

Tracing All the Connections. Wittgenstein on Internal and External Relations

Report on the Habilitation Thesis

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The topic of this thesis is well chosen for at least two reasons. Firstly it picks a recurring motive of Wittgenstein's thought which can be found at all stages of his oeuvre and is closely connected to some of the widest known considerations of this philosopher. Yet, secondly, it has in general not received the attention it deserves as an important methodological tool employed by Wittgenstein. An investigation into the issue of internal versus external relations is, consequently, close to Wittgenstein's core philosophy *and yet* the field is not overcrowded, offering opportunities to discover non-obvious features of Wittgenstein's thought.

The juxtaposition of the types of relations mentioned in the title does not command attention similar to subjects like "the picture theory", "sense and nonsense", "the private language argument" or "rule following". This juxtaposition can, however, be shown to be involved in many of the arguments involved with these themes. This gives rise to a methodological difficulty. In order to cover the full importance of the distinction one would, on the one hand, have to write a comprehensive treatise on Wittgenstein's philosophy *tout court*, which, on the other hand, would necessarily deflect attention from the specific concern warranted by internal and external relations. Both motives can be observed in Jakub Mácha's approach. Its scope reaches across the entire Wittgenstein corpus, cf. his concluding observation "My interpretation of Wittgenstein's writing is now complete." (p. 248) And yet, Mácha picks certain thematic clusters to discuss his chosen subject. His description of the literary *genre* he is involved in is of an album: "It is my own album of Wittgenstein's remarks that I have collected in a certain order that, I hope, reveals an important strand in Wittgenstein's thinking that has been neglected in Wittgenstein scholarship so far." (Preface)

There is a certain *nonchalance* in drawing a parallel between Wittgenstein's describing his own efforts as the composition of an "album" and such an attribution to the procedure of Mácha's exegetical treatise. He is in effect proposing a second-level "album" description of a landscape, namely an album of Wittgenstein's album. This is, however, it has to be admitted, a possible solution to the methodological difficulty mentioned above. It allows J. Mácha to approach Wittgenstein's writing in its entirety while, at the same time, picking the most pertinent vantage points.

The topology of his thesis encompasses three different "locations", i.e. main chapters. A "Prelude" sketches the provenance of the thematic distinction in Hegel and British idealism as well as in Russell and Moore, who, rejecting the idealist's tenets, developed

accounts based on Empiricism and Fregean logic. Wittgenstein's early writings, including his Norwegian research notes, his Notebooks and the *Tractatus*, constitute the second main area of investigation. Both chapters are (more or less) arranged in temporal order, following the historical arguments of the predecessors of Analytic Philosophy and of Wittgenstein's own attempts at clarification. "Wittgenstein's later writings" are a different affair. Whereas it seems feasible to keep the underlying topic in view while following a straight line up to the conclusion of the *Tractatus*, matters get considerably more difficult after 1929. It is, therefore, in composing the third main chapter that one is manifestly forced to turn into an "album strategy". Jakub Mácha, in this context, abandons the temporal guideline and deals with a number of prominent Wittgensteinian issues, among them intentionality, reasons, rules, mathematical proofs, the logic of color words, the standard meter and aspect-seeing.

The way Mácha introduces his main topic is somewhat puzzling. An early subsection is called "What is wrong with the internal/external distinction" (p. 9) No question mark is added, which makes one wonder whether the caption is meant as a (rhetorical ?) question, suggesting something *might be* wrong, or a (slightly awkward) positive statement claiming that there is indeed something wrong. The subsection does, however, provide some basic considerations which are developed in the rest of the thesis. Mácha notes that Wittgenstein himself is uneasy about "internal relations". "He is reported as saying that internal relations are 'entirely different from other relations' and that 'the expression internal relation is misleading' because internal relations and external relations are categorically different; they belong to different categories' " (p. 10)

The main points of Mácha's thesis can be gleaned from this quote. There is a logico-grammatical *genus* "relation" which can, apparently, be subdivided into internal and external relations (*differentia specifica*). And there is, on the other hand, a categorical difference which seems to prevent precisely this move. J. Mácha is very attentive, throughout his thesis, to the essential distinctions to be observed in the handling of the philosophical constructs referred to by these related terms. Yet their reference *has to share* some common characteristics for otherwise the philosophical problem just falls apart. (A name, being categorically different from a logical connective, does not pose any difficulties *vis a vis* such expressions.)

The most important result of Mácha's treatise is the demonstration that a considerable part of Wittgenstein's most characteristic investigations are closely connected to this conundrum. A quick way to introduce the case is to compare an actual relation between two sticks (one being longer than the other) to a feature in conceptual space, namely the provision that the measurement of length presupposes a corresponding matrix. (J. Mácha discusses numerous variations of this theme.)

The *Tractatus*, as Mácha duly notices, draws a sharp distinction between these two options, assigning the first to the empirical realm and consequently exalting as well as debunking the remaining second option which turns out to be simultaneously determinative of all permissible expressions of language *and* devoid of the meaning we ordinarily assign to them. This well known austere (negative) dialectic is often regarded as a (albeit

spectacular) dead end to be put aside in reading the later Wittgenstein. J. Mácha makes an impressive case for keeping this motive in mind when examining the later stages of Wittgenstein's writing.

Whereas the scholarly literature on internal and external relations in early Wittgenstein is manageable and diligently taken into account by J. Mácha, his discussion of the multifaceted issues arising from the later writings are another matter. It is, in this case, simply impossible to do justice to the wealth of pertinent contributions. (This might have been a reason for the author to designate his work as an album, suggesting an eclectic and somewhat personal procedure.) Jakub Mácha does still refer to the literature in his third main chapter, but he is only able to discuss selected aspects of what is usually a much more complicated picture. "Intentionality", "Rule-following", "Mathematics" or "Color" are much too broad headings for his – entirely legitimate – deliberations on how the issues crystallized in "internal versus external relations" shape Wittgenstein's thinking.

To conclude, Jakub Mácha's thesis is an ambitious and creative attempt to emphasize the importance of a feature of Wittgenstein's philosophy little noted hitherto. It shows an impressive command of the Wittgensteinian *corpus* and considerable abilities of exegetical as well as analytic elucidation. In view of the complexity of Wittgenstein's thought, as well as the voluminous literature dedicated to it, Mácha's project is somewhat overconfident, *vide* the author's self-ascription of his work as an album. Another way to look at this is to praise it for its enterprising approach. This treatise meets the requirements of a philosophical habilitation thesis and I strongly recommend its acceptance by the committee.

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