Wittgenstein's Pre-*Tractatus* Writings
Interpretations and Reappraisals

Edited by
Jimmy Plourde
Mathieu Marion

palgrave
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History of Analytic Philosophy

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Editors

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Editors
Jimmy Plourde
Department of Philosophy and Arts
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
Trois-Rivières, QC, Canada

Mathieu Marion
Department of Philosophy
Université du Québec à Montréal
Montreal, QC, Canada

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Series Editor's Foreword

During the first half of the twentieth century, analytic philosophy gradually established itself as the dominant tradition in the English-speaking world, and over the last few decades, it has taken firm root in many other parts of the world. There has been increasing debate over just what 'analytic philosophy' means, as the movement has ramified into the complex tradition that we know today, but the influence of the concerns, ideas and methods of early analytic philosophy on contemporary thought is indisputable. All this has led to greater self-consciousness among analytic philosophers about the nature and origins of their tradition, and scholarly interest in its historical development and philosophical foundations has blossomed in recent years, with the result that the history of analytic philosophy is now recognized as a major field of philosophy in its own right.

The main aim of the series in which the present book appears, the first series of its kind, is to create a venue for work on the history of analytic philosophy, consolidating the area as a major field of philosophy and promoting further research and debate. The 'history of analytic philosophy' is understood broadly, as covering the period from the last three decades of the nineteenth century to the start of the twenty-first century, beginning with the work of Frege, Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein, who are generally regarded as its main founders, and the influences upon them, and going right up to the most recent developments. In allowing

the 'history' to extend to the present, the aim is to encourage engagement with contemporary debates in philosophy, for example, in showing how the concerns of early analytic philosophy relate to current concerns. In focusing on analytic philosophy, the aim is not to exclude comparisons with other—earlier or contemporary—traditions, or consideration of figures or themes that some might regard as marginal to the analytic tradition but which also throw light on analytic philosophy. Indeed, a further aim of the series is to deepen our understanding of the broader context in which analytic philosophy developed, by looking, for example, at the roots of analytic philosophy in neo-Kantianism or British idealism, or the connections between analytic philosophy and phenomenology, or discussing the work of philosophers who were important in the development of analytic philosophy but who are now often forgotten.

One of the most canonical texts of analytic philosophy—perhaps *the* canonical text—is the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), published in German in 1921 and in its first English translation in 1922. Rooted in a conception of propositions as pictures, this short (70-page) treatise offers an account of the relationship between language, logic, and the world that has often been seen as inaugurating the linguistic turn in philosophy, influencing the development of both logical positivism and what became known in the 1930s as the Cambridge School of Analysis. It is the only book Wittgenstein published in his lifetime and all his other works, published posthumously, criticize, in one way or another, among many other things, the ideas of the *Tractatus*. The *Tractatus* has thus been taken as having a foundational status as far as understanding Wittgenstein's philosophy throughout his life is concerned.

In the present volume, edited by Mathieu Marion and Jimmy Plourde, this foundational status is questioned by directing our attention to Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* writings. Ever since these were published, they have been used to help understand Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which is notoriously aphoristic and cryptic, with its argumentation left to be reconstructed by the reader. But this has meant that scholars have tended to adopt what Marion and Plourde call a 'teleological approach' to the pre-*Tractatus* writings, concerned solely with their role in filling out the argumentation of the *Tractatus*. The pre-*Tractatus* writings, they argue,

however, have interest in their own right—in showing ideas and views that Wittgenstein either considered or held himself at some point in his earlier thinking that did not end up in the *Tractatus*. There is thus both a 'completeness argument' and a 'genetic argument' for investigating these writings, to provide both a fuller account of his early philosophy and a deeper understanding of its development.

This in turn means a repudiation of what Marion and Plourde call the 'piecemeal approach' to the pre-*Tractatus* writings, which just selects certain passages for the light they can shed on the *Tractatus*, without considering the wider context in which they are embedded. A systematic approach should be adopted instead, they argue, which takes a particular topic, identifies all the views that Wittgenstein held or considered, reconstructs and evaluates the relevant arguments, and explains the development of his thinking. This is their 'methodological argument' for 'a systematic step-by-step study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings', which is what is impressively illustrated in the chapters of this book. Covering topics from Wittgenstein's early conception(s) of philosophy, logic, and modality to his views on ethics, aesthetics, and the meaning of life, this volume as a whole offers a much richer and more rounded account of his pre-*Tractatus* thinking than has emerged in the scholarly literature on Wittgenstein's early work to date. As we now enter the second century since the publication of the *Tractatus*, with new translations of it also being done, we can look forward to a much deeper understanding and engagement with the work of a thinker who clearly stands out now as one of the major figures of twentieth-century philosophy.

King's College   Michael Beaney
University of Aberdeen
Aberdeen, UK
December 2023

Praise for *Wittgenstein's Pre-Tractatus Writings*

This volume brings into focus the unique importance of Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* writings. These contributed chapters show that Wittgenstein's earliest writings are worth studying for their own sake. They also reveal how much one can still learn about the *Tractatus*, if one is to study them not as documenting one's prior interpretation of the *Tractatus* but as a series of steps in Wittgenstein's thought, some down paths that are later abandoned, some leading towards it. The volume thus offers not only a fresh perspective on the pre-*Tractatus* writings, it also offers a comprehensive reading of a wide range of central topics within Wittgenstein's early philosophy.

"This is an excellent book. Its chapters advance our understanding of Wittgenstein's early philosophy in important ways."
—José Zalabardo, *University College London*

"With a number of important contributions, the book highlights Wittgenstein's path to the *Tractatus* and emphasizes the under-appreciated significance of the pre-*Tractatus* writings."
—Mauro L. Engelmann, *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*

"The book focuses on the pre-*Tractatus* writings from a new and illuminating perspective, by dealing with them not only as writings containing preparatory material for Wittgenstein's early masterpiece but as an autonomous source of ideas concerning many crucial topics in the philosophy of language and logic. The papers collected in the volume provide a valuable and original contribution to Wittgenstein scholarship: all those who wish to deepen their understanding of the early Wittgenstein's thought taken in its entirety should read the book."
—Pasquale Frascolla, *University of Naples Federico II*

"A deeply learned volume conveying the philosophical significance of Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* writings. Excellent and novel analyses of the most fundamental problems are here, alongside striking overviews of Wittgenstein's philosophical aims and detailed tracing of his thought-moves. The path to the *Tractatus* is shown to be a philosophical journey in its own right, anticipating Wittgenstein's future."
—Juliet Floyd, *Boston University*

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Notes on Contributors

Hanne Appelqvist is Docent of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Helsinki and currently works as the deputy director of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. She is the author of *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics* (2023) and editor of *Wittgenstein and the Limits of Language* (2020).

Guido Bonino teaches History of Philosophy at Università di Torino.

Fraser MacBride is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *On the Genealogy of Universals: The Metaphysical Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (2018).

Mathieu Marion is Professor of Philosophy at Université du Québec à Montréal.

Kevin Mulligan is Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophical Studies, University of Italian Switzerland, and Honorary Professor of Analytic Philosophy at the University of Geneva. He is the author of *Wittgenstein et la philosophie austro-allemande* (2012), which has been translated into Italian and Spanish (2014).

Martin Pilch is an independent scholar.

Jimmy Plourde is Professor of Analytic Philosophy at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.

Ian Proops is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin.

Janyne Sattler is Professor of Philosophy at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

Sanford Shieh is Professor of Philosophy at Wesleyan University.

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Introduction

Mathieu Marion and Jimmy Plourde

Sometime after his arrival in Cambridge in October 1911, Wittgenstein started to write down his thoughts in notebooks.[1] In contradistinction to the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein *states* the results of his thinking in a

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[1] As far as we know, only three of these notebooks survived. In fact, there would have been more than one notebook from the time Wittgenstein spent in Cambridge (the "Cambridge notebooks") that were left there when Wittgenstein departed for Norway and which Russell was instructed to destroy after the war (Wittgenstein 2012, 69). There would be another one from the year Wittgenstein spent in Norway (the "Norwegian notebook"), and at least another four notebooks from the time of the First World War (the "wartime notebooks") with, among them, the three surviving ones. According to von Wright, the latter survived despite Wittgenstein's order during his last stay in Vienna in 1949–1950 to destroy his notebooks because they had been left at the house of Wittgenstein's youngest sister in Gmunden (the "Gmunden notebooks," i.e., MS101, MS102 and MS103) (von Wright 1982b). The first two are continuous and were written from 22.8.14 to 22.6.15. The third one was written from 15.4.16 to 10.1.17, and so there must have been a fourth one between the second and the third Gmunden notebooks. The surviving notebooks form the core of the *Notebooks 1914–1916*. An English-language translation of the coded remarks of a personal nature that were written on the left-hand page of these notebooks were recently published under the title *Private Notebooks 1914–1916* (Wittgenstein 2022). The existence of at least one further notebook following the last of the the Gmunden notebooks has also been postulated. On this, Cf. Potter 2013 and Pilch 2022.

M. Marion
Department of Philosophy, Université du Québec à Montréal,
Montreal, QC, Canada
e-mail: marion.mathieu@uqam.ca

rather dogmatical tone, these notebooks are of an exploratory nature.[2] He expresses himself freely and appears to be, so to speak, "thinking out loud," critically examining possible solutions to philosophical problems for which he provides not only explicit formulations, but sometimes even labels.[3] His discussion of these problems stretches over time and often oscillates between different options, depending on the arguments at hand, without usually ever being explicitly clearly settled for good at the end. This makes it difficult to tell whether or not what appears to be Wittgenstein's final word on some issue really is the terminus ad quem of a given deliberation.

Wittgenstein also selected, at some points in time, remarks from these notebooks, as he dictated notes and typescripts that would reflect the positions he had reached on the problems he had been working on. At first, it seems to have been primarily in order to communicate and discuss his results with Russell and, to a lesser extent, Moore, something he was constantly doing through conversations and letters, but in a more limited manner. These texts prominently include the 1913 "Notes on logic" (NB, 93–107) and the "Notes dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway" (NB,

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[2] The notebooks are filled with questions and Wittgenstein's remarks usually are attempts at a solution to a given question or related to some question or some difficulty raised by an answer to a previous question. A quick survey of both texts with Adobe's search function identifies 26 question marks in the body of the German edition of the *Tractatus*, whereas it identified 634 occurrences of those marks in the bilingual edition of the *Notebooks*, so more or less 317 for the German pages only (though there are sometimes double occurrences of the question mark for one question).

[3] Wittgenstein explicitly labels the following problems: "The problem of truth" (NB 6(7)), "The problems of negation, of disjunction of true and false" (NB 40(9)), "The old problem of complex and fact" (NB 48(2)), "The problem of life" (NB 74(1)). In his letters to Russell where he talks about his work, Wittgenstein also mentions: "The complex problem" (Wittgenstein 2012, 8 and 10), "The problem of "∨"" (Wittgenstein 2012, 6), "the problem of the apparent variable" (Wittgenstein 2012, 6), and "the fundamental problem of logic" (Wittgenstein 2012, 30). Talk of "problems" is however far from being restricted to the ones that have been labelled. It is pervasive throughout the notebooks and the list of problems Wittgenstein deals with is even much longer if we include all mentions of a given question Wittgenstein deals with, such as "The question how a correlation of relations is possible" which is said to be "identical with the problem of truth" (NB 6(7)).

J. Plourde (✉)

Department of Philosophy and Arts, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, QC, Canada

e-mail: jimmy.plourde@uqtr.ca

108–119).[4] Since they are usually made out of the notebooks remarks and sometimes are improving on them, these texts constitute, as Martin Pilch already pointed out, a second layer of texts and an intermediary stage in the composition of the *Tractatus* (Pilch 2022, 48–49). They are less interrogative and contain results that are more definitive than those to be found in the notebooks.[5] Since they were elaborated by compiling remarks of lost notebooks, they also provide us with a rough idea about some of their content.

In a letter to Russell of October 1915, Wittgenstein writes that he had "recently done a great deal of work" and that he is "in the process of summarizing it all and writing it down in the form of a treatise" (Wittgenstein 2012, 51). This appears to be the first mention of work on what was to become the *Tractatus*.[6] It is thus the starting point of a subsequent phase of more thoroughly worked out writings. Thus, a longer manuscript, the *Prototractatus*, was put together in different steps on the basis of the notebooks and typescripts available to Wittgenstein at the time (Pilch 2022, 58–61). On the cover page of this manuscript stands the affirmation that "Between these sentences all good sentences of my other manuscripts were inserted" (PT, iii). That this first version of the *Tractatus* draws on all the work that has been done before finds further confirmation in another letter to Russell from March 1919 where Wittgenstein says: "I've written

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[4] The "text of "Notes on Logic" is itself the result of two typescripts, the "Birmingham typescript" and the "Cambridge typescript" that are now lost. Only the translation by Russell and an arranged version of this material, again by Russell, the so-called Costello version, still exists. (On this, see Potter 2011, 261–295.) There also might have been another text entitled "Logik" or "Logic" that Wittgenstein would have written to fulfill a requirement for the obtaining of a BA degree, and that was brought back to Cambridge by Moore in April 1914 for that purpose. But there is a controversy over the identity of this text, whether it is the "Notes dictated to G. E. Moore," the "Notes on logic" or another text that would be lost (Cf. Potter 2013, 15–17; McGuinness 1988, 198–201). There is also the possibility of an "Olmütz typescript," that would have been produced from the Norwegian notebook and three further notebooks, see Potter 2013, 18–19.

[5] In a May 1915 letter to Russell, Wittgenstein writes about the "Notes dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway": "I regard them essentially as definitive (*endgültig richtig*)" (Wittgenstein 2012, 50).

[6] There is a debate among scholars concerning the moment when Wittgenstein began work towards the *Tractatus* (On this, cf. Geschkowski 2001; Potter 2013 and Pilch 2022). We cannot go here into the details of this debate and we do not want to imply that it somehow started in October 1915. Our point here is only that, regardless as to when it exactly began, what Wittgenstein describes in the quoted letter is an important shift that marks the beginning of a new phase in the process that leads to the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's purpose has now changed and his thought is closer than ever to the reaching of its final expression in the form of a treatise.

a book called 'Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung' containing all my work of the last six years" (Wittgenstein 2012, 56). Though they were not initially all written as remarks meant for some treatise, it thus seems that all the material produced by Wittgenstein during the period was taken into account in the elaboration of the *Tractatus*. Along with Wittgenstein's letters of that period (Wittgenstein 2012), these manuscripts and typescripts thus constitute a body of texts that build on each other and that we shall here refer to as the pre-*Tractatus* writings, i.e., the material that was written *before* the *Tractatus*, but contributory to its production.

Since the publication of the first edition of the *Notebooks 1914–1916* in 1961, the pre-*Tractatus* writings have largely been considered as a valuable source for the understanding of the *Tractatus*. Already in their preface to this edition, G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe were acknowledging this, writing that they "publish this material as an aid to students of the *Tractatus*" (Wittgenstein 1961, v). More specifically, the *Notebooks* "shew clearly" according to them "what problems formed the context of Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Tractatus*: in this way it will serve to cut short some argument where wholly irrelevant context are supposed by an interpretation" (Wittgenstein 1961, v).

Though they may certainly help to prevent irrelevant interpretations, the usefulness of the pre-*Tractatus* writings isn't however limited to this. The *Tractatus* is certainly an enigmatic work. Arguably, this enigmatic character is chiefly caused by the absence of contextual elements surrounding the cryptic remarks in which Wittgenstein expresses himself (Klagge 2021). Among the missing elements of context, there is indeed the omission of the problem or problems a remark was meant to address, but also the lack of explanations as to what a given remark should be taken to say and, often, the lack of arguments in support of these remarks. Without contextual elements to most of its remarks, the book is hardly understandable. Now, since a majority of remarks in the *Tractatus* can be traced back to their occurrences in the pre-*Tractatus* writings, they seem well-suited to provide us many of the missing ingredients for our understanding of it. To that extent, they manage to establish themselves over the years not only as a helpful or illuminating source for the understanding of the *Tractatus*, but as an indispensable one.

This way of looking at the pre-*Tractatus* writings has led many to the views that besides being an indispensable aid for the understanding of the *Tractatus*, the pre-*Tractatus* writings do not have any interest on their own and that they are at any rate not philosophically valuable. After all, though the contextual elements that were deliberately omitted remain valuable for the illumination they provide of the latter remarks, everything else appears to have been deemed not worthy of being selected and integrated into the *Tractatus*. On top of this, apart from topics for which some remarks of the *Notebooks* became famous, such as the first mention of the idea that propositions are pictures, what is being said in them appeared to many as not very substantial. It looks more like ideas Wittgenstein is floating around, without having made his mind. Therefore, except maybe for some of the more worked out passages, these writings seem not to contain sufficiently elaborated views or anything close to the level of sophistication of the *Tractatus*, so the remainder is seen as not being worth studying for its own sake.

The view that limits the interest of the pre-*Tractatus* writings to what support they may give to one's reading of the *Tractatus*, with the residual material being deemed of little value is what we would like to call the "teleological approach" to the pre-*Tractatus* writings, as it subordinates their interest to their sole role of helping us to understand the *Tractatus*. This teleological approach might very well be part of the reasons why the pre-*Tractatus* writings have attracted relatively little interest ever since their first publication, and very little interest apart from their significance and utility in understanding the *Tractatus*. As a matter of fact, more than sixty years after the publication of the first edition, there has been not a single book-length study dedicated to them. The only exception, an important one, is Michael Potter's *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic* (Potter 2011), which deals mainly with the earliest texts of the period and stands out in its approach and depth. But how could that be? Are the pre-*Tractatus* writings really too philosophically insignificant not to be worth studying for their own sake?

Though they were not meant to be and are certainly not as important as the *Tractatus*, we are convinced that the pre-*Tractatus* writings have been underestimated and that there are still unexplored valuable philosophical contributions in these texts that are worth studying for their

own sake. In other words, in the same spirit as Michael Potter's work on the "Notes on Logic," we believe that it is also true of the pre-*Tractatus* writings as a whole that treating them "as a work in its own right might pay both historical and philosophical dividends" (Potter 2011, 249). We would like here to indicate some of the main reasons why these writings are historically and philosophically valuable.

Beyond the contextual elements that are missing in the *Tractatus*, there often are original views of interest of their own in the pre-*Tractatus* writings on fundamental topics, that are not to be dealt with in the *Tractatus*, either because Wittgenstein rejected these views for some good reason, but sometimes simply because he just gave up the issue or the thesis he once considered. As a matter of fact—and this will become clear in their presentation below—all contributions to this volume deal with positions or issues of this type, on topics such as the nature of philosophy, the *a priori*, modality, essence, negation and the meaning of life. If this is correct, this means that Wittgenstein's early thought is not reducible to the *Tractatus*. It also includes these other views that do or may differ from positions stated in the *Tractatus* and were not always explicitly rejected by Wittgenstein. Since these views are not present in the *Tractatus*, approaching these writings for the illumination they might bring on some of its remarks, as the teleological approach has it, will not help one to find them out. The narrow scope of the teleological approach makes it hard for anybody fully to grasp Wittgenstein's early thought, and would thereby condemn one to an incomplete account of it. This is what one could call the "completeness argument" in favour of a more thorough study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings. One should study them because there is more in Wittgenstein's "early philosophy" than there is in the *Tractatus* and what there is can only be appreciated by the study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings in a nonteleological manner.

One of the reasons original contributions in the *Notebooks* not occurring in the *Tractatus* were not seriously considered might well be that most commentators are usually too convinced of the unity between the pre-*Tractatus* writings and the *Tractatus* to admit any substantial disagreement between both. Maybe this is more than probable if we think of the last of the pre-*Tractatus* writings, but it is certainly not so clear with the earlier notebooks. From 1912 until the completion of the *Tractatus*,

Wittgenstein's thought evolved on many topics, some earlier views being altogether rejected in favour of what was to become the *Tractatus* view on the matter. This is also part of Wittgenstein's early philosophy and if we want to have not only a complete interpretation of his early thought, but a correct interpretation as to how it evolved from his very first preoccupations with the nature of logic towards the *Tractatus*, then we must also take into account this material, even though it is not part of it, and even if one can show that he explicitly rejected some of it. This is, one might say, the "genetic argument" in favour of the study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings. Even if Wittgenstein's "early philosophy" finds its final formulation in the *Tractatus*, the process that lead to this is complex and can only be fully appreciated through the study of Wittgenstein's path to it, i.e., through the study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings. This also involves jettisoning the teleological approach, inasmuch as its starting point is often an interpretation of the *Tractatus* obtained independently of a serious study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings, that are then solely mined for passages confirming one's prior interpretation. We take it that Michael Potter's *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic* (Potter 2011) takes precisely the opposite stance, namely that of reading Wittgenstein step-by-step from the very beginning.

Another mistake induced by the teleological approach is methodological, it consists in what we call the "piecemeal approach" to these writings. This approach consists of dealing with the pre-*Tractatus* writings position on some issue only insofar as it might settle or contribute to settle what the *Tractatus* has to say on this issue.[7] In other words, whenever evidence is lacking to settle a question regarding what Wittgenstein holds in the *Tractatus* on some issue, then and only then, should one consider fruitfully looking at the pre-*Tractatus* writings and search for a piece of evidence that confirms some hypothesis regarding this issue. Usually, this search for a piece of evidence in favour of some reading is being done without taking into account everything Wittgenstein says on the issue in the pre-*Tractatus* writings and without making sure that the remark one

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[7] Though it may be seen in many studies of the early Wittgenstein, a good example is David Pears' "Principle of representation," that Pears attributes to the *Tractatus* on the basis of a remark of the *Notebooks* that is part of a longer treatment of the issue at stake, a principle that is rejected however few days later in the *Notebooks*. On this, see Plourde 2005.

wants to rely on really is the view Wittgenstein held on the issue and not a mere attempt at a solution that he was going explicitly to dismiss few days later. Of course, this is especially problematic as an approach towards the earlier pre-*Tractatus* writings, since, as we pointed out above, these are often of a tentative and exploratory nature and there are shifts in Wittgenstein's position in them. He sometimes even hesitates over a certain period of time between different alternatives, and his final position on a given issue is not always clearly stated. Thus, a piecemeal approach is liable to error and may not allow anybody fully to appreciate the value of Wittgenstein's reflections on a given question, simply because, pursuing the piecemeal approach, one will simply ignore Wittgenstein's overall discussion. Thus, one risks misinterpreting the pre-*Tractatus* writings. And since this misinterpretation of the pre-*Tractatus* writings is meant as evidence to settle a dispute over some issue in the *Tractatus*, one is potentially failing to read Wittgenstein correctly. The pre-*Tractatus* writings potential as an aid for the understanding of the *Tractatus* is thereby in jeopardy.

In order to avoid this and manage really to find out what was Wittgenstein's position on some issue, one must rather proceed systematically by first identifying all remarks on a given topic, all positions Wittgenstein held, on the basis of which argument, and only then may one have a better idea as to what in the end Wittgenstein excluded, and what he thought to be correct, and for what reason. In this way, there might still remain a gap between the last pre-*Tractatus* writings position and the *Tractatus* position, so that one might not be able to rely on the former to settle an issue in the latter. But if there is no such gap, if we are dealing with a situation where the issue had indeed been unequivocally settled in the pre-*Tractatus* writings, then one shall be able to tell and reap the benefits of a study of these writings. This is what we call the "methodological argument" in favour of a systematic step-by-step study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings. The basic idea here is that these writings may be understood and may help us to understand the *Tractatus*, but only if they are studied systematically for their own sake, not with a teleological approach. This is due to the fact that they are sets of interrelated exploratory thoughts and there is no way to find out what was Wittgenstein's final position, if one takes into account only some of them.

That the pre-*Tractatus* writings are worth studying for their own sake and that it is only through such a systematic stepwise study is the raison d'être behind this volume. It is a point of view that has been gaining ground in the last fifteen years or so, a number of recent studies on Wittgenstein's early philosophy paying more importance to the systematic study of the pre-*Tractatus* writings (Bonino 2008; Bazzocchi 2010; Potter 2011; Sullivan and Potter 2013; Zalabardo 2015). It is hoped the papers collected here, in continuity with these studies, illustrate further the value and rewards of studying the pre-*Tractatus* writings with the right sort of approach along the lines just sketched. This point of view also is present in all contributions collected in this volume, each of which deals with an issue that received an original treatment in the pre-*Tractatus* writings, some of them also show the impact this treatment had on the *Tractatus*.

* * *

Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy has aroused an ever-increasing interest in the last twenty years or so. This seems partly to be explained by the emergence of a trend according to which Wittgenstein's standpoint should be primarily seen as a metaphilosophical one (Horwich 2012), and also partly by an intense debate about how one should read the *Tractatus*, the "*Tractatus* wars." This issue rapidly became entangled with the idea that it should be resolved at a metaphilosophical level, i.e., it would ultimately depend on what philosophy consists of according to Wittgenstein (Kuusela 2008). Many contributions were dedicated to showing that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is *the* angle from which his writings should be read as well as to concomitantly showing the unity of the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* viewed from this angle. Few commentators have shown interest in Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus* conception of philosophy—one exception is Peter Hacker (Hacker 2021)—and those who did venture into this issue often did it in support of their interpretation of the *Tractatus*—this being the teleological approach—and not for the sake of fully understanding Wittgenstein's position in the pre-*Tractatus* writings (see, e.g., McGinn 2009). This

often resulted in readings of the pre-*Tractatus* conception of philosophy that are tainted by views about the *Tractatus*, and which may therefore hardly provide one with a sound account of what Wittgenstein did consider philosophy to be in these writings.

Being aware of this gap in our understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, Jimmy Plourde undertakes to reconstruct Wittgenstein's position on the nature of philosophy in the pre-*Tractatus* writings for its own sake. Beginning with Wittgenstein's often overlooked mention of that which he originally assumed to be the task of philosophy, Plourde holds that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy's task first consisted in the identification of the logical forms of propositions and, secondly, in the determination of the meaning of these propositions, i.e., the complex which makes them true. The first of these steps was performed by logical analysis. The determination of what was the corresponding complex turned out, however, to be a more complicated task. Wittgenstein had no clear method to deal with this problem. In letters to Russell written between summer 1912 and January 1913, he was favouring an ontological approach, that required him to rely on experience and which was therefore, contrarily to logical analysis, an *a posteriori* procedure. According to Plourde, Wittgenstein's failure to deal efficiently with this problem eventually led him to give up this ontological approach and to embrace the symbolic turn, as well as a new conception of analysis based on description and substitution. At the beginning of September 1914, Wittgenstein expressed a realist worry that the possibility which is shown by a proposition to be the case might not be a genuine possibility for the things it is about. In order to be able to deal with this issue, he was then tempted to revert to his originally assumed conception of philosophy's task and to experience, but he ended up instead incorporating the thesis of isomorphism to his symbolic turn approach, thereby strengthening his conception of philosophy as a discipline which deals with logical and metaphysical issues on the basis of a logical *a priori* method.

Wittgenstein's early conception of philosophy is also dealt with, albeit more indirectly, by Fraser MacBride, who proposes an original interpretation of Wittgenstein's position on the possibility of *a posteriori* necessity. Historically, Kripke is credited for first having disentangled necessity from aprioricity and to have first held that there is *a posteriori* necessity.

Defending the view that propositions of logic are tautologies and that there is only logical necessity, Wittgenstein is usually considered to hold, just like Kant, that there is no such thing as *a posteriori* necessity. All necessary statements would be *a priori*. In his paper MacBride challenges this view. He first notices that in Moore's notes of the 1930–1933 Cambridge Lectures recently published in their integrality (Wittgenstein 2019) Wittgenstein talks at one point about the structure of propositions in the *Tractatus* and draws a distinction between "molecular" and "atomic logic." Molecular logic is then said to be the logic that deals with the truth-functional structures of molecular propositions while atomic logic is the one that deals with the structure of elementary propositions. Whereas molecular logic is a system of propositions that may be written down and is "independent of experience," atomic logic is said to belong to what may not be asserted and its results are said to be dependent upon experience. Thus, according to MacBride, though logical necessity is *a priori*, there is also in the *Tractatus* necessity as relative to the substance of the world, i.e., simple objects, as well as the necessity which is relative to forms, i.e., possibility of structure of elementary propositions. This latter kind of necessity would be the business of atomic logic. It would depend on simple objects categories and would be *a posteriori*. Though the form or categories of simple objects is reflected in language by the name that stands for them, MacBride argues that the categories are not given to us through language, but on the basis of experience of objects. Like Plato in *Meno*, Wittgenstein has adopted an atomism based on an acquaintance of objects as well as an implicit experience of all objects. Analysis then reveals this implicit knowledge and the mode of composition or forms of elementary propositions. Thus, as far as the possibilities of combinations of objects are concerned, the Kantian position that links necessity to aprioricity was not Wittgenstein's in his *Tractatus*. The forms of names and of things are known by relying on experience or on something like the "logical investigation of the phenomena themselves" as Wittgenstein used to say in "Some Remarks on the Logical Form." The necessity to rely on experience comes from the fact that Wittgenstein felt dissatisfied with a pure linguistic *a priori* approach that presupposes what MacBride calls "categorial dualism," i.e., the view that every being belongs either to the category of object which are expressed by names and the category of their

attributes which are expressed by predicate or relational expressions. MacBride argues for his interpretation of the *Tractatus* by tracing the evolution of Wittgenstein's views on the categories through "Notes on Logic," the "Notes dictates to G.E. Moore" and the *Notebooks 1914–16.* If MacBride is right, not only would there be room in the *Tractatus* for *a posteriori* necessity, but philosophy's task would partly be *a posteriori*.

The view that Wittgenstein conceived all necessity in terms of analyticity not only induced the thesis that all necessity is *a priori*, but also suggested that Wittgenstein rejected modality and endorsed on this issue a form of extensionalist reductionism close to Frege's and Russell's (von Wright 1982c). Like other commentators in the past (Maury 1977; von Wright 1982c; Bradley 1992; Plourde 2004) Sanford Shieh disagrees with such reductionist interpretations of Wittgenstein's position and proposes an original account of the indispensability of modality for Wittgenstein. According to him, though Frege and Russell both expelled modality from logic for reasons related to their rejection of the relativization of truth modality implies, Wittgenstein did not agree with them on this issue. Instead he brought modality back to logic and philosophy in order to account for truth and falsity of elementary propositions in a way that did not imply any relativization of truth. In his efforts to deal with the problem of truth in the "Notes on Logic," Wittgenstein managed to account for truth in terms of something that satisfies the meaning stipulation of a given proposition by being of "like sense" and he proposed to account for the falsity of a given proposition in terms of something being of "opposite sense" to this proposition. In the wartime notebooks, he tried to understand this notion of "being of like sense" in terms of a proposition's form being identical to a real form. But this idea could not straightforwardly apply to falsity. It suggested that a proposition such as "aRb" would be false when there is no form or in the absence of some fact. A non-existing form was, however, not something acceptable for Wittgenstein; an absence is not something which may be individuated as a genuine constituent of reality that could specifically explain the falsity of some particular proposition. According to Shieh, thanks to the notion of possibility and the thesis that a proposition is a picture of a possibility, Wittgenstein was able to solve the problem of falsity of any elementary proposition p by understanding the fact which makes p false as the

non-obtaining of the *possibility* that the *p* represents. Thus, far from being a relativization of truth, modality turns out to be an indispensable element in order to properly account for the truth and falsity of elementary propositions.

Often invoked to ground modality or sometimes understood in terms of *de re* necessity, essence is not usually considered as a central notion within Wittgenstein's philosophy. Kevin Mulligan disagrees with this. According to him, Wittgenstein is a "friend of essence," i.e., he is one of those philosophers who think we cannot really know anything unless we know its essence or nature. This is especially true for the early Wittgenstein, where appeals to essence are pervasive. Mulligan's goal in his paper is to make clear Wittgenstein's understanding of essence as well as essence's role and importance within his early philosophy. He also wants to determine where exactly Wittgenstein's position fits among stronger positions such as the Austrian classical view of essence and more sceptical positions such as Russell's. In order to make this clear, he compares Wittgenstein with Husserl on essence. Thus, according to Mulligan, when it comes to essence or nature, Wittgenstein uses the locution "the essence of x" (e.g., proposition, judgement, belief, functions, identity, tautologies, truth and all being), but he also uses the locutions "x is essential to/for y," "x is essentially F" and "It lies in the essence of x that p" and holds the view that essence is understandable, specifiable or explainable. Furthermore, Wittgenstein clearly considers essence and modality to be distinct and he takes modality to lie within essence. Whether or not "lying within essence" allows modality to be explained by, grounded in or to follow from essence has however not been clearly settled by Wittgenstein. Since the thesis that "modality lies within essence" is, among others, a thesis that Wittgenstein's conception of essence shares with Husserl's *Logical Investigations* conception of essence, the comparison between both conceptions promises not only to be of historical interest, but also appears to be potentially philosophically illuminating. Regarding Husserl's position, Mulligan argues that whatever lies in the essence of something is grounded in that essence, whereas this talk of "being grounded in the essence of something" is wholly absent from Wittgenstein's considerations about essence. Wittgenstein's position on this issue therefore clearly differs from Husserl's. Wondering what could explain Wittgenstein's resistance

towards grounding claims, Mulligan formulates the hypothesis that this would be due to Wittgenstein's peculiar conception of essence, a conception that would also entail a particular view as to what it consists of to understand an essence. According to Mulligan, Wittgenstein would think of essence as something that is neither general, predicable nor even particular, but which is rather neutral regarding all such determinations. Now, if essences are neutral, they may not be introduced predicatively. As Scheler thought, they are to be introduced epistemically, as that which is intuited or, as Wittgenstein prefers, as that which we happen to somehow know or understand. Now, if this is right, Mulligan suggests that for Wittgenstein essence would be required to justify our *understanding* of the modal connexions which lie within the essence of the entities concerned, but no grounding claim would be necessary in order for this justificatory role to be played by essence. To that extent, essence was to play an important role in the justification of our understanding and therefore appears to be epistemologically fundamental. But since it didn't have to be ontologically fundamental in order to perform that epistemological role, the question as to whether it could or should ground modality would have been left unanswered by Wittgenstein.

Logic in the *Tractatus* is said to be transcendental. This has been understood by many along Kantian lines, i.e., as entailing that it deals with the general *a priori* possibility of representation. The question whether Kant's influence could have led Wittgenstein to also think of the *a priori* conditions of perception, to the very possibility not only of a transcendental logic, but also of a transcendental aesthetic close to Kant's has however not received much attention. Building on a remark from the "Notes dictated to G.E. Moore" in which Wittgenstein talks about a possible way in which "We might thus give a sense to the assertion that logical forms are *forms* of thought and space and time *forms* of intuition" (*NB*, 118), Hanne Appelqvist addresses this question. Focusing on the "Notes dictated to G.E. Moore" and the wartime notebooks, she argues that there are similarities between Kantian aesthetics and some early views of Wittgenstein, e.g., in Wittgenstein's notion of seeing the form of reality in a tautology, which is reminiscent of Kant's distinction between the intuitive and the conceptual, but also of some of the things Kant says about transcendental aesthetic in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

Though the similarities are too thin to establish that Wittgenstein subscribes to a Kantian aesthetic in his early philosophy, Appelqvist argues that they are important enough to be considered as evidence of Kant's influence upon Wittgenstein.

Central to Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic is his thesis that propositions of logic are tautologies. Tautologies are not *unsinnig*, i.e., they belong to symbolism, but nonetheless "say nothing". But how is this possible? What does it mean and how could that be that tautologies say nothing? This is the question Ian Proops addresses through a careful examination of Wittgenstein's position on the issue throughout the pre-*Tractatus* writings and the *Tractatus*. In so doing, Proops identifies two main accounts of this idea. Thus, in the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein's answer relies on the vector analogy. Comparing propositions with sense to vectors having a certain quantity of sense, tautologies appear to be built of propositions of equal and opposite vector-quantities in such a way as to form the "null vector". The senses of their constitutive propositions may thus be considered to cancel each other out and the quantity of sense they express amounts to zero. But Wittgenstein relies on another analogy in the *Tractatus*, which seems better to capture Wittgenstein's idea that tautology and contradiction are two extreme cases of truth-conditions, i.e., that of being unconditionally true or true under all circumstances and that of being true under no circumstance. Tautology and contradiction appear as two opposite extremes in the series of conditions that have to be fulfilled by propositions in order for them to agree with reality, i.e., to be a correct picture of reality. In contradistinction to meaningful propositions, they simply are not in a position to be a picture of reality at all. From that point of view, tautology and contradiction turns out as limiting degenerate cases of propositions, just like a certain geometrical point may appear as the limiting case of a series of concentric circles of diminishing radius. Proops then argues that both analogies are still at work in the *Tractatus* and were never reconciled, even though the null vector analogy does present problems in dealing with contradiction.

Tautology and the thesis that propositions of logic are tautologies were not the only central elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic that received extensive and decisive treatment in the pre-*Tractatus* writings. As a matter of fact, key ideas even for these last elements such as the

ab-diagrams, W-F schemes (the truth tables), the Sheffer stroke and the discovery that all propositions of logic could be generated by this single truth-function were also innovations belonging to the same period. It is not easy, however, to retrace the full-development of Wittgenstein's position on these issues and there has been some controversies regarding the paternity and the exact dating of some of these ideas, e.g., for the truth tables. This is partly due to the fact that the work that has been done regarding these questions figured in the pre-war notebook material that was lost. We may therefore only appreciate the outcome of this work as it stands in the "Notes of Logic" and surrounding documents that survived, which only provide us with a fragment of the remarks that lead to these developments. Taking his point of departure from a thorough analysis of the jottings that figures on the verso side of a manuscript page of Russell's paper "On Matter—The Problem stated" that was found in Russell's Archives and which shows clear traces of a discussion between Wittgenstein and Russell using truth tables and bearing on the Sheffer stroke, Martin Pilch proposes not only a detailed reconstruction of the discussion around the jottings, but also, on that basis, an account as to how Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic evolved from the bipolarity of propositions, to decision procedure techniques such as ab-diagrams and W-F schemes, to the theory of propositions as ab-functions. According to Pilch's account, Wittgenstein was working on the bipolarity thesis during Easter holidays, i.e., around the time of a visit to Whitehead on 15 March 1913 where this issue was raised. Wittgenstein would then have tried to develop ways of representing the different poles combination possibilities for propositions constitutive of some molecular proposition and to determine on that basis the different outcomes of polarity for the entire molecular proposition. He would first have privileged ab-diagrams, but Pilch argues that it is likely that he came up with different attempts and that the technique of the W-F schemes was elaborated at that time. Wittgenstein would end up preferring talking of the poles as "a" and "b," instead of true and false, and would also end up talking of ab-functions and deal with their truth and falsity with the ab-diagrams. Reasons for this preference are not completely clear, but Pilch believes that Wittgenstein might have wanted to avoid logical signs that seem to stand for the True and the False as that would imply a Fregean understanding of these notions as