

# *Style, Method and Philosophy in Wittgenstein* by Alois Pichler

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Alois Pichler, *Style, Method and Philosophy in Wittgenstein*. (Cambridge Elements). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 86 pp.

Alois Pichler's new book *Style, Method and Philosophy in Wittgenstein* (2023) in the Cambridge Elements series argues that the relationship between Wittgenstein's style and his philosophy is by no means accidental or marginal, but deserves the utmost attention. For if we disregard this relationship, we overlook the fact that the specific form and style of each of Wittgenstein's works tells us something important about his philosophy. Moreover, Pichler's interpretation successfully highlights that Wittgenstein's philosophical style also embodies something fundamentally ethical and a genuine cultural aspiration. Something that, like his philosophy itself, stands in stark contrast to the thinking of his time, and is left to the reader as a task. If one were to marginalise Wittgenstein's style or even regard it as an annoying idiosyncratic defect, one would miss out on a great deal philosophically and would only have half understood Wittgenstein and his "movement of thought [*Gedankenbewegung*]" (CV 19/16). In three chapters, Pichler meticulously and comprehensively examines Wittgen-

stein's idea of philosophical clarification, the methods he uses to achieve it, the influences he acknowledges as sources for his special way of "moving his thoughts," and finally, what Wittgenstein may have actually meant when he made his statement: "[O]ne should write philosophy only as one *writes a poem* [German: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur *dichten*]" (CV 24/28).

For Wittgenstein, philosophy is the activity of clarifying thought and language (TLP 4.112; PI §133). This also means that superfluous and ornamental excess must be dispensed with, and that simplicity and austerity are given top priority. Philosophical clarification is about practising "justice to the facts" (BNE, Ms 110, 184) and thus being able to "see the world aright" (TLP 6.54). And that also means developing an honest and fair view of the world and oneself. Philosophical clarification in Wittgenstein's sense must therefore also be understood as ethical, as "work on oneself" (CV 16/24), in order to come to terms with oneself (p. 17). For Wittgenstein, the difficulty of philosophy therefore lies not only in

forcing the intellect to rethink, but in achieving a change of heart. “[R]esistance of the *will* must be overcome” (BT 301; cf. DPS 43).

In the first chapter, Pichler convincingly argues that we must bear in mind that Wittgenstein’s clarification work takes place on two levels that cannot be completely separated from one another:

one is the activity of philosophical clarification for himself through writing, lecturing and discussion; the other is the activity of composing works for the reader so that they can clarify their own philosophical concepts and problems. (p. 2)

Pichler also characterises these levels as follows: the first is the level of Wittgenstein’s own authentic philosophical reactions; the second is the level at which the “precipitate” of these reactions is additionally shaped into a book that is beneficial to the reader (cf. p. 2). For Pichler, the most important difference between the non-works and the works is that Wittgenstein attempts to give the works a form that is fully consistent with his philosophy at the time and we can therefore assume that the connection between Wittgenstein’s style and his philosophy is “most visible and graspable” (p. 7) in the works. If we consider Wittgenstein’s philosophical clarification work, it becomes clear that his claim becomes increasingly limited: while in the *Tractatus* we still find the idea that philosophical clarification can be complete and that every philosophical problem can therefore be eliminated through this work, Witt-

genstein later believes that only individual, minor philosophical problems can be completely eliminated piece by piece through clarification work (cf. p. 5). In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein doubts if even this modest goal can be achieved and claims to offer nothing more than a mirror in which the reader can recognise and understand his own and the specific philosophical problems of others, as well as their sources and manifold entanglements (cf. p. 5). Pichler asserts that questions of style and form are essential for each of these three different types of clarification projects. And, as he also points out particularly well, it becomes apparent that Wittgenstein himself offers the reader an opportunity to clarify their own philosophical concepts and problems by observing Wittgenstein’s clarification work. Wittgenstein does not only attempt to find the “redeeming word” (BT 302) for his philosophical problems, which can be thought of metaphorically as the keystone of a building (cf. BNE, Ms 179, 3v), and to get rid of the annoying “hair on the tongue” (BT 302), but also to provide the reader with support and inspiration for his or her own problems, and to do so through style and form (cf. WCL 196). Wittgenstein’s works, as Pichler makes clear on several occasions, are not simply the results of clarification work, but often show the work of clarification itself as it is in progress, as it is actually being undertaken (cf. p. 6). In his published works, Wittgenstein then arranged a selection of the best parts of the

original clarification activities to be shared with the reader (cf. p. 9). In this way, Wittgenstein's thinking, which essentially strives for philosophical self-knowledge, takes on a Socratic and even maieutic character.

Pichler argues that the fixed unity of style and philosophy is also evident in Wittgenstein's methods, which he chose to structure his philosophical works or books for the reader. Central to Wittgenstein's thinking is the concept of "movement of thought" (CV 19/16), which was influenced by Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, and Sraffa (cf. p. 28). Pichler plausibly points out that the term "movement of thought" (CV 19/16) primarily refers to "the specific *way* in which one *gets on* with a thought, an idea, a concept, a perspective, a philosophical approach, rather than the general idea, concept, perspective or philosophical approach itself." (p. 25) It is therefore a matter of "procedures, moves and strategies for one's thinking, speaking and writing – *methods* for bringing about the right transition from one thought to another, from one remark to another, from one sentence to another" (p. 25), and thus arriving at a correct and purified view of the world.

As Pichler makes clear, poetry is an integral part of Wittgenstein's philosophical clarification work. Pichler makes it plausible that for Wittgenstein, poetry is already necessary "*in the act of clarification*" (p. 42). For it is not a scientific approach,

but poetry alone *in* the act of clarification that helps to find the redeeming word and can also reach the reader on an existential level. Imagination, humour, irony, wit, comparison, analogy, parable, image, metaphor, narrative, thought experiment, narrative fiction, dialogue, prosody, etc. all come together in poetry (cf. p. 57). Only poetry can offer, in perfectionist form, the entire range of literary means and methods that philosophy should use to move its thoughts. For Wittgenstein, according to Pichler, the connection between philosophy and poetry is not in contradiction to philosophical argument, and attention to style in philosophy is not in opposition to clarity (cf. p. 58). For Wittgenstein, argument and clarity depend on style, and Wittgenstein's stylistic endeavours are therefore also philosophical endeavours (cf. p. 58). Wittgenstein's view that philosophy should have no qualms about resorting to poetry and should not proceed in a purely scientific manner already felt outdated at the time – and even more so now. It is all the more commendable that Pichler indirectly shows us that we no longer perceive the tension between civilisation and culture, i.e. between craftsmanship and art, in the same way as Wittgenstein, and that our philosophical thinking is currently somewhat limited. Wittgenstein pointed this out to us, and Pichler masterfully draws our attention to the fact that style in philosophy deserves much more attention than one might think. Style reflects how we deal with ourselves and the world. Style

contains the truth about the respective era. Style is the image of the human being.

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