

Wittgenstein in Conversation with His  
Sources:  
*Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig  
Wittgensteins* by H. Biesenbach

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Biesenbach, Hans, *Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins*. Publications from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen 22. Bergen 2011. 446 p.

Wittgenstein rarely quotes other authors and when he does so, he brings attention to where he differs rather than where he agrees with them. His thought is drawn to philosophical positions. He asks about the sense of ‘p’ (with ‘p’ standing for a philosophical thesis), but not about the truth of statements such as ‘x believes that p’ (with ‘x’ standing for a philosopher), and not in the least about where, when, etc., x has actually said that p. In the Preface to his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein emphasizes that it is a matter of indifference to him whether the thoughts expressed in his book might have been thought by someone else before and, providing this explanation, he declares his refusal to give sources. Thus, despite the considerably wide range of ideas, the names that significantly occur in the *Tractatus* are only those of Frege and Russell. (Frege is mentioned on his own in eight paragraphs and again nine more times together with Russell, while Russell’s name further occurs in twenty paragraphs, though on two of these occasions he is mentioned together with Whitehead and once with Moore.)<sup>1</sup> The method of the later Wittgenstein, as one knows it from his *Philosophical Investigations* as well as from other posthumous

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of Frege and Russell is indeed highlighted in the Preface, but specific works of theirs are mentioned in the text just once each (in brackets to TLP 5.451 and 5.452) without any bibliographical references. For a consecutive analysis of all seventeen places where the name of Frege can be found in the *Tractatus*, cf. Kienzler (2011).

publications compiled from his *Nachlass*, is again engaged mainly with philosophical positions. Even though (in contrast to the declarative *Tractarian* style) any commitment to claims here is intentionally avoided, Wittgenstein's arguments are unfolded in a dialogue with specific positions considered to be more or less seemingly obvious. These positions, which often come from Wittgenstein himself, are questioned and tested for cogency through descriptions of simple linguistic situations. So, here again, he is not interested in discussing and commenting on what actually might have been thought or said by others. And it is not surprising, on that account, that the number of names occurring in these texts is relatively small and there is (with a few exceptions) a lack of bibliographical references.

Philosophical positions are, of course, not anonymous (and undoubtedly Wittgenstein did not believe this to be the case either).<sup>2</sup> This is why identifying where a position emerges in the specific context of its author's work, is a worthwhile endeavour. Furthermore, since Wittgenstein, like many others, worked contextually, revealing his somewhat implicit references is useful toward developing a better understanding of his thinking.

These are the very tasks to which Hans Biesenbach's book *Allusions and Quotations in the Writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (*Anspielungen und Zitate im Werk Ludwig Wittgensteins*) is devoted. In spite of its form – that of a reference book or a compilation of source materials – or rather thanks to it, the collection throws light on the multiple facets of Wittgenstein's thought by making explicit the addresses of a number of references to other authors left unspecified in Wittgenstein's manuscripts and typescripts. By means of revealing the authentic textual sources with which he is implicitly engaged in dialogue, this collection contextualizes Wittgenstein's search for a correct perspective on philosophy. Thus eschewing any commentary or interpretation, and rather utilizing systematic and thematic generalizations in the selection and

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<sup>2</sup> As a representative (and in a sense disturbing) example, stand Wittgenstein's charges of plagiarism against Carnap (especially in a letter to the latter from 20.08.1932; for a reconstruction and interpretation of this conflict see Kienzler (2008)); also similar charges eventually breaking off his relations with Waismann (cf. Wittgenstein's letter from 19.05.1936; Wittgenstein's complete correspondence is available in Wittgenstein (2004)).

organization of the material, the book provides additional orientation in the otherwise voluminous and mazy *Nachlass*.

The collection consists of Preliminaries provided in both German and English, a main text body of almost 400 pages, colour reproductions (pp. 399–413), an Appendix listing citations of undiscovered origin, as well as an Index of the consecutively appearing names in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* and their respective places in Biesenbach's source compilation (pp. 420–446).

The Preliminaries outline the aim and the structure of the collection. It is not a study investigating the relations between Wittgenstein and other authors (see there point 2), but a helpful manual or a guidebook for finding the original citations to which Wittgenstein more or less openly alludes. In this regard, I would add, it is a work of value exactly because of the collected and examined materials' broad scope.

The main body of the collection is reserved for the source materials themselves: from proofs of mathematical theorems through physical, philosophical and literary texts, to poems, graphics, charts, black-and-white sketches, photographs and even sheet music. All texts are quoted in their original language – German, English, French, Russian, Danish, Latin, and Ancient Greek – sometimes with German translations added when, as it seems, such translations were available. The number of authors cited (philosophers, scientists, writers, poets, painters, musicians) is 167.

Special attention is devoted to Frege, Ramsey and Moore. However, since “Wittgenstein's lifelong engagement with these three authors”, according to Biesenbach, has “left its mark in his *Nachlass* to such a degree that discovering and identifying all references to them seems rather impossible [...] here, by choice, only *a selection* of texts is included (in particular, the passages from TLP and its precursors have been left out)” (p. 11). Russell is entirely excluded from the book for the same reason.

In spite of the fact that only a selection of passages referring to Frege is included, Frege is by far the most broadly represented

author.<sup>3</sup> So, in order to demonstrate some of the compositional and thematic features of the collection, I would like to scrutinize further the quotations and implicit references attributed to him.

Biesenbach provides a total of 72 of Wittgenstein's references to Frege.<sup>4</sup> Most of them can be found in multiple manuscripts and/or typescripts and, in such cases, the additional places where each quotation occurs in the *Nachlass* are also indicated (as a rule, the chronologically earliest occurrence is cited in the book). This arrangement provides a valuable compass by which readers can orient themselves and trace the development of similar formulations.

In addition, these 72 quotations are grouped together in 35 thematic clusters (from FREGE 1 to FREGE 35). Some of these clusters contain just one quotation (FREGE 2, 8, 14, 17, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35), whereas others include up to seven (FREGE 4).

And finally, to each of these 35 groups, fragments of Frege's writings are related. In more than half of the cases here, we have only a single fragment (FREGE 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 18, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32), while in the rest several fragments are included (up to four – FREGE 4, 19). Unlike Wittgenstein's quotations, that are usually brief remarks or sometimes just phrases, Frege's are quite extensive textual excerpts (some of them run to about a page and a half (e.g. in FREGE 4, 14)). On the one hand, this is due to Wittgenstein's fragmentary style of writing. On the other hand, however, Biesenbach, it would seem, must have proceeded from the assumption that the reader is acquainted with the respective Wittgenstein context or at least he/she has Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* at hand.

There are, however, two quotations of Wittgenstein lacking a proper reference (FREGE 34 and 35) and a cluster of quotations that is attributed to Frege, but without reference to a concrete text (FREGE 33). The later facts are already a symptom of the chronic

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<sup>3</sup> He is followed by Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe, Wolfgang Köhler, and William James.

<sup>4</sup> Among these, however, there are references that are, so to speak, implicit: neither is Frege's name mentioned, nor are words in quotation marks present in them. One can assume, therefrom, that Biesenbach should have used content-related criteria here.

difficulties involved in identifying which passage(s), or work, is Wittgenstein's target when he mentions authors like Frege in his remarks. Biesenbach himself pays attention to these difficulties in his Preliminaries with the following reservation:

Wittgenstein usually “quotes” from memory, but his words look as if they were proper quotations – e.g. because they are enclosed in quotation marks. [...] Often his references and allusions – especially to non-fictional literature – cannot definitively be related to a specific passage within that work. [...] In addition, it is just as often the case that Wittgenstein *interprets* other authors, rather than *quoting* them. Or he just indicates *who* “by association” has inspired him to a certain thought. [...] Therefore, it should be clear that the references given in this book often are only meant as *suggestions* thought to help readers to identify *what* Wittgenstein *might* have had in mind; a lot remains speculation. (p. 13 f.)

Some of the choices of fragments cited are actually speculative ones and should be considered, respectively, against the background of this relativity. Even at the level of the thematic grouping of Wittgenstein's quotes, Biesenbach was not able to avoid a certain degree of interpretation. Assuming, for instance, that the theme FREGE 4 is the usage of the so-called ‘assertion sign’, and the theme FREGE 5 – what Frege, according to Wittgenstein, understands by ‘Annahme’, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet FREGE 5 would seem to fit just as well in FREGE 4 (at least in view of the excerpt from Frege's article “Der Gedanke” (Ged)<sup>5</sup> cited there) and the last bullet FREGE 4 could be included in both of the groups (perhaps its first paragraph would fit better in FREGE 5, and the rest in FREGE 4). Another example is FREGE 10:

- Ich komme hier auf jene Methode der Zeichenerklärung über die sich Frege so lustig gemacht hat. Man könnte nämlich die Wörter „Rössel“, „Läufer“, etc. dadurch erklären daß man die Regeln angibt die von diesen Figuren handeln. [108, 170 → 210, 24 f. → 212, 753 → 213, 263]
- Frege: Ein mathematischer Satz sei nicht zu vergleichen einer Konstellation von Schachfiguren, denn er drücke einen Gedanken aus, & sie nicht. [137, 50b]

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<sup>5</sup> Let me note here that I shall include Biesenbach's abbreviations when I refer to Frege below.

The theme seems to be a comparison between arithmetic and chess. The 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet, however, could possibly also be included in FREGE 15, where the theme is Frege's doctrine of the sense of a sentence being the thought it expresses. But there is something else about this bullet which seems to be noteworthy. In manuscript 137 where the quotation is actually taken from, it directly follows the only quotation in FREGE 21 thematizing the question of whether we calculate mechanically or grasp thoughts when calculating:

Niemand denkt daran ob er gedankenvoll, oder 'papageihaft' rechnet, wenn er rechnet. (Frege.) [137, 50b → 232 § 602 = BPhPs II § 603]

If these two quotations were together (even though Wittgenstein himself divides them by including only the last one in typescript 232), then it would be natural, as a corresponding passage from Frege, for some parts from § 90 of *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (GGA) II to be added here.<sup>6</sup> For at that very place the inferences one makes in the Concept-Script in order to arrive at a thought from other thoughts are being opposed to the moves one makes in the chess game in order to arrive at a position from other positions. Besides, especially appropriate to the 1<sup>st</sup> bullet FREGE 10 would be a place in § 95, where Frege discusses the question whether any 'meaning' is conveyed to the chess pieces when rules of operating with them are given.

As the last observations go to show, even greater difficulties arise concerning the question of which fragments of Frege are to be related to the clusters of Wittgenstein's quotations. I come across problems, e.g., already in FREGE 1. Its 1<sup>st</sup> bullet is a remark from the *Notebooks* from 1914 (= TLP 5.4733):

Frege sagt: jeder rechtmäßig gebildete Satz muß einen Sinn haben & ich sage: jeder mögliche Satz ist rechtmäßig gebildet & wenn er keinen Sinn hat so kann das nur daran liegen daß wir einigen seiner Bestandteile keine Bedeutung g e g e b e n haben. Wenn wir auch glauben es getan zu haben. [101, 13r = Tb v. 2.9.1914 → 104, 53 = PT 5.3064 → 202–204, 5.4733 = LPhA 5.4733]

This remark is supposed to refer to a place in Frege's *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (SB) where Frege discusses the sense of what he calls

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<sup>6</sup> Possibly together with § 91 that Biesenbach has decided to use.

‘proper names’ (i.e. singular terms). Unlike Biesenbach, I am – similarly, by the way, to Max Black (1964: 247) – inclined to think that it could rather be an allusion to the GGA I, § 32. For in this case what is at issue is the sense of a sentence (resp. the thought expressed by it), rather than the sense of a name (especially since for the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* names have no ‘sense’ (*Sinn*), but just ‘meaning’ (*Bedeutung*), cf. e.g. TLP 3.3).

Surely, in most cases the excerpts from Frege’s works correspond to Biesenbach’s aims. I am, nevertheless, tempted to make a few suggestions. FREGE 2: a better choice, it seems to me, would be some part of GGA I, §§ 14–16. FREGE 8: here I would suggest GGA I, p. XVII (cf. in FREGE 13, p. 126). FREGE 11: two alternatives to the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet would be GGA I, p. XXVI (and also there p. 3: “Begriff und Gegenstand sind die Grundsteine, auf denen ich meinen Bau aufführe”), or *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (GLA), the end of § 88. FREGE 12, 1<sup>st</sup> bullet: concerning the ‘generality’ of the expressions “Begriff” and “Gegenstand” – *Funktion und Begriff* (FB), p. 18; “Über Begriff und Gegenstand” (BG), p. 193; concerning countability – GLA, § 14 (already cited in FREGE 8). FREGE 15: Frege’s passages are perhaps adequate for the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet, but when the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> ones are considered, a more appropriate choice would be FB, p. 16; SB, p. 32; GGA I, § 32; *Ged*, p. 61. FREGE 16: the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet:

Ein Begriff ist nicht wesentlich ein Prädikat. [127, 187 = BGM V § 47]

does not correspond to the first three concerning Frege’s theory that in assigning a number one makes a statement about a concept. This bullet is also problematic because it is not obvious here that this is a reference to Frege. Since Frege’s name is not mentioned, it is apparently regarded as an implicit quotation (that is also, as it seems, the opinion of the editors of Wittgenstein’s *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik* (cf. V § 47)). If this is an implicit quotation at all, then possibly BG, p. 201 would fit better here: “Der Begriff – wie ich das Wort gebrauche – ist prädikativ. [Fn.] Er ist nämlich die Bedeutung eines grammatischen Prädikats.” (BG, p. 193) “[D]er Begriff verhält sich wesentlich prädikativ auch da, wo etwas von ihm ausgesagt wird” (*ibid.*, p. 201). FREGE 18: to the 1<sup>st</sup> bullet – GGA I, § 5, fn. 3; to the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet – FB, p. 20. FREGE 19:

only the 1<sup>st</sup> bullet is an explicit reference to Frege and here I would also add GGA I, p. XIV and XXIV f. (in case that two more sentences from the first of Frege's passages were cited, the phrase "der verderbliche Einbruch der Psychologie in die Logik" would have appeared; cf. also GLA, p. VIII, where Frege speaks about the invasion – "Einbruch" – of psychology into mathematics). FREGE 33: it is presupposed here that the allusion does not concern a concrete quote from Frege; nevertheless, in the sense of an 'imaginary dialogue' between Wittgenstein and Frege – as the speculatively quoted passages are to be interpreted – I would suggest the beginning of the Appendix to GGA II (as well as the end of the Foreword to GGA I). FREGE 34 (undiscovered quotation): based on the same reasoning, I would suggest SB, p. 38 f., and Ged, p. 62 (these seem to be the only parts of Frege's writings, where commands and imperative sentences are discussed). FREGE 35 (undiscovered quotation): SB, p. 26 ("Man kann keinem verbieten, irgendeinen willkürlich hervorzubringenden Vorgang oder Gegenstand zum Zeichen für irgend etwas anzunehmen"); FB, p. 19 f. ("Es ist also nötig, Festsetzungen zu machen, aus denen hervorgeht, was z.B. '☉ + 1' bedeutet, wenn '☉' die Sonne bedeuten soll. Wie diese Festsetzungen geschehen, ist verhältnismäßig gleichgültig").

Another difficulty to be pointed out is Wittgenstein's implicit quoting. It should be said that, generally speaking, when Frege's name is not explicitly mentioned in a remark, one can never be completely sure that this is in fact a reference to him. Wittgenstein's sporadic practice of adding a certain name when rewriting a phrasing or a formulation in another manuscript or typescript later in time (cf. the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet FREGE 15, FREGE 32, as well as the undiscovered FREGE 34 and 35), does not exclude this possibility. The implicit references are twelve in number. Some of them are very subtle, e.g. FREGE 25, 27 and 28. Other are totally unproblematic, e.g. the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet FREGE 13. There is also a third group of them that seem to be a bit on the speculative side, e.g. the 6<sup>th</sup> bullet FREGE 4, the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet FREGE 16, the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet FREGE 22.

In conclusion, I would characterize this collection as, among other things, an important study of Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* and its

sources. Such a study, comprehensive as it is, would hardly be possible without the effective means of search and verification provided by an electronic edition such as the *Bergen Electronic Edition* and other electronic resources. Yet the results of Biesenbach's study, in the form they find expression in his book, should not be seen in the light of a manual or a guidebook that is *only* to be used when collating one or another quote. On the contrary, they could encourage further investigations, concentrated on the content of the references revealed by Biesenbach.

Even when taken by itself, above concerns aside, the book is altogether an enjoyable read. It would not be a far-fetched statement to say that sometimes the reader almost feels like he/she is witnessing a real dialogue between Wittgenstein and the authors which have engaged and shaped his thought.

## *References*

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