Book Review: UFFELMANN, Sarah Anna. *Vom System zum Gebrauch: Eine genetisch-philosophische Untersuchung des Grammatikbegriffs bei Wittgenstein*. (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2016. 242 pp. ISBN 978-82-308-3234-9).

Nuno Venturinha

Nova University of Lisbon – FCSH
Department of Philosophy / IFILNOVA
Portugal
nventurinha.ifl@fcsh.unl.pt

ABSTRACT
This review discusses Uffelmann's thesis that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar underwent important changes in the different phases of his philosophizing. I claim that if we do not accentuate the shifts in approach and terminology that naturally exist in Wittgenstein's thought, we can see that grammar and logic go hand in hand all along the way, from the *Tractatus* to the very end, and that grammar was simply a mode he found to conceive of logic in a completely different way from what Frege and Russell did.

This work concentrates on the concept of grammar in Wittgenstein's philosophy, mainly in the so-called transitional and later periods. This is a topic that has attracted the attention of various scholars in the last few decades, with the amount of secondary literature on the topic being significant. Uffelmann convincingly shows that she knows the relevant studies published in German and English, interestingly discussing throughout *Vom System zum Gebrauch* many different views. More important, however, is the knowledge demonstrated by the author of the Wittgenstein texts. As the title makes clear, Uffelmann does not limit her study to the publications edited from Wittgenstein's *Nachlass*, such as *Philosophical Remarks*, *Philosophical Grammar*, *The Blue and Brown Books* or

Philosophical Investigations, but she makes effective use of the *Nachlass* itself. In doing so, the status of grammar in Wittgenstein's thought receives a decisive illumination, with *Vom System zum Gebrauch* contributing in an important way, with its "genetic-philosophical investigation", to the clarification of many puzzling issues. To enter into Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* is not an easy task, but the author has acquired all the learning needed to move herself in a profitable manner through an extraordinarily convoluted corpus. Yet, the work has the necessary balance between a genetic and a philosophical study, with the *Nachlass* being in the service of an elucidation of philosophical matters, in particular the transition from a system-like conception of meaning to one based on use.

The main claim of *Vom System zum Gebrauch* is that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar underwent important changes in the different phases of his philosophizing. This view challenges those interpretations, such as that of Peter Hacker, that see the concept of grammar as remaining essentially the same from 1929 onwards. As Uffelmann recognizes, to interpret what Wittgenstein meant by grammar on an evolutionary basis is not absolutely innovative, with other authors having already proposed a similar reading (e.g. Mauro Engelmann). However, the work is original in tracing the concept of grammar from the time of the *Tractatus* until the writings on certainty and, above all, in providing empirical data, of philological kind, to support the claims made. This methodology allows Uffelmann to reject speculation in favour of evidence and this scientificity provided by philology is, in the domain of an author like Wittgenstein, with his intricate *Nachlass*, most welcome.

In the first chapter of *Vom System zum Gebrauch*, Uffelmann analyses the different uses of the word "grammar" and then introduces Wittgenstein's peculiar usage. The starting-point is Moore's criticism of the Wittgensteinian conception of grammar, with the author citing some notes from the Moore papers, published only in 2016, and relating these to the sources already available. There follows a valuable inventory of Wittgenstein's employment of the term "Grammatik" in the *Nachlass*. Uffelmann distinguishes between "grammar in the general sense", "grammar in the particular sense", "grammar in another sense" and "derivatives from grammar". It is very interesting to see, as the perspicuous tables of the work show (Sec. 1.6), that it is in the *Big Typescript* that the concept of grammar appears more often, with "grammar in the general sense" having more occurrences than "grammar in the particular sense", something that is also the case in the 1929-30 remarks but not in Part I of the *Investigations*. Another interesting conclusion is that the word and its

derivatives almost disappear in the last writings, where Wittgenstein prefers to use "logic", something that has a parallel only in the 1929-30 remarks, though there "grammar" also appears copiously. Last but not least, the author also demonstrates that, in all sets analysed, "logic in the general sense" has a much more regular appearance than "logic in the particular sense". Although Wittgenstein wrote the majority of his texts in German, the empirical data that could have been obtained from his texts in English, namely the Blue Book, with no counterpart in German, would have been an important addition to the study. In fact, *Vom System zum Gebrauch* does not examine this dictation in detail, one that, as recent work of Jonathan Smith has shown (2013), Wittgenstein revised extensively.

After laying down the main arguments of *Vom System zum Gebrauch*, Uffelmann focuses, in the second chapter, on what Wittgenstein meant by "grammar", in its relationship with "logic", in the Tractarian corpus and the early post-1929 manuscripts. The examination of the concept of "grammar" as used at the time of the preparation of the *Tractatus* is short and even if Wittgenstein does not use it abundantly, his regular employment of the term "logic" should suffice to justify a more thorough analysis. It is in the criticism that the early Wittgenstein directs at both Frege and Russell that we find the roots for his innovative conception of "logical grammar" or "logical syntax", as he makes clear in *Tractatus* 3.325. The author quotes the first paragraph of this proposition twice (p. 26, fn. 24, and p. 69), but not the parenthetical remark that constitutes the second paragraph, where Frege and Russell are named. On p. 69 Uffelmann reproduces in facsimile the proposition that in the *Prototractatus* corresponds to the first paragraph of 3.325, numbered 3.2015, but even there the second paragraph immediately follows the first, bearing the number 3.20151. Another important issue that could have been subjected to a deeper examination is Wittgenstein's so-called phenomenological phase. Section 2.2 includes five pages on "phenomenology as grammar" and a couple of pages dedicated to the "colour-octahedron", but what is at stake in the 1929 writings and the vast literature on the topic should deserve a central attention. The consequences of Wittgenstein's rejection of a phenomenological language are considered in Section 2.3, where we find some pages about "grammar as 'theory of logical types'", with Russell being discussed. The fact that Wittgenstein talks in *Tractatus* 3.331-3.333 about Russell's theory of types and that *Tractatus* 3.334 alludes to "rules of logical syntax" – with only 3.332 being

referred to on p. 97, fn. 165 – confirms the significance of the Tractarian period for the understanding of the later views.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the *Big Typescript* and the *Brown Book*, more specifically what Alois Pichler has called the "Brown Book Complex", which consists of Ts 310 (the English Brown Book), the second part of Ms 115, where we find Wittgenstein's German version of that work under the title *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Versuch einer Umarbeitung*, plus Ms 141, which contains a preliminary version of the German text. The author begins with some elucidatory remarks about the singularity of Ts 213, distinguishing it, as Joachim Schulte has done, from the *Big Typescript*, with Wittgenstein's revisions. This sub-section, "Erläuterungen zur Textgrundlage: Ts 213 und BT", constitutes a remarkable overview of the problematic history behind the publication of this pivotal text, which involves the polemic edition of *Philosophical Grammar*. With the help of other perspicuous tables (Sec. 3.1), we can see that the concepts of both "grammar" and "logic" are recurrent in Wittgenstein's reworking of the typed text, making the number of occurrences even larger. The discussion of "grammar as a *pure* calculus" and the introduction of "games and language games" is well conducted, with Uffelmann discussing relevant literature. The Brown Book and its twin texts are examined in Section 3.2 and the author begins again with elucidations on the textual basis, at this point Ts 310 and Ms 115ii. These, however, are much briefer than those on Ts 213 and BT. As recent work of Arthur Gibson has shown (2010), Wittgenstein has also revised at length the English version of the Brown Book. Although we are still waiting for the publication of that version of the Brown Book, some words about it would have been fitting. In fact, as I myself have noted (Venturinha 2013, p. 5), Wittgenstein tried, with the help of Moore, to publish the Brown Book in 1935. The absence of these references is however consistent with the little attention paid to the Blue Book, though I am of the opinion that these two English texts should have been decisively taken into account in *Vom System zum Gebrauch*. As a matter of fact. I have not found a single quotation from the Blue Book or Ts 309. It is true that we find in Section 3.2 a table containing appearances of the term "grammar" not only in the *Big Typescript* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, as Tab. 1 on p. 59 already documented, but also in the Brown Book and Ms 115ii. But we do not find such an analysis for the term "logic", albeit there is a sub-section on Wittgenstein's use of it in the "Brown Book corpus".

The fourth and final chapter concentrates on the *Philosophical Investigations* and later manuscripts, namely those from which *On Certainty* was edited. As before, Section 4.1 contains important considerations on the text of Ts 227, which Uffelmann, following Alois Pichler, interprets as a "polyphonic album". This interpretation is extraordinarily interesting but its tenets can only be fully accessed when it is confronted with opposing and related views, something that the work treats very quickly. The transition to the analysis of the later texts also deserves a note. In fact, there are important materials between the composition of Ts 227 and the 1949-51 remarks. For that reason, we need to take the examination of Mss 172-177 as a case-study, which is simply indicative of Wittgenstein's views at that time. If it is true that these manuscripts were sources not only for *On Certainty* but also for *Remarks on Colour* and the second volume of the *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, the fact is that there are many items in the *Nachlass* that could decisively contribute to the circumspection of the concept of "grammar", in this period and before. The analysis of the other writings on the philosophy of psychology and of those on the philosophy of mathematics would certainly add important data to the investigation. As an exercise among many possible exercises, however, *Vom System zum Gebrauch* fulfils its aims of clarification. It isolates specific corpora and extracts important conclusions that can be tested against other textual sets. But given their interrelatedness, we would need the whole picture to draw definite conclusions.

I therefore look at the pathway described in this work concerning the evolution of the concept of grammar as an interesting suggestion, but there are aspects that still puzzle me. It is not obvious, for instance, that the phenomenological language envisaged in 1929 should be of a pure formal, symbolic nature, as is assumed in *Vom System zum Gebrauch*. If it is a fact that Wittgenstein still aims in his phenomenological phase (which includes "Some Remarks on Logical Form") to implement a clear notation, capable of making clear the confusions of our natural language, we should not take that project, as for example Jaakko Hintikka took it to be, as closely related to that of the *Tractatus*. Yet the author refers, for example on both pp. 20 and 107, to "his [Wittgenstein's] project of developing a phenomenological notation as a supplement to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*" (*sein Projekt, eine phänomenologische Notation als Ergänzung zur LpA zu entwickeln*), characterizing this "notation" on the same pages as "logical-formal" (*eine phänomenologische, und überhaupt jegliche logisch-formale Notation*). The truth is that Wittgenstein continued to insist on the

need, as he writes in the Blue Book, "to construct new notations, in order to break the spell of those which we are accustomed to" (1969, p. 23). That these "notations" are not formal is something that becomes evident in the *Investigations*, where he writes that

> If I were to reserve the word 'pain' solely for what I had previously called 'my pain', and others 'L.W.'s pain', I'd do other people no injustice, so long as a notation were provided in which the loss of the word 'pain' in other contexts were somehow made good (2009, §403).[1]

And in §562 of the *Investigations* he asks: "But how can I decide what is an essential, and what an inessential, coincidental, feature of the notation? Is there some reality lying behind the notation, to which its grammar conforms?" Taking into account that Wittgenstein's methodology in 1929 is, differently from that of the *Tractatus*, entirely descriptive of the workings of our language, it may be argued that the rejection of phenomenology at the end of that year in favour of grammar is mostly due to the recognition that a phenomenological description, though much broader than what the Tractarian operators could offer, is nevertheless secondary in relation to our ordinary language. And that is why Wittgenstein came to the conclusion as early as October 1929 that it is its grammar that must be investigated in first place since any phenomenological description will need a grammatical elucidation of the terms employed.

If we now take into consideration that many of the 1929 remarks made their way, via different typescripts, into the *Big Typescript*, it may also be argued that the conception of grammar there remains fundamentally unaltered. In contrast with what the work suggests, the autonomy of grammar defended by Wittgenstein can be seen as compatible with its application to reality if we realize, as Frege did, that the sense of our propositions, the possibility of forming a "thought", is a precondition for the empirical verification of their truth or falsehood. Hence the coincidence of grammar and logic that Uffelmann recognizes to exist in the *Big Typescript*. The apparent incompatibility between the completeness and at the same time the incompleteness of grammar vindicated by Wittgenstein is explained by our difficulties in providing a full account of what it makes sense to say. No surprise that the *Big Typescript* and its

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[1] All subsequent references to the *Investigations* are to this edition.

revisions include a number of remarks on our understanding of poetry, in order to point out the fluidity of what is it like to understand a sentence, bearing in mind that some sentences cannot be subjected to verification.

The tensions we find in the *Big Typescript* will make room for a much more concrete analysis of language, one that, according to the author, is to be found for the first time in the 1934-35 Brown Book, but, as mentioned before, the 1933-34 Blue Book has also a key role in the appreciation of our "language games". This is a notion that Wittgenstein introduces as early as 1932 and one can actually argue that this attention to the specific context in which we use our words does not mean, as *Vom System zum Gebrauch* interprets it, doing away with the idea of grammar as the "complete space of possibilities" (*vollständiger Möglichkeitsraum*), as mentioned on pp. 22 and 183. This can indeed be seen alongside Wittgenstein's "conception of grammar as the description of language use" (*Auffassung von Grammatik als Beschreibung des Sprachgebrauchs*), as Uffelmann calls it on pp. 171 and 177, for any use that can be described will be part of that whole – it cannot be outside it. What happens is that all these uses are now seen as making part of logic, which is broadly understood as the possibility of forming thoughts translatable into reasonable actions. This actually responds to the puzzling circumstance of the Brown Book possessing no occurrences of "grammar in the general sense", but only "in the particular sense", whereas the *Philosophical Investigations* contains almost the same number of each of them, 14 in the first and 18 in the second sense, as Tab. 7 on p. 161 documents. If we were to be guided only by these empirical data, we would have to point to another shift in Wittgenstein's notion of grammar. The author, however, does not want to do that and, rightly, defends that the Brown Book and the *Philosophical Investigations* have a view of grammar in common with each other. Her strategy is to interpret the instances of "grammar in the general sense" within the polyphonic method of contrasting positions, including those held by Wittgenstein in his previous writings. The polyphonic reading, as stressed, has enormous advantages over a traditional, theoretical reading. It responds much better to the therapeutic character of philosophy that Wittgenstein vindicates. But this does not mean that we cannot – and should not – look at, for example, §371 of the *Investigations*, in which we find that "*Essence* is expressed in grammar", or at §373, where it is said that "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is", in a positive way. Uffelmann is absolutely right in claiming throughout the work that Wittgenstein replaces a metaphysical way of looking at philosophy with an activity of grammatical elucidation. Yet, one may wonder

whether a rejection of the systematicity of grammar, of its essentialism, is really possible. The multifarious language games analysed by Wittgenstein in his later philosophy belong all to the grammar of human reasoning or, as he also terms it, to the "natural history of human concepts" (1980, §950). And if Wittgenstein is already well aware of the impossibility of providing a complete account of our language uses, the results of his descriptions, though not theoretical, in the common sense of the word, constitute more than simple possibilities of looking at things – they are actual possibilities and therefore belong to our systematic understanding of reality.

This leads me to the last point I wish to make. It concerns the prevalent use of "logic" in the later manuscripts. The author leans herself towards the opinion that the concept of "grammar", which cannot be coincident with that of "logic", undergoes a transformation again, in line, as noted on pp. 24, 201, 203 and 211, with the "extended concept of grammar" (*erweiterte Grammatikbegriff*) defended by Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, even if the thesis of a "third" Wittgenstein is not entirely subscribed to in *Vom System zum Gebrauch*. But if we do not accentuate the shifts in approach and terminology that naturally exist in Wittgenstein's thought, we can see that grammar and logic go hand in hand all along the way, from the *Tractatus* to the very end, and that grammar was simply a mode he found to conceive of logic in a completely different way from what Frege and Russell did. The evolution of the concept of "grammar" is indeed the evolution of the concept of "logic" that comes to be regarded in the remarks on certainty in a quasi-psychologistic way.

In conclusion, there are claims in *Vom System zum Gebrauch* that can be challenged and the empirical data, though very useful, are not complete enough to solve all the questions that can be raised when this fascinating topic is approached. But Uffelmann defends her views quite effectively using a methodology that helps to situate the claims made beyond the space of mere hypotheses. We are thus in the presence of an excellent work, one that, no doubt, will prove to be of invaluable help to those concerned with Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* and his conception of grammar.

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