

## INFLUENCE VERSUS STIMULUS

Reflection on the context of Wittgenstein's work

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**Abstract:** There were almost 300 meetings between Sraffa and Wittgenstein over two decades, sometimes with an agenda and preparatory texts. Furthermore, Piero Sraffa's name is included in a famous list from Wittgenstein of thinkers who could have influenced him. As if not enough, the "Preface" to *Philosophical Investigations* reads that he owed the most fruitful ideas of that book to the stimulus of Sraffa's incessant critical exercise. Not surprisingly, many have sought the trail of that supposed influence. However, Wittgenstein carefully chose the word *Ansporn* (stimulus) to indicate the effect caused by Sraffa's criticism and not the more generous expression of an *Anregung* (inspiration), which he had used in the *Tractatus* to refer to the works of Frege and Russell. It no longer resorts to inspiration, nor does it talk about influence.

In our presentation, we intend to reconstruct the meaning of the relationship between Sraffa and Wittgenstein, which culminated in a rift, to understand Wittgenstein's unique connection with the context of ideas he confronted. We will then show that the image of a mental transfer of ideas from Sraffa to Wittgenstein is not sustainable, not even in the commonly cited episodes of the overcoming of pictorial theory and the position of a more anthropological view of language. The stimulus in both cases was, however, decisive.

In light of this analysis, we also intend to reflect on two points: (i) the more precise reasons for the rift, decided by Sraffa in May 1946, and (ii) the stimulus provoked by Wittgenstein's reflection on the specific difficulties of understanding between the two friends for some developments relating to the theme of deep disagreements. After all, with so many points in common and supposedly so similar, one would expect an understanding between the two, at least from the questions they would diverge.

Wittgenstein's diagnosis is, however, much more severe. The similarities only generated false expectations. Therefore, referring to their relationship in a letter to Sraffa, he considers: "If some people looked like elephants and others like cats, or fish, one wouldn't *expect* them to understand each other and things would look much more like what they really are." Finally, it is worth noting that even after their rift, Wittgenstein maintained the reference to Sraffa's stimulus and their frequent contradiction. Indeed, such a harsh context was not superfluous for him; instead, it can be understood as part of his method of thought and investigation.