

The Date of Tractatus Beginning

Luciano Bazzocchi, Pisa, Italy

1. Tractatus and Prototractatus

I suggest considering the so-called "Prototractatus" notebook (MS104) not as "an early version of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"¹, but as the effective manuscript of Wittgenstein's book. We know that the ultimate typescript was dictated in August 1918; it's considered a final writing, despite a dozen of later inserted propositions². Well, the MS104 notebook (if we look at the whole of it and not only at its published part) contains in its turn all the material of that typescript, including title, dedication, motto and Preface, with the exception of only five propositions³. In particular, the first fifty remarks of the manuscript, the backbone of the work, passed almost unaltered into the final book, and 41 of them maintained also the same decimal number: so we can consider the date of composition of these first pages as the real starting date of the Tractatus itself. Unfortunately, there isn't any agreement on Prototractatus' composition date.

The content similarity between Prototractatus and Tractatus was just what led von Wright in error when he advanced "the conjecture [...] that work on the 'Prototractatus' immediately preceded the final composition of the book in summer of 1918" (Wittgenstein 1971, p.9). This may perhaps be true for the last part of the notebook, i.e. pp. 103-120, not edited and not considered "Prototractatus" by von Wright; but most of MS104 was written a long time before. The decisive philological proof was found by McGuinness in 1989, when he published a list taken from the correspondence of Hermine Wittgenstein and dated January 1917. It mentions some of Wittgenstein's manuscripts; the fifth entry of the list ("a large chancery volume, containing the revision of [the first three notebooks] for publication") seems to refer precisely to the Prototractatus notebook. McGuinness argues that at the end of 1916 the notebook was filled at least until page 71, in correspondence with proposition 7 insertion, or perhaps until the end of the successive layer of text at page 78 (McGuinness 2002).

2. Prototractatus first 70 pages

While we can accept his conclusion, it's not so much clear in which circumstances these pages were composed. McGuinness expects that from Hermine's list we can deduce the non-existence of an eventually lost diary connecting the three we have (MS101, 102 and 103 of von Wright's catalog); the period between MS102 and MS103, from June 1915 to March 1916, would instead be dedicated to the Prototractatus compilation, until the line traced at page 70. This hypothesis is very uncertain. The work around the Prototractatus is utterly unlike the work on the diaries. Compared with the structured and formal aim of

the *Abhandlung*, their date-ordered arrangement (which is identical before and after the interleaving period: left pages with encoded personal notes, right pages with philosophical free entries) answers to very different needs. Besides, it's likely that an intermediate lost diary existed, as Geschkowsky arguments in his book⁴. Finally, it's probable that the third entry of the Hermine's list just refers to this (now lost) notebook, and not to the successive MS103, as McGuinness thought.⁵ But from his objections to McGuinness, without any cogent reason, Geschkowsky concludes that the first 70 pages of the Prototractatus were filled only in the autumn of 1916, on the basis of a gathering of material on loose sheets.

3. Prototractatus first 28 pages

On the contrary, as I elsewhere discussed (Bazzocchi 2007a and 2007b), I think that the method of composition of the notebook's first layer, until p. 28, reveals a typical first writing, where the decimal numbers play the role of heuristic guide. It seems improbable that the proposition numbers were added later, as instead Geschkowsky is forced to assert (if the decimals were present at the moment of the supposed copy from the loose sheets, the notebook wouldn't be in such disorder as it is). We can prove, indeed, that the decimal numbers were in use from the beginning. In fact, the proposition 2.23 in second page was deleted by pencil and transferred to the fourth page under the new decimal 2.181: at the moment of deletion, it already had its number, perfectly coherent with all the others.

In short, I think that the first 28 pages were filled before the letter to Russell of October 22nd 1915, because from the letter we can deduce that some time before a copy of the notebook first stratum into a "last summary on loose sheets" was made (see Bazzocchi 2006). So we can date this first layer compatibly with McGuinness' dating (although by different reasons), i.e. around 1915 summer.

4. Prototractatus first 12 pages

Now I want to introduce a new argument, that until now critics haven't noticed.

In the diary entry of June 18th 1915, one can find a very baffling passage. In the middle of a long discussion on generality and particularity, illustrated by an example of a picture and its dots, there is an incongruous reflection: "Not: a propositions follows from another one, but: the truth of a proposition follows from the truth of the other". Then the text continues about pictures and dots. What is the sense of this mention? Why such sudden inspiration? One idea is that Wittgenstein, incidentally remembering some other remark, decided on a new way of expression and

1 See the subtitle of (Wittgenstein 1971).

2 These were added by hand to the typescript, generally on the overleaf of its sheets, during Wittgenstein's permanence in the Montecassino camp.

3 They are the remarks 3.251 (derived from a note of June 19th 1915), 4.0311 (taken from Nov 4th 1914) and the second paragraph of 4.01 (from Oct 27th 1914): perhaps these were already in a supposed parallel version of MS104 notebook, requested by the so-called 'Korrektur'. Instead, 3.22 (from Dec 29th 1914) and 3.221 (from May 26th and 27th 1915) were added directly during the process of dictation. On the other end, one of the later twelve insertions, the proposition 5.2523, had already appeared as last entry of MS104.

4 See (Geschkowsky 2001), chapter "2.1 Reasons for the existence of a further diary". Passing, I add that the lost diary can be even partially reconstructed. Presumably, Prototractatus pages 79-81 contain selected propositions from its second part in perfect continuity with pages 81-86, that systematically contain all the good propositions of the consecutive MS103 diary.

5 McGuinness himself argues that at the time the notebook in question had been "in part" reversed in the Prototractatus; but MS103 notebook was exploited only later, starting from page 81 of the manuscript.

hurried to fix it on the page. The remark to be modified is not in the diary. But if we look at page 12 of the Prototractatus notebook (a page that as in McGuinness' as in my hypothesis takes place *around* that period), we find exactly the contested expression: "5.041 In particular a *proposition follows from another one* if all the truth-grounds of the first are truth-grounds of the second"⁶. Well, the remark is emended with the precise insertion of "the truth of": "the truth of a proposition follows from the truth of another one".⁷

Here we have two indubitable facts: on June 18th 1915 Wittgenstein fixed a correction, and at Prototractatus page 12 the same correction took place. There are only two possibilities: or first Wittgenstein stated the amendment in abstract, and then the case took place and he corrected it exactly as stated some time before, or first he wrote the previous form on the Prototractatus, and then reviewed it and remarked the adjustment on the diary. The first case is very unlikely. It's hard to believe that Wittgenstein decided in abstract such a particular (and indeed not so clear) correction of his thought; that then (a few weeks later, in McGuinness' hypothesis) twice⁸ he made just the "mistake" he had already criticized; and that finally he corrected it following a previous such foresighted purely theoretical amendment. The only effective possibility is that the compilation of Prototractatus page 12 *precedes* the discovery of the inaccuracy and its record on the diary. Note that the question does not concern only the wording of propositions 5.04 and 5.041 – that at the time, one may think, could have been recorded on some other slip of paper – but properly Prototractatus page 12, because the correction is unquestionably on it.

Hence we can conclude that the Prototractatus notebook started *before* (and not *after*) the end of the MS102 diary, that in fact contains a reference to its page 12. McGuinness' hypothesis seems to fall off anyway, but onto the opposite side compared to what Geschkowsky argued.

5. Prototractatus first page

The Prototractatus compilation was indeed a very slow process, at an average speed of three or four pages a month: the total 120 pages of August 1918 were already 71 as the end of 1916, at least 28 in October 1915, and 12 in June⁹. So we can presume that the starting point was in April or May 1915. In this case, the letter to Russell of May 22nd 1915 assumes a definite sense. In the previous communication to Russell, in November 1914, Wittgenstein said: "If I should not survive the present war, the manuscript of mine that I showed to Moore at the time will be sent to you, along with another one which I have written now, during the war" [Wittgenstein 1974, p. 62]. The second manuscript is evidently the 1914 diary, whose first

notebook was completed in October 30th. But in May the reference is quite different: "I'm extremely sorry that you weren't able to understand Moore's note – Wittgenstein writes – Now, what I've written recently will be, I'm afraid, still more incomprehensible. [...] If I don't live to see the end of this war, [...] you must get my manuscript printed whether anyone understand it or not".

Here Wittgenstein refers to only one coherent manuscript ["*mein Manuskript*"], started in the last period ["*in der letzten Zeit*"], very different and more incomprehensible than the one showed to Moore. This recent writing can hardly be identified with the two wartime notebooks MS101 and MS102, already cited in the previous letter and presented as similar to the pre-war notebook. Besides, this is the first time, despite Russell's frequent solicitations, that Wittgenstein speaks about printing some work of his – or rather, insists it "must" be printed. After his reluctance to publish anything that is less than perfect, his diaries seem the less indicated works for publication.¹⁰ But the most puzzling reference is the final clause: "The problems are becoming more and more lapidary and general and the method has changed drastically."¹¹ Wittgenstein wasn't in the habit of telling something without a good reason. Such a relevant change of method is not detectable in the diary entries, nor in the passage from MS101 to MS102. The method here remains discursive and dubitative, without any increasing "lapidity". On the contrary, everyone would say that with the first pages of the Prototractatus "problems become more and more lapidary and general". Here Wittgenstein cannot refer to the diaries, but to new records (may be also in other sheets or notebooks) which in brief will converge (or are in the process of converging) into the Prototractatus notebook. No doubt that starting from its first page the method does "change drastically", adopting Tractatus' top-down numerical structure. So we aren't far from the truth if we think that the first page of the notebook, the proper *Abhandlung* starting point, was filled between April and May 1915.¹²

This conclusion is not without consequences. If in general the 1915-16 notebooks do not precede the definition of the *Abhandlung* propositions on the Prototractatus register, nor are they independent and alternative, but accompany it, as a counter-song that discusses its apodictic statements, it's useful to read the two documents in parallel. It's essential to hypothesize a definite date scansion of the Prototractatus notebook, and above all to follow the sequence of its itinerary, which – it's convenient to repeat here – doesn't have anything in common with Tractatus' arrangement in sequential order of decimal number. The notebook privileges a top-down process, from high-level sequences to ever deeper reflections; all the skeleton of the arguments is stated before the successive waves of specific comments.¹³ In particular, the first twenty-eight pages of the Prototractatus

6 As I discuss in (Bazzocchi 2005), this proposition is surprising recurrent in Tractatus' story. It is quoted, in a double allusive manner, in a note at Prototractatus' head; besides, it maintains an embarrassing logical error, whose correction involved a correspondence between Ramsey and Wittgenstein, and determined an unsatisfactory adjustment of the entire pass.

7 In German, from: "Insbesondere folgt ein Satz aus einem anderen..." into: "Insbesondere folgt die Wahrheit eines Satzes aus der Wahrheit eines anderen..."

8 The same correction appears also in the previous statement, 5.04, whose ending ("so sagen wir dieser Satz folge aus der Gesamtheit jener anderen") becomes: "so sagen wir die Wahrheit dieses Satzes folge aus der Wahrheit der Gesamtheit jener anderen". The four insertions "die/der Wahrheit" are very evident on the page.

9 I refer to Wittgenstein's page numeration. Note that the first page of text, with the first fifteen propositions, is numbered as page 3.

10 Compare with Hermine's list, where not the diaries, but only Prototractatus notebook is marked: "for publication".

11 "Die Probleme werden immer lapidarer und allgemeiner und die Methode hat sich durchgreifend geändert. –". Surprising, in the "Historical introduction" to the Prototractatus von Wright quotes almost the whole letter, except this revealing conclusion. So von Wright can argue: "What he here calls 'my manuscript' is, I conjecture, the manuscript he had shown to Moore and the first two wartime notebooks" (Wittgenstein 1971, p.6).

12 After a consistent period of non-productivity and depression, until April 15th ("Es fällt mir nichts Neues mehr ein! [...]Ich kann auf nichts mehr Neues denken"), the encoded journal shows a turn in April 16th ("Ich arbeite") and 17th ("Arbeite"). A period "of grace" is testified with unusual emphasis at the end of the month: "Ich arbeite" (April 24th), "Arbeite" (26th), "Arbeite! In der Fabrik muß ich jetzt meine Zeit verplempern!!!" (27th), "Arbeite wieder!" (28th), "Die Gnade der Arbeit!" (May 1st).

13 So the Prototractatus structure is very alike the Tractatus hypertext arrangement, in the sense illustrated in [Bazzocchi 2008].

do not correspond to recorded propositions on the diaries, but are in general their structural ancestors. So, it becomes clear how could the 1915-16 notebooks contain so many propositions of detail which will find place, without corrections, in the final work, since at the moment of their first conceiving, the entire structure of reference was already fixed on the contemporary *Abhandlung*. The Prototractatus stratification sets a series of nuclear prototypes, in some way discussed and commented in the diary, whose inspection can improve the comprehension of the whole enterprise.

Literature

- Bazzocchi, Luciano 2005, "The Strange Case of the Prototractatus Note", in *Time and History – Papers of 28. International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Kirchberg am Wechsel, 2005, pp. 24-26.
- Bazzocchi, Luciano 2006, "About «die letzte Zusammenfassung»" in *Cultures: Conflict-Analysis-Dialogue – Papers of the 29th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Kirchberg am Wechsel, pp. 36-38.
- Bazzocchi, Luciano 2007a, "Hypertextual interpretation of the decimals and architectonic hermeneutics of Wittgenstein's Tractatus", in *The Labyrinth of Language*, G.P.Gálvez ed., Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, pp. 95-103
- Bazzocchi, Luciano 2007b, "A database for a Prototractatus Structural Analysis", in *Philosophy of The Information Society – Papers of the 30th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Kirchberg am Wechsel, pp. 18-20.
- Bazzocchi, Luciano 2008, "On butterfly feelers. Some examples of surfing on Wittgenstein's Tractatus", in *Philosophy of the Information Society*, Vol. 1, Alois Pichler & Herbert Hrachovec eds., Ontos-Verlag, Frankfurt a.M., 2008, pp. 129-144.
- Geschkowsky, Andreas 2001, *Die Entstehung von Wittgensteins Prototractatus*, Bern.
- McGuinness, Brian 2002, "Wittgenstein's 1916 «Abhandlung»", in *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy*, R.Haller, K.Puhl eds., Wien.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 1971, ²1996, *Prototractatus*, B.F McGuinness, T.Nyberg and G.H. von Wright eds., Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 1974, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, B.F McGuinness and G.H. von Wright eds., Basil Blackwell, Oxford.