

**Notes on Thompson's "Wittgenstein on phenomenology and experience". University of Bergen Press, 2008.**

I read Thompson's well-written and relevant book 'Wittgenstein on Phenomenology and Experience', published by the University of Bergen Press in 2008, with great interest. My PhD Dissertation, defended in 2012, has direct connections with his main object of investigation, especially because one of my interests there was to evaluate logical problems with the expressiveness of color exclusion within the tractarian background.

Thompson's treatment of the so-called Middle Wittgenstein period, documented by the transitional material that appeared in the *Nachlass*, is for this reader the most seminal feature of his work on Wittgenstein's phenomenology. His commentary provides a useful addition to the leading and influential researchers already focusing on this challenging and oft-neglected material. Thompson manages to handle significant problems with Wittgenstein's exposition about experience and phenomenology without lapsing into the sort of misleading labels and programmatic vagueness that has dominated commentaries of the last two decades in the "Wittgensteinian scholarship", for instance discussions of the tractarian passage 6.53, which orientates the contention of resolute reading. The secondary literature has too often rendered Wittgenstein an isolated and aptly neglected author in contemporary analytic philosophy.

One potentially misleading feature of Thompson's exposition, however, is the symmetric approach that he takes towards presenting Wittgenstein's thoughts about experience and phenomenology; on the contrary, a careful reading seems to reveal that phenomenology was a centrally important topic in Wittgenstein's philosophical development, while experience was not. Consider the frequency and centrality with which phenomenology was directly discussed by Wittgenstein, while any discussion of experience was very often fragmentary and marginal. Moreover, note the kind of association which Thompson draws between the mystical experience in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [hereafter TLP] as a trigger for the rise of phenomenology in the

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transitional period. If Thompson is correct, then the relation is by no means obvious and straightforward, and it deserves a fuller explication. I do agree that some germs of the phenomenology found in Wittgenstein's Middle Period can be already seen in the *Tractatus*, but not in its contention on mystical experience, as Thompson defends, but already in the very beginning of his first book.

Arguably, Thompson's work overlooks the importance of colors and their logical organization in this transitional material. In some passages of *Philosophische Bemerkungen* [hereafter] PB, for instance §81-83, and in some entries of the discussions presented in *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis* [hereafter WWK], such as 'Farbsystem' and 'Die Welt ist rot', Wittgenstein does draw attention to his uses of colors in TLP directly connected to his new phenomenology. I am not talking about the obvious problem in 6.3751, first pointed out by Ramsey (who was not mentioned in any part of Thompson's book). Criticizing this *Tractarian* passage, Ramsey (1923) discovered the *Sackgasse* for the tractarian logic: Some necessary consequences are not due to tautologies. However, I prefer to read this contention through its dual: Some (logical) exclusions are not due to contradictions (but due to contrarities). My point is that if we read carefully the first two mentions of colors in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, namely 2.0131 and 2.0252, which both occur in the work's so-called ontological section, we will see that already some phenomenology was to be expected even there. The italics in 2.0131 strongly suggest a kind of exclusion, surprisingly underdeveloped by Wittgenstein at that time. As this passage 2.0131 already suggests, these italics are not just to be found in color system. The 'etcetera' in this very same passage suggests the multiplicity of 'logical spaces' or 'Satzsysteme', whose treatment are ubiquitous in his "phenomenological" period and given a full treatment.

Another concern might be raised about Thompson's neglect of Ramsey's relevance to Wittgenstein's abandonment of the thesis of the independence of elementary propositions/*Sachverhalt*. Many authors have been said to have influenced Wittgenstein directly or indirectly throughout his career. But none of them made a complicated trip from England to Austria, more specifically, to a small village in *Niederösterreich* in the middle of nowhere, to meet personally with Wittgenstein to discuss some (obscure) problems in his (obscure) book. Ramsey was the first one to recognize the significant problem of logical organization that colors posed and the challenge they represented for the *tractarian* logic and image of language. Moreover, as an illustration of a very interesting case of historical completeness, Ramsey already pointed out the color problem within the tractarian philosophy in 1923; he therefore probably anticipated, in 1927, Wittgenstein's later solution for the problem introducing additional rules, pragmatism and games, by using a metaphor of chess. And Ramsey had proposed all of that three years before Wittgenstein had begun

talking significantly about games! The importance of recognizing Ramsey's criticism and his impact on Wittgenstein's solutions in the *Tractatus* is not just a matter of scholarly integrity; it is also a matter of illuminating accurately the conceptual development of key contributions made to logic and mathematics which have become associated with early analytic philosophy.

The total neglect of WWK in Thompson's book, which purportedly intends to unveil Wittgenstein key shifts, is also hard to comprehend. WWK was neither written nor edited by Wittgenstein; yet it is a great historical and philosophical document for understanding the kinds of problem Wittgenstein was dealing with and reacting to in his philosophical development. If the problem is that WWK is not well edited, that can always be established by a careful comparison with Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*. Such an exercise would like reveal that many arguments, metaphors and concepts are indeed very similar. Thompson ought to justify why he very often used PB and not WWK at all. Moreover, in WWK we can see diachronically how things evolved, while, with PB, Rush Ree's interventions make this kind of genetic investigation impossible.

Perhaps also as consequence of not using WWK, Thompson seems to have overlooked the importance of the year 1930 for Wittgenstein's treatment of phenomenological problems. For instance, in the beginning of 1930, the notion of normativity, which is not explored in Thompson's book, arose in Wittgenstein's discussions with Waismann about the number  $\pi$  and the role of axioms in geometry. Another example is the role of June of 1930. At this time, Wittgenstein was preparing Waismann to represent him in a brilliant round table on the nature of mathematics in Königsberg, in which Von Neumann, Carnap and Heyting would participate. In the entry 'Was wäre es zu sagen in Königsberg' in WWK, we can see both Wittgenstein and Waisman discussing *Grundgesetze's* criticism of formalism. This entry shows that Wittgenstein defended clearly, against Frege, that formalists are right in holding mathematics as a game. This discussions on formalism also marks Wittgenstein's decreasing interest in his short-lived phenomenology. In this way, this entry should have played a relevant role in Thompson's evaluation of Wittgenstein's phenomenology.

Another conspicuously absent omission in Thompson's book was some detailed discussions of verificationism. Maybe this is also due to his neglect of WWK in his critique; for it is there that this topic is raised at several points in conjunction with phenomenology. These discussions are important to understand Wittgenstein's influence on Carnap and the Vienna Circle; moreover, the prominence of Wittgenstein's treatment of these two conjoined topics is critical to appreciating the influence on Wittgenstein of Brouwer's intuitionism and revisionism about the role and nature of logic. Thompson does mention, but does not explore in much detail, the clear connection between verificationism and problems with the restrictiveness of truth-functionality. In some way this discussion may link with the reasons why the kind of realist truth theory

defended in the *Tractatus* (based on the notion of sense as truth conditions) must be abandoned. It might be argued that this consequence is directly linked to the full ascendancy of Wittgenstein's phenomenology: 'sense' resolves finally into the concern for finding a method for verification, and not a matter of concern for determining logical truth conditions. Thus a very important key to the role that his phenomenology played in Wittgenstein's official return to philosophy has been neglected, in an otherwise compelling overview of his phenomenology and the notion of experience.

Thompson made, in spite of these problems pointed above, some brilliant remarks on the failure of using calculus to understand human language discussing its lack of determinedness, rigidity (i.e. the well structuredness of rules) and completeness. I recommend Thompson's book to people interested in an introduction to Wittgenstein's (short-lived) phenomenology and for anyone who will profit from sharp, effective criticism of the limitations of the so-called resolute reading.

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