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Reviewed by Alois Pichler

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**Review: Wittgenstein's Philosophical
Development: Phenomenology, Grammar,
Method, and the Anthropological View, by
Mauro Luiz Engelmann**

Alois Pichler

Since becoming known through editions such as *Philosophical Remarks* (1964/1975) and *Philosophical Grammar* (1969/1974) or the *Blue and Brown Books* (1958), "Middle Wittgenstein" has never ceased to create interest and fascination as a period of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Alongside "early" and "late" Wittgenstein, represented by his two principal works, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921/1922) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), middle Wittgenstein is worth attention on its own. In recent years, interest and investment in middle Wittgenstein seem even to have increased. An entire week's conference was devoted at the Iowa Obermann Centre in May 2015 to Wittgenstein's Cambridge lectures 1930–33 and his indebtedness to G.E. Moore as well as middle Wittgenstein as a whole. Comprehensive research is being carried out on the relation between middle Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle (e.g. McGuinness 2011) and on the place thought about culture received in Wittgenstein's philosophy of the early 30s (Rothhaupt and Vossenkuhl 2013). In Brazil, for about ten years a number of projects and conferences have been running that had precisely the "middle Wittgenstein" as their focus (publication outcomes include for example *Philosophiques* vol. 39 (2012), no. 1), the most recent example being the IVth Middle Wittgenstein Symposium in 2014. The Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, having published the entire Wittgenstein Nachlass (cf. von Wright 1969) in electronic

form in 2000, in 2009 made items from the middle Wittgenstein the starting point for their open access site Wittgenstein Source (www.wittgensteinsource.org). While the *Wiener Ausgabe* (1994–), editing Wittgenstein's writings from 1929–33, is being completed, and the bilingual German-English edition of the Big Typescript (2005) is already widely used, Cambridge University Press has just announced the publication of G.E. Moore's notes of Wittgenstein's lectures 1930–33 (Wittgenstein 2016). (Facsimiles of these notes are already now available on the wittgensteinsource.org site.)

Mauro Engelmann's book is a contribution to middle Wittgenstein studies that we can be most grateful for. The editors of the forthcoming edition of Moore's notes aim at giving us as much as possible the actual phrases that Wittgenstein used in the lectures, trying to separate the words and sentences that Moore recorded during the lectures from later additions. Mauro Engelmann's complementary ambition is to go back to the original middle Wittgenstein as he manifests himself in the writings and records we have from the period between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, as much as possible digging out the Wittgenstein that appears here in addition to the Wittgenstein of the two principal works. This permits Engelmann to give us a view of Wittgenstein's middle philosophy/ies that is unbiased by perspectives driven by *Tractatus* or *Investigations* interpretation. This is not at all to say that Engelmann does not also accomplish the more common thing, namely to embed middle Wittgenstein in the development from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*; but most importantly he does something more: showing also the Wittgenstein that was independent of the two. This opposes both a strong continuity view of Wittgenstein's development and a one-change view.

To this end, Engelmann puts to work a large number of Nachlass and other sources that have heretofore been relatively little used. Engelmann's book should be among the first to be linked

directly from Wittgenstein Source, helping to make the Wittgenstein Nachlass more widely used and useable, e.g., through his many English translations of passages from the Nachlass so far only available in German, or by the many very valuable commentaries and analyses that he provides of Nachlass texts, including their local and genetic contexts.¹

I have said that Engelmann's book is primarily about the middle Wittgenstein, but it will be found very useful also by those who wish to learn more for the purpose of *Tractatus* and *Investigations* interpretation. The *Tractatus* is discussed at numerous places from the viewpoint of the middle and of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein, but Engelmann also treats the *Tractatus* independently of those viewpoints: so to speak, *on its own terms*. The *Investigations* are discussed mostly as emerging from what Engelmann takes to be the main achievements of the middle Wittgenstein, a *genetic method* and an *anthropological approach*, and these concepts are applied to the *Tractatus* as well as the later philosophizing. But it is exactly attention to these two achievements that permits new readings also of the *Investigations*. I will explain Engelmann's understanding of the two terms in more detail below.

Engelmann's book contains a careful study of Wittgenstein's development to the *Investigations*, and the title of the book is therefore appropriate. It is the successful fusion of the genetic method with the anthropological approach as well as their critical application to the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's own philosophies from the middle period, combined with a gentle, reader-friendly style, that characterize, according to Engelmann, the development toward the *Investigations*. Though the genetic method and the anthropological approach had—so Engelmann argues—already been put effectively to work in the *Brown Book*,

¹Other valuable books to link to and dealing with the same period would be, to mention only two and too little known ones, Sedmak (1996) and Paul (2007).

in the end they there became “boring & artificial” and not at all a reader-friendly enterprise (cf. Wittgenstein's Letter to Moore, 20 Nov. 1936, in Wittgenstein 1997). But while others have attributed to MS 142 (the *Investigations*' earliest text from 1936–37) the status of a substantially new beginning, Engelmann (207ff) disagrees and sees much more continuity than discontinuity between the *Brown Book* and the *Investigations*. The *Investigations*' principal achievements are that it applies the genetic method in less rigid ways (becoming thus less boring and artificial), that it applies the method in ways that are more in line with everyday experiences (balancing the anthropological approach focused on primitive languages and tribes with references to the readers' usually less exotic experiences), and that it makes the *Tractatus*—but also some of Wittgenstein's later philosophical ideas—a substantial and primary target for the application of the genetic method, thus giving us an important and authentic example of how to apply the method to one's own philosophizing. Consequently, while most scholars of the later Wittgenstein take the *Investigations* as their starting point and look back at the middle period from there, Engelmann opens up new perspectives on the *Investigations* developed “from within” Wittgenstein's writings up to 1936. He argues strongly that it is the *Investigations* that are to be seen and understood in terms of the background of the middle Wittgenstein rather than the other way around. This is an important contribution, considering that the majority of *Investigations* interpreters are either devoted to a severely text-immanent approach (see, e.g., von Savigny 1988) or to an approach that has a tendency to treat middle Wittgenstein's texts in terms of their later manifestations (or absence) in the *Investigations* (see, e.g., much of Baker and Hacker 1980).

The subtitle of Engelmann's book, “Phenomenology, Grammar, Method, and the Anthropological View”, offers us the book's four most important concepts as guides through Wittgenstein's development. Engelmann's approach permits

us not only to identify a middle Wittgenstein's philosophy that differs from the *Investigations*, but even different philosophies within it: "Wittgenstein had many changes of mind and they are so substantial that he can be understood as holding several different philosophies in the late twenties and early thirties" (from the abstract).

One such philosophy was the "phenomenological" one: one of the questions that the early middle Wittgenstein labored with—and to an extent that is almost entirely invisible from the *Investigations*—is the issue of phenomenological experience and its description in language. Engelmann shows how the early middle Wittgenstein was after the construction of a phenomenological language that lets us properly describe phenomenological experience. The *Tractatus* was lacking in this respect, a lacuna that came out in Wittgenstein's discussion of the color exclusion problem in *Some Remarks on Logical Form* (1929) and *Philosophical Remarks* (§§76ff, among other places). In contrast to other accounts (e.g., Stern 1995), Engelmann takes "phenomenological language" to mean a *Begriffsschrift*, a notation or symbolism in the Fregean sense, rather than "prose". One such notation that Wittgenstein would come up with is the color octahedron. But Wittgenstein found his search for such a symbolism for phenomenological experience (dated by Engelmann to February–October 1929) in the end unsuccessful. It is given up in favor of pursuing a more comprehensive, but less logistic, "phenomenological grammar" (this phase is dated by Engelmann to October 1929–May 1930). Ultimately, even this approach is abandoned, and a program of "just" studying and describing "physical language and grammar" is put in its place. This change has been described before as a turn that would inform Wittgenstein's entire later philosophy (e.g. Hintikka and Hintikka 1986).

The second philosophical topic that Engelmann considers central to Wittgenstein's philosophizing in those earliest years

after the return to Cambridge is Russell's causal theory of meaning, as expressed in *Analysis of Mind* (1921). Against it, Wittgenstein develops (or develops further from the *Tractatus*) his calculus conception of language. In the discussion of Wittgenstein's first two to three years after his return to Cambridge in 1929, Engelmann takes great care to show the variety and depths of the issues on which Wittgenstein labored: solipsism, the "given", verification and truth, the relation between everyday sentences ("hypotheses") and sense data protocols ("elementary propositions"), meaning, rule-following, intentionality, and so on. Most of them are associated with key figures of early analytic philosophy: Frege, Russell and last but not least members of the Vienna Circle as well as its precursors such as Mach and Boltzmann. Engelmann is always careful to base his interpretations on close readings of the relevant texts, and to consider alternative readings. But the most important achievement of those years was according to Engelmann not insights of content, but the *methodological* lessons that Wittgenstein draws from his work. These lead up to what Engelmann calls Wittgenstein's "genetic method". The genetic method becomes, as soon as it merges with the anthropological approach in the *Brown Book*, the unbeatable method of the later Wittgenstein.

What is the "genetic method"? In short, the term denotes Wittgenstein's method of "dissolving philosophical puzzles by the understanding of how they came about" (abstract). The genetic method is applied by Wittgenstein to both his own and others' philosophical ideas. An important context of origin for this method is Wittgenstein's self-critique of his own "phenomenological" philosophy, as it is assembled in TS 208, Wittgenstein's first typescript after his return to Cambridge in 1929. The critique takes place in MSS 111–114 (1931–32) and develops into an attempt to understand the origin of the views and aims of the phenomenological period, tracing them back to the first manuscripts of 1929. While the genetic method was first

applied to problems of his own, he then also uses it for understanding better the philosophical problems of Russell, as well as others.

One important point is that, though the method is first used as an instrument to let him—Wittgenstein—better understand *himself*, he will eventually regard its use as a required vehicle also for adequately addressing and including his reader. As Wittgenstein needs to understand his philosophical problems *genetically* in order to (dis)solve them, so the reader won't be able to get any help from Wittgenstein's (dis)solution if he isn't able to join in already on the level of genetic analysis. The reader needs first to understand where her philosophical problems come from before she can appreciate the tools offered by Wittgenstein for treating them. "The goal of the genetic method is to make the reader see, as though in a mirror, what has led or may lead him to puzzlement" (3). In order to apply the genetic method well, "no specific philosophical views should be presupposed, i.e., the method asks for philosophical neutrality" (*ibid.*).

It is here where the notion of an overview or perspicuous presentation of our language, as it works, and as allegedly neutral, makes its strong entrance. But Wittgenstein had then coupled his idea of perspicuous presentation with a concept of "grammar" that was all but neutral, something that Piero Sraffa forcefully pointed out to him. According to Engelmann, the entire Big Typescript (1933) was under the unfortunate burden of this concept of grammar, which was driven by a calculus ideal/idol. It was focused on the boundaries between sense and nonsense rather than devoted to theory-free perspicuous presentation on the basis of actual and functional language usage. This "calculus conception" of language was the theory that had to be replaced with the non-theoretical anthropological approach, inspired by Sraffa and his Neopolitan gesture: "languages of gestures as well as many primitive languages taken in isolation

don't fit into the central role that Wittgenstein ascribed to sentences in the logical calculus of the T [*Tractatus*] and of its revised grammar-version in the BT [Big Typescript]" (153).

Wittgenstein now adopts the "anthropological" approach, studying real or invented cases of "primitive" languages that require focusing on the environments where these languages function. It is the exploration of these environments that provides the means for understanding how both primitive languages and our actual language work. The anthropological approach thus provides what the calculus conception had distorted: a neutral presentation of the grammar of our language.

The turn to the anthropological approach implies a different distribution of work among Wittgenstein's key concepts, and "grammar" loses weight in Wittgenstein's further development: "Wittgenstein's new trend is to consider the purpose and the point of languages and language-games precisely in 'human societies'. This implies a broader notion of use, which is not restricted to the position of words in a calculus; a use of words that 'meshes with life'" (162). "Grammar" gets partly replaced by "use" (and is eventually completely replaceable by "use" in the *Brown Book*). Equally, the Big Typescript's focus on the border between sense and nonsense as articulable by rules gets replaced by a study of the function of expressions in concrete usage, always with an eye on the context. I have heretofore not seen any other discussion of the influence of Sraffa's "Neopolitan gesture" (in the two versions of the story) as careful and comprehensive as Engelmann's; in this Engelmann also utilizes new evidence recently brought to light by Venturinha (2012). It is Sraffa who makes Wittgenstein leave the calculus conception, and Wittgenstein would later then apply the genetic method to precisely also this calculus conception from the early 30s.

According to Engelmann it is in the *Blue Book*, particularly its portion from 1934, that the genetic method is for the first time successfully applied, as recommended by the anthropological

approach, freed from the regime of “normative” grammar. In this piece, Wittgenstein succeeds in living up to his idea of offering a mirror to the philosopher and consistently diagnoses his problems as outcomes of him being misled by analogies. Engelmann does a great job in illustrating precisely this:

The topics discussed in the BB [*Blue Book*] are always related to misleading analogies that supposedly lead philosophers to formulate philosophical problems (see BB: 1, 7, 9, 23, 26, 29, 35, 48, 56). The book opens with the description of the misleading comparison between nouns that refer to objects and the ones that don't. The second discussed analogy is the one between the locality of sentences and thought (BB, 7); the third analogy discussed is the one between being conscious and knowing something (BB, 23); the fourth is the example of the measurement of time from Augustine (BB, 27); the fifth is between ‘to say something’ and ‘to mean something’ (BB, 35); the sixth is related to different uses of ‘subjective’ that are taken as the same (BB, 48); the seventh analogy discussed is the one between metaphysical and empirical propositions (BB, 56). This strategy is combined with the indication of moments in the philosophical reasoning where one is inclined to formulate a philosophical question based on unclear assumptions and a ‘grammatical remark’ that is, as Russell writes, “so simple as not to seem worth stating.” Wittgenstein tries to indicate the moment when one takes the first of a series of false steps. These are indicated by expressions like “tempted to ...” (182)

The reader can recognize himself in these temptations and may consequently become receptive also to the remedies that Wittgenstein offers. But still the *Blue Book* required improvements. First, it had not really managed to *integrate* primitive languages (though introduced and defined) into its genetic procedure. Second, it was one thing to diagnose philosophical problems as resulting from false analogies, while it is another more difficult thing to put a finger on the “exact point where an analogy begins to mislead us” (*Blue Book*, 28). But it may be decisive to achieve precisely this: not only knowledge of which analogy misleads us, and where, but also control over the point

at which the analogy misleads us. The subsequent *Brown Book* wants to respond also to this need, specifically and continuously trying to give examples of identifying the spots where things start going wrong. Starting off from a very simple primitive language (the builders’ language), the *Brown Book* explores step by step more and more complex terrains. With each step not only is complexity added, but equally the danger of going wrong, being misled:

Note that each new extension of the simpler first language, i.e., each new level of complexity, introduces new philosophical temptations connected to the new kinds of words, the new tools, introduced. This means that the genetic method and anthropological view are working in association. (191)

Continuously new primitive languages (language games) are introduced as objects of comparison, while interwoven reflections are added that help the philosopher become aware of, why and *where* analogies can mislead and philosophical problems begin.

Engelmann offers a thoroughly consistent reading of the *Brown Book* as fully guided by the unified application of the genetic method and the anthropological approach. Engelmann also does detailed textual work, drawing our attention to the phrasings Wittgenstein uses to identify the “turning points” where analogies become misleading (192): “inclined to ...” (BrB: 80, 86, 88, 113, 120), “tempts us ...” (BrB, 114), “tendency” (BrB, 117), “it seemed to us ...” (BrB, 124), “tempted to ...” (BrB: 78, 82, 125). Engelmann also has things to say about the *Brown Book*’s translation into German in the second part of MS 115 (1936; Engelmann refers to it as “BrBG”). One new aspect he sees coming in is that successful philosophy can consist in proposing *new* analogies that are alternative to the analogies holding us captive: “Wittgenstein wants to point out that ‘an analogy made our thinking captive and brings it away without resistance’ (BrBG, 156) and that a different analogy may break

the spell of what we see as an obvious necessity" (196).

Wittgenstein abandons his German translation (and revision) of the *Brown Book* on MS 115's page 292, characterizing it as "worthless". But Engelmann finds this termination (shall we say: of the entire *Brown Book* project?) less dramatic than others have taken it to be. What are, according to Engelmann, Wittgenstein's reasons for dissatisfaction? The *Brown Book's* application of the anthropological approach had become too rigid and therefore "boring and artificial". While the *Blue Book* had made too little of the idea of primitive languages, in the *Brown Book* now almost *everything* had to turn around them and have them as starting point:

Even the more complex languages of the BrB that gradually appear are associated with tribes or societies (BrB §§1, 5, 30, 32, 39, 40, 46, 48, 49, 58, 59). In fact, *all* sections of part I of the BrB are directly introduced in a minimally described form of life or indirectly associated with one. (191)

Wittgenstein had also felt "cramped" (Letter to Moore from 20 Nov. 1936, already quoted above) by the *Brown Book's* original English when doing the German version. If his envisaged second book were to be able to fulfill its purpose and keep the reader adequately engaged and interested, its style and form had to become much more familiar and not as rigid. The emphasis had to balance back from invoking extraordinary tribes to referring to something less distant and resembling more adequately our *ordinary* life experiences. These were important matters to consider for Wittgenstein when now rewriting his work into the *Investigations*. But there was also one other thing: the genetic method should be much more comprehensively applied to his *own* philosophy. The earlier *Tractatus*, his first work in philosophy, should become the primary subject of the genetic method. Engelmann summarizes:

Why did Wittgenstein decide to apply his method to his own work in a systematic manner after BrBG? There are two reasons for this.

To apply the genetic method to his work would give the reader a good example of the method; second, the examination of old views could make clear how his then current views were different from the views expressed in the *T[ractatus]*. The most interesting aspect of the remarks of the notebooks from the beginning of 1937 is Wittgenstein's interest in pointing out the path that brought him to his assumptions in the *T[ractatus]*. (212)

Philosophy should be shown to be first of all self-critical engagement: "work on oneself", as Wittgenstein put it in MS 112 in October 1931.

Engelmann holds that the genetic method remained the main method also in the *Investigations*. But this seems at odds with *Investigations* §133 where a multiplicity of methods seems to be defended and promoted. Engelmann devotes to this passage detailed discussion, granting that "[i]f Wittgenstein ever assumed that *all* philosophical problems have a false analogy at their bottom, then this assumption is abandoned by the time of the PI [= *Investigations*]" (225). In this respect, Engelmann finds *Investigations* §90 very telling, quoting it by marking "among other things" with italics:

Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one. And this inquiry sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, *among other things*, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language. (PI §90, my [Engelmann's] emphasis)

Engelmann demonstrates again the value of text-genetic studies: "The part that I italicized is a small but significant *addition* to the previous versions of the PI. In the last version of the *Investigations* (TS 227), Wittgenstein clearly avoids a dogmatic position according to which *all* philosophical problems are prompted by false analogies." Thus, the "among other things" was added by Wittgenstein, according to Engelmann, in order to counter the idea that *all* philosophical problems originate from false analogies.

With this Engelmann's main argument—that the *Investigations* primarily deals with those problems of philosophy that are thought to result from misleading analogies—can stay in place. Actually, according to Engelmann (227) the clearest description of the genetic method is to be found in a manuscript that marks the start of the *Investigations*, MS 142:

One of our most important tasks is to express all false trains of thought so true to character that the reader says, "Yes that's exactly the way I mean it". To trace the physiognomy of every error.

We can only bring someone away from a mistake if he acknowledges this expression as the correct expression of his feeling.

Only if he acknowledges it as such is it the right expression. (Psychoanalysis)

What the other acknowledges is the analogy that I'm presenting to him as the source of his thought. (MS 142 (UF) §§121; TS 220 (FF), §106; TS 239(BFF), §139; modified translation of BT, 410)

The few critical questions and disagreements I have with Engelmann's book in no way impugn my great appreciation of its thoroughness and comprehensiveness in the texts and topics it deals with. The book is an impressive example of unremitting investigation, never giving up before some defensible answers are found. There are only two to three things that I would like to discuss in conclusion of this review, to be understood more in terms of topics that I would have wished to see dealt with (more) than as fundamental criticism.

First, Engelmann does not trace Wittgenstein's genetic method to factors outside of his authorship and thinking. But this may enlighten the genetic method's role and scope further. Isn't it plausible that Wittgenstein took at least parts of this method from other thinkers? Can/should it be related to for example Ernst Mach's method of analyzing conceptual problems in physics in terms of the historical origin of these concepts?² The answer to this question is one of my

²"The gist and kernel of mechanical ideas has in almost every case grown

wish-list items, underlining the importance of studies such as Janik's *Studies in the Genesis of Wittgenstein's Concept of Philosophy* (2009) and Biesenbach's *Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins* (2014). Second, Engelmann does not really trace the genetic method in Wittgenstein to the time *before* middle Wittgenstein. But is it clear that the genetic method first began with Wittgenstein's self-critique of his phenomenological phase? Could there not have been similar processes and procedures already in the much earlier workings and writings leading up to the *Tractatus*?

This brings me to the last point I want to address here. Engelmann presents Wittgenstein's philosophical development under a template of linearity and step-by-step change. After his return to Cambridge, Wittgenstein takes up questions and issues that were left unsatisfactorily dealt with in the *Tractatus*; this brings him to his "phenomenological" philosophy; problems arising from this new philosophy as well as the philosophy of others (such as Russell) bring him to develop the calculus conception of language; the calculus conception is in turn later replaced by the anthropological conception. The genetic method is first applied properly in the *Blue Book*, though without adequate integration with the anthropological approach; this is subsequently taken care of by the *Brown Book*. The *Investigations* improve further on matters of style and application of the method. And so on. Engelmann's Wittgenstein follows a "not yet there, but coming next" scheme. But alternative views of Wittgenstein's philosophical development are possible, and may be in some areas also more sensible.

Is it correct to regard the Big Typescript as more or less solely

up in the investigation of very simple and special cases of mechanical processes; and the analysis of the history of the discussions concerning these cases must ever remain the method at once the most effective and the most natural for laying this gist and kernel bare. Indeed, it is not too much to say that it is the only way in which a real comprehension of the general upshot of mechanics is to be attained" (Mach 1919, ix-x).

defending and promoting the calculus conception, as Engelmann does? Or does it also bring in competing conceptions, showing a struggle between the calculus and the other conceptions? I myself consider the calculus conception only *one* of the Big Typescript's lines of argument, and take it that this line is authentically and successfully challenged already *in* the Big Typescript, especially in its early remarks about the "amorphousness" of meaning.

An alternative to Engelmann's approach would be to leave the "first *a*, then *b*" approach and rather look at the matter in this way: while *a* and *b* may be continuously *simultaneously* present in Wittgenstein's thought, it is the weighting and rating which each receives that changes. If viewed in this way, it is not so much that the calculus conception is replaced by the anthropological conception, but rather that the room and the role that are attributed to it in some contexts become qualified and restricted, while it may still be active and awaiting new tasks in other contexts. To put it differently, the anthropological approach may not have been a *deus ex machina* discovery of the early 30s, but rather it (or precursors of it) may have already been available to and in Wittgenstein before, but just not allowed to do the right job and be properly thematized. It needed Sraffa to be brought to the fore. On this view, Wittgenstein's development can be seen more in terms of a continuous struggle between constantly present views and approaches and the iterative weighting of their relation and less in terms of a linear development from one view to another. Such a perspective might also permit us to see *many* self-standing methods at work in the *Investigations* rather than to consider them primarily manifestations and subtypes of a genetic method only. Of course the genetic method is undoubtedly a central ingredient of the *Investigations*, and it is Engelmann's achievement to have given us a much better understanding of its meaning and history than has been available before.

Nothing of what I have put forward here in terms of questions or comments should be understood to diminish Engelmann's achievements, or his book's merits.

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