

# The von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives in Helsinki (WWA): A Unique Resource

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## Introduction

The von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives, WWA, is a research resource at the Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies at the University of Helsinki, located at the philosophy unit. Although its roots go back to the 1960s when the late professor Georg Henrik von Wright started to form his Wittgenstein-archives, WWA is currently re-establishing itself at the University of Helsinki with a new location and administration.

Activities of WWA may be divided into three groups. WWA provides basic logistical and scientific support to visiting scholars who benefit from the unique resources kept at WWA. It seeks to ensure immediate, effective availability of its materials while also securing long-term preservation. To this end WWA works on cataloguing, describing and digitizing its materials and on developing its website. Thirdly, WWA engages in independent and collaborative research efforts.

The materials kept at WWA have two different parts. One part consists of copies of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* and other related items collected and organized by the late professor Georg Henrik von Wright (1916–2003). This part was described by von Wright as "probably the most comprehensive and well-organized Wittgenstein archive in the world" (von Wright 2000, our translation). The other part consists of von Wright's own literary estate, including a major part of von Wright's correspondence related to his activities as one of Wittgenstein's literary executors.

During von Wright's lifetime the archive was well-known and frequently visited by Wittgenstein scholars around the world. The publication of the Wittgenstein *Nachlass* in electronic form has made it much more widely available and easily accessible than before. The function of WWA and comparable holders of originals and copies of Wittgenstein-materials has thereby to some extent changed. They are no longer unique in providing access to the basic text sources. The availability of the *Nachlass* has, however, also opened up new questions for research that increase the relevance of detailed study of manuscript sources, variations in typescripts, editorial processes and related matters. In this new context WWA remains a unique resource, in particular for scholars interested in the editing process behind Wittgenstein's published works, or the history of their publication in general.

Thanks to the new material von Wright donated to the archives WWA is now also an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the philosophy of Georg Henrik von Wright. Among other things, it contains early versions of many of the most important works by von Wright.

## Background: von Wright and Wittgenstein

The origin of WWA goes back to a friendship between two extraordinary persons, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Georg Henrik von Wright.

Most scholars are familiar with the unusual course of Wittgenstein's life. The life and career of Georg Henrik

von Wright are probably less well known. The autobiography *Mitt liv som jag minns det* ("My Life as I Remember It") has been translated only into the other language of his home country, Finnish.

Georg Henrik von Wright was born in Helsinki 14th of June 1916, and died on 16th of June 2003. Already at an early stage he seems to have known that he would become a philosopher (Vilkkö 2005, 1). Under the influence of his first teacher at the University of Helsinki, the Finnish philosopher Eino Kaila, von Wright became convinced that logical positivism finally had paved the way for philosophy as a proper science – in his autobiography he even speaks about logical positivism as the "Galilean turn of philosophy" (von Wright 2001, 18).

Logic was going to be one of his first research interests. From early on von Wright's investigations in logic went in surprising and innovative directions. His interest in the logic of induction earned him early recognition. Soon after he practically invented deontic logic and, later, the logic of preference. His later works include major books on theory of value and the philosophy of action and science. His last major book published in 1998 was on the philosophy of mind.

Especially in the Nordic countries von Wright was also known for his essayistic writings. These were written and published mainly in von Wright's mother tongue, Swedish. The essays, often praised for the elegance and purity of their prose, include early studies on Spengler, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Some of them that make contributions to the philosophical diagnosis of our times have been translated and published in English (von Wright 1993b). A key topic in the essays is the cultural and moral interpretation of the advance of scientific rationality or, to use a term from the German tradition of critical theory that von Wright also related creatively to, the "dialectics of enlightenment." – von Wright sometimes called his attitude in these essays a "provocative pessimism" (von Wright 1993a, 150).

Von Wright first met Wittgenstein as a young post-graduate student in Cambridge 1939. According to the autobiography their first encounter was not altogether pleasant for either parts – von Wright made an unannounced appearance at Wittgenstein's lecture late in the term, and was met with angry comments from Wittgenstein about the presence of "unwanted visitors." Fortunately, von Wright sent a letter of apology to Wittgenstein, and immediately received a friendly answer. (Von Wright 2001, 76–77). This was the beginning of their friendship, which was re-established after the war when von Wright returned to Cambridge. In the autumn of 1948 von Wright became Wittgenstein's successor as professor at Cambridge, a chair he held until 1951 when he returned to Finland.

When Wittgenstein died in 1951 von Wright was surprised to learn that Wittgenstein had named him one of his literary executors, together with Elizabeth Anscombe and Rush Rhees. The executors soon found that Wittgenstein's literary estate was much more extensive than they had expected. Eventually, von Wright's work on the *Nach-*

lass that involved collecting primary material, cataloguing it, editing works for publication and independent studies of themes in Wittgenstein's philosophy, lasted more than 50 years. One example of von Wright's activity was when he in the summer 1967 together with Norman Malcolm, at Oxford, supervised the microfilming of the *Nachlass* for Cornell University (von Wright 1982, 38). Probably few other philosophers have influenced the first decades of Wittgenstein scholarship more than von Wright did through these efforts. Books compiled on the basis of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* edited or co-edited by von Wright include *Über Gewissheit*, *Zettel*, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Psychologie* and *Vermischte Bemerkungen*. He also discovered the manuscript known as the *Prototractatus*.

### History of WWA

**Roots.** During his collecting and cataloguing of Wittgenstein's literary estate in the 1960s and 70s, von Wright also started to form a Wittgenstein archive with copies of the *Nachlass* in connection with his office at the University of Helsinki. The copies were regularly updated by von Wright for completeness as new material was discovered. Later on copies of Wittgenstein's correspondence and some biographical material were added.

For some years the Wittgenstein archive in Helsinki was also a center of research on the *Nachlass* in which von Wright together with Tauno Nyberg, André Maury and Heikki Nyman among other things tried to clarify the sources for various typescripts in the manuscripts, and differences between published texts and sources. One interesting result of this work is the so called *Helsinki-Ausgabe* of the Philosophical Investigations. (von Wright 1982, 6–11, and von Wright 2001, 168.)

**Donation letter.** In September 2000, three years before his death, von Wright donated the contents of his Wittgenstein archive to the University of Helsinki, under the conditions that the materials should be preserved as a separate and functioning unit at the Department of Philosophy, or what since the beginning of 2010 is the Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies. The donation also included von Wright's own literary estate. Consequently, the archive that was formed through the donation basically includes two different parts, the Wittgenstein-materials collected by von Wright and von Wright's own literary estate.

The donation to the University in Helsinki was followed by a donation in August of 2002 to the National Library of Finland, which included his scientific home library and a major part of his correspondence. The contents of this donation is today known as the *Bibliotheca Wrightiana* of the National Library and is available for researchers at a short walking distance from WWA.

**Recent history.** In 2001 the contents of the archives followed the Department of Philosophy from its original location at Metsätalo in Helsinki to the nearby Siltavuorenpenger. In the summer of 2009 the archives moved back to Metsätalo, not however to the original room, but to a similar space. At the same time some efforts were made to re-establish the archive as a functioning research unit after some years with poor facilities and a lack of proper administration.

In 2009 the archive, in accordance with its bipartite composition, was renamed "the von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives", with the abbreviation WWA. It is now administrated by a director and steering group with five members and has a curator employed on a half-time basis. There are also plans to gather an international advisory group through invitations to Wittgenstein and von Wright experts, and experts on archives and digitizing.

### Present state and future plans

After some years of silence WWA is reconstituting itself as a research source. Today, WWA is located in two rooms at Metsätalo in Helsinki, providing working spaces with computers and effective internet access for two visiting researchers. Ongoing efforts are being made to improve the conditions. WWA is currently in the process of cataloguing recently added material and updating old catalogues. A special challenge is posed by digitizing as a new way of making the materials of WWA available for the scientific community, and a new means of preservation.

The Wittgenstein-part of WWA was fully catalogued during the life-time of von Wright (the catalogue is available on the website of WWA under the link "Wittgenstein materials"). However, there are some inconsistencies due to later additions that should be removed. More importantly, the material needs to be thoroughly re-examined and described in greater detail than has been done so far, in view of identifying qualitative aspects that may be of interest for researches, such as written remarks made by von Wright himself. Any findings of this kind will be added to the catalogue.

The literary estate of von Wright, including lecture notes, unpublished manuscripts, early versions of published works and correspondence relating to the publication of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* is to be catalogued in the near future. There are also plans to digitize some of this material, in order to secure preservation and improve on its availability.

**Activities.** In April 2010 WWA hosted an international, cross-disciplinary colloquium with the title "Trends and Developments in Digital Publishing in the Humanities, with special reference to Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*". Papers presented at the colloquium will be posted on the website of WWA.

**Cooperation.** During 2008-2011 the *Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen* and WWA run a research project funded by the Nordic research agency NordForsk, called Joint Nordic Use of WAB Bergen and WWA Helsinki (JNU VWAB). The project funds short-term visits by Nordic scholars to WWA and WAB engaged in Wittgenstein's studies or digital editing and publication. With cooperation partners in other European countries WWA is seeking funding for further work related to Wittgenstein-studies, digital publishing and the cross-section between these. With international cooperation partners, such as the WAB, the *Brenner Archives in Innsbruck* and the *Nordic Wittgenstein Society* WWA is currently involved in the preparation of several seminars and conferences in 2011.

### Links

Bibliotheca Wrightiana: <http://www.nationallibrary.fi/services/kokoeimat/vonwrightkokoelma.html>

JNU WAB: [http://wab.aksis.uib.no/wab\\_jnu-vwab.page](http://wab.aksis.uib.no/wab_jnu-vwab.page)

The program for the colloquium "Trends and Developments in Digital Publishing in the Humanities, with special reference to Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*" arranged by WWA in April 2010 is available at <http://www.helsinki.fi/phca/research/conferencesandevents.html#wwa> (8.5. 2010)

### Literature

Vilkko, Risto 2005 "Georg Henrik von Wright (1916–2003)", *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 36, 1–14.

von Wright, Georg Henrik 1982 *Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

— 1993a *Myten om framsteget* [The Myth of Progress], Helsinki: Söderströms.

— 1993b *The Tree of Knowledge and other essays*, Leide: E.J. Brill.

— 2000 "Gåvobrev" [Donation letter to the University of Helsinki]

— 2001 *Mitt liv som jag minns det* [My Life as I Remember It], Helsinki: Söderströms.