



## Obituary: Ludwig Wittgenstein

Bertrand Russell

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# M I N D

## A QUARTERLY REVIEW

### OF

## PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY



### I.—OBITUARY

THE Editor regrets to announce the death of Ludwig Wittgenstein on 29 April, 1951, at Cambridge.

### II.—LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

WHEN I made the acquaintance of Wittgenstein, he told me that he had been intending to become an engineer, and with that end in view had gone to Manchester. In the course of his studies in engineering he had become interested in mathematics, and in the course of his studies in mathematics he had become interested in the principles of mathematics. He asked people at Manchester (so he told me) whether there was such a subject, and whether anyone worked at it. They told him that there was such a subject and that he could find out more about it by coming to me at Cambridge, which he accordingly did.

Quite at first I was in doubt as to whether he was a man of genius or a crank, but I very soon decided in favour of the former alternative. Some of his early views made the decision difficult. He maintained, for example, at one time that all existential propositions are meaningless. This was in a lecture room, and I invited him to consider the proposition: "There is no hippopotamus in this room at present". When he refused to believe this, I looked under all the desks without finding one; but he remained unconvinced.

He made very rapid progress in mathematical logic, and soon knew all that I had to teach. He did not, I think, know Frege personally at that time, but he read him and greatly admired him.

I naturally lost sight of him during the 1914-18 war, but I got a letter from him soon after the armistice, written from Monte Casino. He told me that he had been taken prisoner, but fortunately with his manuscript, which was the *Tractatus*. I pulled strings to get him released by the Italian Government, and we met at the Hague, where we discussed the *Tractatus* line by line.

I cannot say very much about his opinions before 1914, as they were in a state of formation and flux. He was thinking very intensely and very fruitfully, but was not yet arriving at anything very definite. While I was still doubtful as to his ability, I asked G. E. Moore for his opinion. Moore replied, "I think very well of him indeed". When I enquired the reason for his opinion, he said that it was because Wittgenstein was the only man who looked puzzled at his lectures.

Getting to know Wittgenstein was one of the most exciting intellectual adventures of my life. In later years there was a lack of intellectual sympathy between us, but in early years I was as willing to learn from him as he from me. His thought had an almost incredible degree of passionately intense penetration, to which I gave whole-hearted admiration.

He was in the days before 1914 concerned almost solely with logic. During or perhaps just before, the first war, he changed his outlook and became more or less of a mystic, as may be seen here and there in the *Tractatus*. He had been dogmatically anti-Christian, but in this respect he changed completely. The only thing he ever told me about this was that once in a village in Galicia during the war he found a bookshop containing only one book, which was Tolstoy on the Gospels. He bought the book, and, according to him, it influenced him profoundly. Of the development of his opinions after 1919 I cannot speak.

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The Editor hopes to publish in the next issue Memoirs by Prof. G. E. Moore, J. T. Wisdom and F. Waismann covering the other periods of Ludwig Wittgenstein's life.