



# Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the 'Tractatus' and Modernism

*Ben Ware*

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Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) remains one of the most enigmatic works of twentieth century thought. In this bold and original new study, Ben Ware argues that Wittgenstein's early masterpiece is neither an analytic treatise on language and logic, nor a quasi-mystical work seeking to communicate 'ineffable' truths. Instead, we come to understand the *Tractatus* by grasping it in a twofold sense: first, as a dialectical work which invites the reader to overcome certain 'illusions of thought'; and second as a modernist work whose anti-philosophical ambition is intimately tied to its radical aesthetic character.

By placing the *Tractatus* in the force field of modernism, *Dialectic of the Ladder* clears the ground for a new and challenging exploration of the work's ethical dimension. It also casts new light upon the cultural, aesthetic and political significances of Wittgenstein's writing, revealing hitherto unacknowledged affinities with a host of philosophical and literary authors, including Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, Benjamin, and Kafka.

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