an – enormous – difficulty of expression.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (March 8, 1915)

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Preface

“An aspect of Wittgenstein’s work which is certain to attract growing attention is its language.” Georg Henrik von Wright wrote this in a biographical essay about his teacher in 1955. The essay has been reprinted numerous times since then, with the prediction carried forward apparently unfulfilled. Indeed, philosophical readers of the *Tractatus* used to bracket or dismiss the idiosyncrasy of Wittgenstein’s language. They found a statement in its preface which seemed to indicate that considerations of language, method, and style can only obscure his philosophical point: “What can be said at all can be said clearly.”

Thanks are therefore due to Cora Diamond, James Conant, Matthew Ostrow, and others for drawing increased attention in recent years to Wittgenstein’s method. In particular, they have established the need to take literally Wittgenstein’s claim that his sentences are nonsensical. Though I disagree with them on nearly all of the particulars, they have prepared the way for my own attempt to take Wittgenstein literally in the context and tradition of analytic philosophy.

This book has been a long time in the making. Its beginnings can be traced to a seminar with Hide Ishiguro in the early 1980s. Accordingly, its intellectual debts reach equally far back. In ways entirely unbeknownst to them, Ernie Alleva, Lisa Leizman, and Veronica Vieland continue holding watch over my work – they are my philosophical conscience. For much needed encouragement at various stages of this work I wish to thank Georg Henrik von Wright, Garry Hagberg, Jim Klagge, and David Stern, also Bernd Buldt, Sabine Döring, Péter Forgács, Manfred Frank, Gottfried Gabriel, Kathrin Kaiser, Richard Raatzsch, Tom Oberdan, Christiane Schildknecht, Joachim Schulte, Ilse Somavilla, and Jörg Zimmermann. For collegial and institutional

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support I thank the Pittsburgh Center for the Philosophy of Science, where a substantial draft was produced, but especially Davis Baird and all my other friends at the University of South Carolina. The debt I owe to my wife Angela cannot be put into words – I wish I could repay her in kind rather than in the questionable currency of a book.

Abbreviations of works by Wittgenstein

CL	<i>Cambridge Letters</i>
CV	<i>Culture and Value</i>
L _{30–32}	<i>Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1930–1932</i>
L _{32–35}	<i>Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge 1932–1935</i>
LCA	<i>Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief</i>
LE	“Lecture on Ethics”
LFM	<i>Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics Cambridge, 1939</i>
LO	<i>Letters to C. K. Ogden</i>
LvF	“Letters to Ludwig von Ficker”
LWPP	<i>Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology.</i>
MT	“Movements of Thought: Diaries 1930–1932, 1936/1937”
NB	<i>Notebooks 1914–1916</i>
OC	<i>On Certainty</i>
PG	<i>Philosophical Grammar</i>
PI	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i>
PO	<i>Philosophical Occasions</i>
PPO	<i>Public and Private Occasions</i>
PR	<i>Philosophical Remarks</i>
PT	<i>Prototractatus</i>
RFM	<i>Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics</i>
SD	“Secret” Diaries 1914–1916 (<i>Geheime Tagebücher</i>)
TLP	<i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>
WA2	<i>Philosophische Betrachtungen. Philosophische Bemerkungen</i>

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WA ₄	<i>Bemerkungen zur Philosophie. Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Grammatik</i>
WA ₁₁	<i>The Big Typescript</i>
WVC	<i>Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle</i>
Z	<i>Zettel</i>