

Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter (eds.), Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: History and Interpretation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Hardback 273pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-966578-5.

This rich and rewarding collection is the product of a conference held at the University of Stirling in 2005. The conference was itself the upshot of a three-year research project on the history and interpretation of the *Tractatus*. To judge by the papers collected here, the emphasis was on careful and historically sensitive scholarly work on the book.

As the editors note in their introduction, there has been in recent years a new wave of interest in the *Tractatus* as a topic for study in its own right, independently of any desire to understand, by way of comparison or contrast, Wittgenstein's later work. Both of the editors have contributed to this trend, as well as to the related resurgence of interest in the early work of Bertrand Russell. As a result, the project of understanding the *Tractatus* historically does not distinguish the papers in this volume particularly clearly from much other recent work. But they are none the worse for that.

The editors mention their desire to avoid making the debate between "resolute" readers of the *Tractatus* and their opponents the main focus of the volume. This debate concerns the various philosophical theses which are formulated in the body of the book. The resolute readers tend to find a purely therapeutic intention in Wittgenstein's enunciation of the theses, while their opponents are more inclined to think of him as putting forward his own substantive views in those passages.

Those of us who have tended to find this debate somewhat vague and unsatisfying will be relieved by the editors' attitude. In any case, it is a justifiable attitude to take. As the introduction notes, on either reading of the frame of the *Tractatus*, it is important to understand the body of the book in its own terms. We need to understand just what doctrines are formulated there, and what arguments Wittgenstein thinks can be adduced in their favour.

Nevertheless, the volume does contain a great deal of material that is relevant to the debate. Resolutists like James Conant and Cora Diamond have tended to deny that Wittgenstein makes any positive use of the distinction between saying and showing. They have also accused their opponents of ascribing to Wittgenstein, against his intentions, substantive metaphysical theses, whether of a realist or idealist kind. Several papers here either discuss what role the saying/showing distinction plays in the *Tractatus*, or test the extent to which Wittgenstein expresses or advocates any metaphysical theses.

Several different approaches to this task of understanding the *Tractatus* historically are taken, but they are represented very unevenly. One might divide the papers into four rough groups. (i) Michael Potter's contribution is an examination of the evolution of the actual text. (ii) Hanne Appelqvist and Genia Schönbaumsfeld offer somewhat speculative discussions of the submerged influence of Kant and Kierkegaard respectively. (iii) The bulk of the papers comprise detailed discussion of the logical doctrines of the *Tractatus* with particular emphasis on Wittgenstein's engagement with Russell. Contributions by Ian Proops, Peter Milne, Thomas Ricketts, William Child and James Levine fall into this category. Topics covered include Wittgenstein's account of the logical constants, the saying/showing distinction, solipsism and the issue of private sensation. Wittgenstein's views on generality and quantification turn out to be of particular importance. The authors' cumulative treatment of this issue is perhaps the greatest strength of the volume. (iv) In a fourth category, perhaps, is a further instalment in an ongoing debate between Adrian Moore and Peter Sullivan on the question of whether Wittgenstein advocated a form of transcendental idealism in the *Tractatus*.

Potter

Potter reconstructs the development of the *Tractatus* from Wittgenstein's pre-war writings (the subject of Potter's excellent book *Wittgenstein's Notes on Logic*) and the various notebooks compiled during the early war years, up to the publication of Ogden and Ramsey's English translation, with Russell's introduction, in 1922.

The result is a complex and somewhat speculative narrative, and the reader is likely to become lost among the various manuscripts, typescripts and notebooks. Some general morals can nevertheless be drawn. The somewhat romantic notion cherished by some of us, of the *Tractatus* emerging in crystalline purity amid gunfire on the Italian front late in the war, is dispelled. Instead, it appears that much of the book (up to about proposition 6) was in more or less its final form by summer 1916, much of it composed while Wittgenstein was at home in Vienna on leave.

One point that does emerge is the extent of the continuity between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's pre-war work in Cambridge and Norway. Another is that the logical (and, if one will, metaphysical) doctrines expressed in the *Tractatus* were more or less complete before the material on value, on viewing the world as a whole, and on silence was added in the late stages of the war. Perhaps this is good news for the anti-resolutist. But Potter refrains from drawing any very strong conclusion about interpretation from his reconstruction.

Appelqvist

Hanne Appelqvist looks at Wittgenstein's early remarks on ethics through a Kantian lens. But it is Kant's aesthetics and not his ethics which is in focus here. Specifically, Appelqvist elucidates Wittgenstein's attitude to ethics under four headings corresponding to Kant's four moments of judgements of beauty: disinterestedness, universal validity, purposiveness and necessity. The claim is not that Wittgenstein had Kant's tetradic distinction specifically in mind, or that this very passage of the third *Critique* exerted an identifiable influence, but that Wittgenstein's project is sufficiently Kantian in spirit for the comparison to be an enlightening one.

According to the *Tractatus*, neither ethical nor aesthetic value inhabits the world. The facts that constitute the world could be described without reference to the will, to good or bad, or to beauty. Wittgenstein also remarked (*TLP* 6.421) that "ethics and aesthetics are one and the same". Commentators seem to agree that the point of saying so is *not* that ethics and aesthetics can alike be dismissed as mere nonsense. It is a difficult matter to say what the point is. Appelqvist's approach is to suggest that Kant's approach to aesthetics provides a useful analogy. This is indeed plausible insofar as for Kant aesthetic judgement is not cognitive, but is not to be understood as mere subjective affect either. But it quickly becomes unclear just what further lesson we are to draw from the analogy, and the reader is left intrigued but puzzled. The presentation suffers from a vice familiar from much Wittgenstein literature: there is too much piecemeal quotation and too little sustained argument.

Schönbaumsfeld

The editors describe Genia Schönbaumsfeld's paper on "Kierkegaard and the *Tractatus*" as "perhaps a more romantic perspective on Wittgenstein's ethics" than that of Appelqvist. I must admit to being rather puzzled by this paper: as with Appelqvist, one is presented with interesting and evocative material but, perhaps, no clear conclusion. We are very much in the territory of the debate over resolutism, and in particular how the final sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be interpreted. James Conant has argued that both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard abjure the notion that there is any realm of the ineffable. Schönbaumsfeld argues that, on the contrary, it is precisely Wittgenstein's

Kierkegaardian conception of ethics that goes unexpressed because unexpressible: "the *Tractatus* highlights the importance of the ethical precisely by having next to nothing to say about it." Silence is a "moral injunction".

It is true that, according to the doctrines expressed in the *Tractatus*, anything that can be said stops short of ascribing value to things in the world, including ethical values. It follows, then, that insofar as there is a domain of the ethical, it is according to Tractarian doctrine inexpressible. What is puzzling is why this should be considered not merely a consequence of Wittgenstein's early philosophy of language but rather as itself expressing insight into the importance of the ethical. Why should one stay silent about the things one finds important?

The answer apparently lies in a religious or "quasi-religious" conception of ethics shared by Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. If one were to attempt to express ethical content, one would inevitably fall short, spouting what Schönbaumsfeld quotes Wittgenstein as calling "transcendental twaddle". To do so would not only be inaccurate but also impious. Whether this line of thought sheds any light on the ending of the *Tractatus* is unclear to me, however.

Proops

Ian Proops's paper sheds light on the saying-showing distinction by examining its relation to Frege's doctrine of logical categories and the problem of the concept *horse*. Since the work of Geach and Anscombe, it has been a commonplace to trace the distinction to this area of Frege's work. By examining in detail just what Frege's problem is, Proops seeks a clearer view of the precise connection between the two.

Several possible interpretations of the problem are discussed. The first is what Proops calls the "breach of custom" problem. On the face of things, the sentence "The concept *horse* is a concept" is an instance of the schema "The K T is a K." But, by Frege's lights, the sentence is false, even though the schema it instantiates customarily yields truths. Proops suggests that Frege ought to deny that the sentence really is an instance of the schema, and thus maintain that the breach of custom is only superficial. But this is not the really deep problem which afflicts Frege.

The real Fregean problem is twofold. The first is that of "self-stultification". In attempting to explain the distinction between concepts and objects, we find ourselves attempting to say things which turn out, strictly speaking, to be false. Proops helpfully distinguishes this problem from a related but more general one: what he calls the problem of "frustration of referential intentions". Frege's statements about concepts fail to match his thought, because he fails to refer to the concepts to which he had intended to refer. Here we arrive at the interesting issue of whether *Frege* believes there to be ineffable truths. Proops argues that what Frege has in mind is an inappropriateness of language, harmless if carefully handled, which is inevitably incurred when we express a certain thought. There is for Frege no question of any thought which just cannot be expressed.

The fourth possible interpretation of the problem comes closest to Wittgenstein's: Proops calls it "the inexpressibility of logical category distinctions". But Proops argues that Frege did not intend any inexpressibility doctrine of such generality. Thus Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction may at best have arisen from reflection on Frege's problem: it cannot be characterised as an application of the problem. Since Proops's paper itself shows connections between Frege's problem and Wittgenstein's distinction, and even demonstrates how the former can point to the latter, this hardly shows that Geach and Anscombe were basically incorrect. But the point is nevertheless worth making, and the discussion of Frege is illuminating in its own right.

Milne

Peter Milne tackles Wittgenstein's pronouncement at *Tractatus* 5.4611 that "signs for logical operators are punctuation marks." His strategy is to explain Wittgenstein's view of the logical constants in such a way that both their similarities and dissimilarities to punctuation marks become clear. It is plain that logical constants make some contribution to the sense of the sentences in which they appear. But for Wittgenstein, unlike Frege and Russell, they do not name components of the sense of the sentence. The difficulty is then to characterise the way in which their contribution is made. Milne appeals to Wittgenstein's conception of propositions signs as pictures to solve the difficulty. It is a *truth function* which constitutes a picture. Logically equivalent complex propositions, in which the same atomic propositions are combined in different ways by constants, mark different ways in which we can arrive at the same truth function. Thus we can say that constants contribute to the determination of the truth conditions of a picture without being part of the content of the picture itself.

Punctuation marks, similarly, contribute to meaning without representing aspects of reality but, Milne says, they do so in different ways. The difference is brought out by the fact that pictures can themselves be negated: logical operators can be applied to pictures themselves. But we do not so much as have a picture until the work of punctuation marks is done.

Ricketts

Thomas Ricketts addresses the topics of generality and quantification. Wittgenstein's approach to first-order quantification is contrasted with that of Frege and Russell, and Ricketts adds somewhat speculative remarks on what prospects for higher-order quantification are afforded by Tractarian logical doctrine.

In brief, for Wittgenstein general statements like "all Fs are G" are constructed truth-functionally from particular statements about objects, statements of the form "a is G". But even if Wittgenstein's approach were adequate for first-order quantification, it is unclear how higher-order quantification can be handled. Ricketts's tentative answer draws on remark 5.501, in which Wittgenstein suggests that we might determine a proposition by "giving a formal law that governs the construction of the propositions, in which case the bracketed expression has as its members all the terms of a series of forms."

Ricketts's paper is short and pithy. It seems to me that it would have benefitted from being longer: more space might usefully have been devoted to explaining its fairly complex and subtle argument.

Child

William Child argues, against Cora Diamond, that there is no private language argument in the *Tractatus*. The debate relates, perhaps tangentially, to the resolutist issue, since resolutists typically emphasise continuities between early and late Wittgenstein. But it has its own interest. Diamond appeals to Wittgenstein's conception of generality, which unlike Russell's demands that I should be capable of understanding the instances of any general statement that I understand. Thus, Diamond thinks, Russell's route to interpreting our statements about the mental lives of others is blocked. Russell thinks that I can think of Bismarck as having a toothache, since I can have the purely general thought that there is something which is a toothache and which is had by Bismarck, even though I could not so much as formulate a thought about a particular toothache of Bismarck's without (impossibly) being acquainted with that particular. Since Wittgenstein is committed to denying such possibilities, he must suppose that if we can understand statements about Bismarck's toothaches at all, such statements cannot involve objects which are private to Bismarck.

Child denies a premise of Diamond's argument. They agree that for Wittgenstein understanding a statement involving a name requires knowing (*kennen*) the object referred to by the name. But Child denies that Wittgenstein's notion of object-knowledge is equivalent to Russell's notion of acquaintance, and thus that Wittgenstein's objects are comparable to Russellian sense data.

Levine

James Levine's paper, by the far the longest in the volume, treats of Wittgenstein's conception of the unthinkable via a discussion of Berkeleyian idealism. Berkeley argued for idealism on the grounds that no object which is not in the mind can be named. He concluded that we cannot understand the realist hypothesis that there might be mind-independent objects. Levine is not concerned with the detail of Berkeley's argument, but rather with realist responses to it. Prior argued that Berkeley had neglected the possibility of a general thought to the effect that objects not in the mind exist, formulated without reference to any particular such object. And Mackie made the additional point that from the unthinkability of a class of object we cannot validly infer that no such object exists.

Levine uses this framework to provide an interpretation of the Tractarian attitude towards solipsism. The starting point is Russell's principle of acquaintance: that no proposition can be understood unless we are acquainted with its constituents. Solipsism threatens: it may follow that I cannot so much as understand the possibility of objects beyond the domain of my acquaintance. (This domain, Levine helpfully points out, can be defined liberally or restrictively: perhaps it contains all the objects with which I have ever been acquainted, or perhaps only those objects with which I am currently acquainted. A more radical form of solipsism attends the second option.) Russell's solution is along Prior's lines. I can understand general propositions about things beyond my acquaintance, and many of the things I take myself to know beyond that domain are indeed properly expressed in general terms. But, Levine argues, Wittgenstein's ideas about generality prevent him from taking this route.

So solipsism still threatens. But Mackie's solution is still available. Levine interprets Wittgenstein's anti-metaphysical stance precisely as the refusal of this route. The domain of given objects yields the extent of logical space, so that not even the bare possibility suggested by Mackie can be admitted.

Moore and Sullivan

Adrian Moore and Peter Sullivan have for some time engaged in a fascinating and subtle debate about Wittgenstein's attitude to transcendental idealism. Moore sees Wittgenstein as advocating a form of it. Sullivan agrees that transcendental idealist doctrines are expressed in the *Tractatus*, but argues that Wittgenstein means to undermine and not to endorse them. Importantly, for Sullivan transcendental idealism is not merely undermined in the way the "frame" of the book is thought to undermine its body; rather, the remarks within the body already constitute a rejection.

The Moore-Sullivan debate first took published form in the supplementary volume to the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* in 2003. Another exchange was published in 2011 in the collection *Beyond the Tractatus Wars*, edited by Rupert Read and Matthew A. Lavery. Rather confusingly, Moore's paper in the volume under review predates the exchange in the Read and Lavery volume, though Sullivan's response is new. Readers may find it useful to study the Moore paper in the new volume first. It is the best and clearest introduction that I have seen to a debate in which the disputed issue can be frustratingly difficult to grasp.

What makes the debate particularly difficult to understand is the extent of Moore and Sullivan's

agreement. They agree that Wittgenstein is diagnosing, and attempting to undermine, an inveterate tendency to conceive of the limits of the thinkable as limitations on thought. If we conceive limits in this way, we are inevitably led into thinking of there being, on the other side of the dividing line, thoughts which we are unable to think. But to see things this way is to contradict the very notion of a limit of the thinkable. Transcendental idealism gets into the picture because it is a pertinent-seeming way in which the limits of the thinkable are so conceived: it is because we are the creatures we are that the limits are drawn where they are. It is possible (even if only a bare possibility that cannot be detailed further) that a cognitively different being would have available a broader range of thinkables. To suppose *this* is precisely to conceive limit as limitation.

Roughly, then, Moore thinks that such transcendental idealism is promulgated in the body of the *Tractatus*, though ultimately to be rejected as (in some sense) nonsensical, along with the rest of that body. Sullivan argues on the contrary that transcendental idealism is rejected in the body. This hardly does justice to the subtlety of the discussion, however, and it may even be hoped that in the future this material could be organised into a short volume of its own.

As a whole, Sullivan and Potter's volume is a highly worthwhile one, which will yield insights and stimulate thoughts in experienced readers of the *Tractatus*. But it is not an easy read, and some of the best papers in it are also the most difficult, requiring a grasp of the issues in philosophical logic with which Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein grappled. It is thus highly recommended for scholars, but is not a particularly good starting point for those who are just beginning to develop their interests in Wittgenstein's early work.

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