BOOK REVIEWS

Wittgenstein's letters to Russell

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*. Edited with an Introduction by G.H. von Wright, assisted by B.F. McGuinness. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974. Pp. 190. £3.50.

This book contains a total of 131 letters (or, occasionally, excerpts from letters) from Wittgenstein to Russell (57), Wittgenstein to G.E. Moore (41), Wittgenstein to J.M. Keynes (24), Russell to Wittgenstein (1), Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell (2), Keynes to Wittgenstein (3), Keynes to I.M. Maisky (1), F.P. Ramsey to Keynes (1), and M.H. Dziewicki to Russell (1). It is surprising, and not a little disappointing, therefore, that this book contributes so little that is new to the body of information already available concerning Wittgenstein's life, his personality or his philosophy.

There are reasons for this failure. In the first place, almost all of Wittgenstein's substantial *philosophical* remarks occur in the correspondence with Russell; and these were excerpted and published some thirteen years ago as "Appendix III" to Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914-1916* (ed. by von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1961). Secondly, as regards *personal* and biographical information, there have already been published some fifteen different "memoirs", "portraits" and "biographical sketches", as well as a considerable number of Wittgenstein's letters to (amongst others) W. Eccles, P. Engelmann, R. Fouracre, L. von Ficker, C.K. Ogden, Ramsey, M. Schlick and Mrs. M. Stonborough. And these together provide for the interested reader of Wittgenstein what the dust-jacket of this book calls, somewhat blandly, an "impression of both the charm and the difficulty of his personality"; an impression which this book does not substantially modify. Thirdly, virtually all the *biographical* and *bibliographical* information which this book contains has already been made available, most notably in the "Historical Introduction" to Wittgenstein's *Prototractatus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) and in "A Biographical Sketch" published in Norman Malcolm's *L. Wittgenstein: a Memoir* (Oxford University Press, 1958), both by von Wright.

But if the book contains neither startling personal revelations nor substantial new information, still it contains much that is both delightful and revealing about Wittgenstein. We are made to realize again

just how morally fastidious, how emotionally demanding, how generous, and how uncompromisingly unsparing in argument he could be. And we realize how very generous and understanding were his friends! "Dear Ludwig, What a maniac you are!" Keynes began his reply to a particularly tortuous and unpleasant letter from Wittgenstein (quoted p. 128f). And perhaps because Keynes could achieve such a degree of almost paternal kindness and tact, his relationship with Wittgenstein ran a relatively even course. Such is not the case, however, with the relationships between Wittgenstein and the other two correspondents. Wittgenstein wrote abusively to Moore in 1914 (p. 150), and the ensuing break in their friendship lasted fifteen years. Russell met Wittgenstein at Innsbruck in 1922, and this meeting, the editor informs us, "led to a rupture in their friendship with was never restored to what it had been before" (p. 2). But even before this date relations were not always harmonious. In January or February 1914, for example, Russell and Wittgenstein quarrelled so intensely that Wittgenstein was prompted to write: "... I shall not write to you again and you will not see me again either" (cf. pp. 49-54). It is clear, even from Wittgenstein's half of the correspondence, that it was Russell's persistent kindness which enabled their friendship to survive this crisis. Unfortunately, in neither of these cases is it known over what they quarrelled; and it can only be hoped that Russell's letters to Wittgenstein can be located, for they might well shed some light on matters such as this. (The *only* letter from Russell to Wittgenstein which is known to exist is printed, p. 60f.)

Mr. B.F. McGuinness has translated those letters, mostly to Russell, which were originally written in German. The translations are accurate and idiomatic. The only mistake this reviewer discovered is the omission of the words "and acts" after the penultimate word in "... my life is *FULL* of the ugliest and pettiest thoughts imaginable ..." (p. 53).

Perhaps the most important academic need which this book satisfies is to present clearly and correctly and in context the logically and philosophically significant parts of the correspondence with Russell. For, it transpires, the excerpts appended to Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* are far from accurate. This reviewer found approximately fifty points of divergence between the two versions - though the majority of these are without serious semantical or logical significance. Three, however, are important enough to warrant mention here: (1) the diagrammatic representation of the proposition "p≡p" in the ab-notation is wrong (cf. *Notebooks*, pp. 126, 128 and *Letters*, pp. 40, 43). (2) the formula

$$F[\hat{x}(\phi x)] =: \phi z \equiv_z \psi x . \supset_\psi . F(\psi)$$

which occurs in the *Notebooks* (pp. 126, 128), should be written

$$F[\hat{x}(\varphi x)] . = : \varphi z \equiv_z \psi z . \supset_\psi . F(\psi)$$

as it appears in the *Letters* (pp. 40, 43). And (3) the notation involving multiple underlinings to show the transitivity of correlations of new truth-poles in the ab-notation is abbreviated beyond the point of intelligibility in the *Notebooks* (p. 123); this notation is given in full in the *Letters* (p. 33).

One cannot but wonder, despite the editor's avowal that they are really too uninteresting to print, just what *is* contained in the twenty-three extant letters to Moore and Keynes which have been omitted from this collection. The very first letter Wittgenstein wrote to Moore, for example, is not printed, nor is there any indication of what it contains. This is disquieting - and the book would be better if it were complete. It would also be better if it had an index.

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