

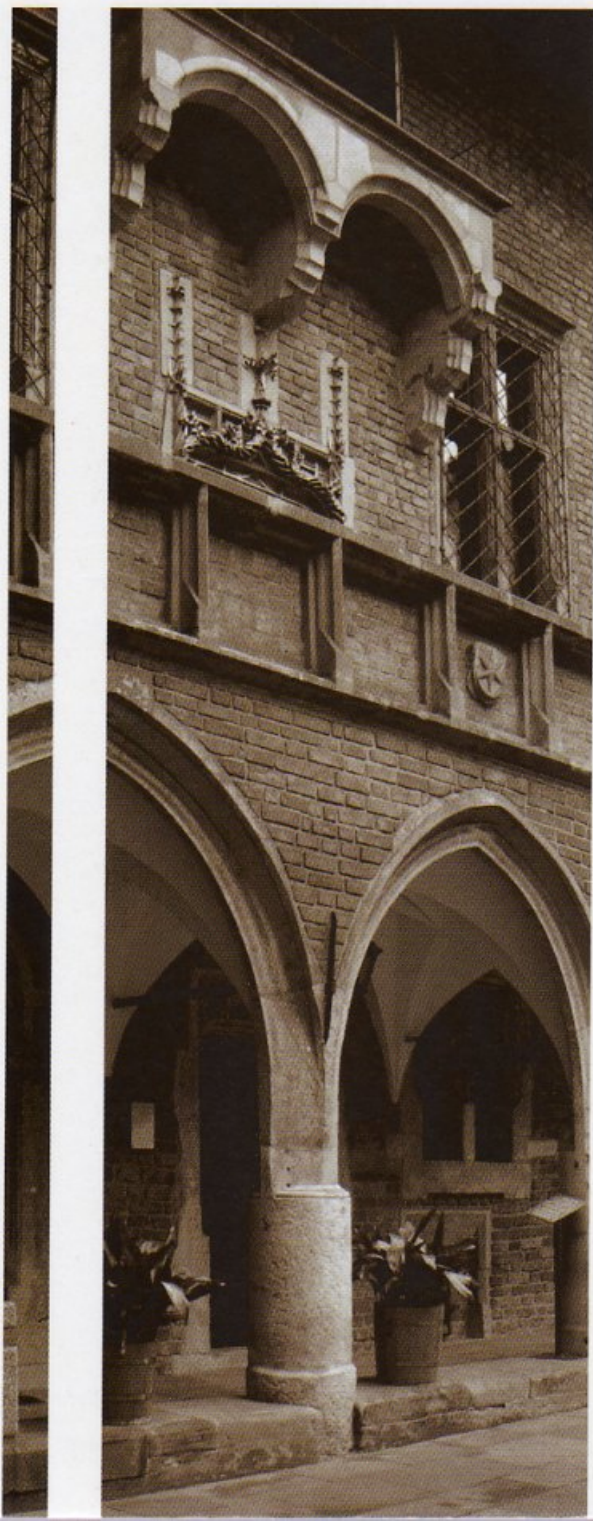
VOLUME OF ABSTRACTS

6 EUROPEAN
CONGRESS OF
ANALYTIC
PHILOSOPHY

Sixth European Congress of Analytic Philosophy

Jagiellonian University, Institute of Philosophy

21-26 August 2008, Krakow, Poland



Section 1: History of Philosophy
When and how did Wittgenstein write his Tractatus?

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The so-called “Prototractatus” notebook, partially published in 1971 with the subtitle “An early version of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus”, can instead be considered the manuscript of the Tractatus itself. It contains all the material of the final typescript, although organized in a top-down manner: from the first page, which includes six of the seven cardinal propositions, until the last twenty pages (not published) with eighty propositions of bottom level (i.e. numbered with several decimals) and the definitive “Preface”. The understanding of its composition technique was not easy, because the propositions succession seems greatly chaotic; it testifies, roughly speaking, the order of composition, following a hierarchic schema that Wittgenstein perhaps managed by other sheets of paper. So, von Wright regarded the Prototractatus notebook as a last rewriting, immediately before the 1918 typescript; only in 1989 McGuinness understood that the manuscript requires a very longer period of composition. In effects, he discovered in a documents list of January 1917 a precise reference to it, of course in a previous stage of composition. He so suggested that the notebook can be sectioned into several layers, all in some sense already consistent and completed; more than half of the book was written, McGuinness argued, between June 1915 and March 1916. This stage is very interesting, because it immediately precedes the insertion of the proposition seven and of the first ethics considerations: until here, the Tractatus was a pure logical treatise. Andreas Geschkowsky on 2001 stated that some McGuinness’ “proofs” are not decisive and post-dated the starting point to September 1916.

I agree with Geschkowsky’s criticism but not at all with his proposals. In my view, the chief document to consider is Wittgenstein’s letter of October 22nd 1915 to Russell, where he speaks about a “last summary written in pencil on loose sheets of paper”. Basing on this and on other clues converging into this turning point, I argue that at that time the Tractatus basic core (the 280 original propositions on the first 28 pages of the notebook) was already completed and copied into a top-down structure on loose sheets. In short, I think that the scattered sheets were not an initial rough miscellany from which Wittgenstein obtained the notebook first part: on the contrary, they were obtained from the notebook first layer as a by-level structured copy. The scattered sheets, like an archetypal hypertext, permit to Wittgenstein a perspicuous representation of the growing structure of his *Abhandlung* and will be the working laboratory for subsequent insertions of quotations from his other manuscripts. They accompany the Prototractatus notebook as a twin version, justify the strange and ungovernable structure of the notebook itself and support the complex formal restructuring (“*Korrektur*”) at page 103. So we can understand how could Wittgenstein create the hypertext-like architecture of his masterpiece (see the hypertext at www.bazzocchi.com/wittgenstein). Like the notebook, that can be defined an indexed-sequential device, the loose sheets increasing system doesn’t require any re-writing and makes unnecessary to suppose (as the critics do, and McGuinness above all) series of sequential copies to dominate the apparent numeric chaos of the notebook. Indeed, we haven’t any testimony of such supposed intermediate copies, on typescript or not, while also Heinrich Groag remembered a manuscript “written in pencil on loose sheets with numbered propositions” loan¹⁴ to him in 1917. Consequently to my hypothesis, the first 28 pages of the notebook are a first writing and must have been written before October 22nd 1915. Driven by this idea, I’ve found in Wittgenstein’s diary a surprising reference to a precise correction on page 12 of Prototractatus notebook. If then we assume that in June at least 12 pages were already fitted, the words of Wittgenstein’s letter of May 22nd 1915 (“recently my method¹⁴ drastically changed”) could be connected with the Tractatus effective starting point. Therefore we can conclude that the main pages of the Tractatus hierarchy may date from April or May 1915: McGuinness’ dating anyhow seems to fall, but on the opposite side compared with Geschkowsky’s thesis.