

BOOK REVIEW

Jaap van der Does, **Passed over in Silence. On Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and its System.** London: College Publications, 2011. xix + 284 pp., £ 17.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-84890-008-0 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jürgen Koller

Upon reading Jaap van Does's book 'Passed over in Silence' it is immediately apparent that this book is not simply another book on Wittgenstein and his *Tractatus*. Much has been written, lots of exegetical work has been done over the years and yet, a formal approach to the system in the *Tractatus* has been neglected so far. The author wants to counter this situation by showing that the *Tractatus* has a coherent reading, both philosophically and technically (xii). It seems doubtful whether he succeeded.

The book consists of 14 chapters, whereby for the most chapters interludes are established. One cannot fail to agree with the author that 'they offer historical or other points of detail without interrupting the flow of interpretation too much' (xvii). Even though I shall not discuss all chapters and interludes in detail here, I would like to emphasise the interlude 'Russell on judgments and propositions' (64–8) in advance.

It is a well-known fact that within the first two decades of the 20th century Russell had changed his mind on judgment several times. And it is equally established that Wittgenstein influenced Russell on various levels. One may note Wittgenstein's objection against Russell's multiple relation theory of judgement as expressed in a letter to Russell, dated June 1913, in which he writes: 'Mein Einwand gegen die Urteilstheorie kann ich jetzt genau ausdrücken: Wird der Satz „A urteilt, daß a (z. B.) in der Beziehung R zu b steht“ richtig analysiert, so muß meines Erachtens offenkundig der Satz „aRb.v.~aRb“ unmittelbar *und ohne den Gebrauch irgendeiner weiteren Prämisse* folgen. Ihre Theorie erfüllt diese Bedingung nicht.' Even if it is disputed whether this is, in short, a denial to judge nonsense or, so e.g. in Hanks 2007¹, that the judged has to be capable of being either true or false, this can be seen

¹ Peter Hanks, 'How Wittgenstein Defeated Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment', *Synthese* 154: 121–46.

as a main objection. Does's development of a second objection, wherein he follows Pears 1979², seems to be informative and important at least in two ways. First, it turns one's attention to Russell's introduction of Platonic logical forms and to Wittgenstein's addressing of this issue. Second, the mention of this objection reveals, in my opinion, a weak spot of this formal approach with regard to this question: How shall we deal with Wittgenstein's ontological remarks?

Admittedly, van der Does does not share this view. To him, there is no contradiction in assuming a semi-formal ontology which 'concerns not just what sign and symbols are about, it includes signs, sense, and symbols' (19) and the fact that, as Pears (1979: 203) calls it, 'he [Wittgenstein; J.K.] substituted an *ineffable* [my italics] Aristotelian metaphysic for Russell's Platonic metaphysic.'

As quite common in the interpretative literature, van der Does starts the second chapter, after he has given a first general overview in the first chapter, with the ontology of the *Tractatus*, that is to say, Wittgenstein's ontological remarks. In van der Does's interpretation, Tractarian ontology is based on the discernable but hardly separable notions of object and state of things (Sachverhalt).³ He stays abstract on their specifics, as Wittgenstein did, and goes on to link Wittgenstein's approach to Frege and Russell's approaches on types. The statements on logical space and finally, after all, on the state of things and objects seem to be of crucial significance. Logical space is defined as totality of states of things (25; see also chapter 14, 248), which are configurations of objects (31; see also 248), and objects are seen as fully specified by the logical notions of form and content (25). By accepting these definitions, it is possible to see this as a first step in a direction which seems to break new ground. Van der Does reads the *Tractatus* within his formal approach as an attempt to delimit ethics through a symbolic turn from within the

² David Pears, 'The Relation between Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Propositions and Russell's Theories of Judgment', in *Wittgenstein Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C. Luckhardt, Hassocks (Sussex), 190–212.

³ I am unsure if it is better to translate 'Sachverhalt' as 'state of things' than as 'atomic fact' or 'state of affairs'. It could be argued that Wittgenstein does not use the notion of 'thing' uniformly. In addition, it seems to be clear that Wittgenstein does not see 'Sache' and 'Ding' as interchangeable. In TLP 2.01 and 4.1272 he refers to 'Sachen, Dingen' and 'Ding, Sache'. However, with reference to 2.15 and 2.1514 it could be argued for an interchangeability of 'Ding' and 'Sache'. In my opinion, this remarks can be seen as evidence for the view that Wittgenstein changed his mind on the object of his ontological remarks from a realistic point of view in the early years to a more complex view in which language does not require a language-independent reality at all, during which time the *Prototractatus* was created.

system of language. This is closer to the 'resolute' readers than he may realise.⁴ To speak of language and ontology as being on par (cf., fn 42, 54), to speak of a *descriptive essentialism* as core of the *Tractatus* (3) attributes language significance which is in line with, at least, exegetical works in the periphery of the resolutionists. On the other side, to talk about *ostensive philosophy* (e.g. 15 f.) to solve the problem of saying what can only be shown, is more in line with 'metaphysical' or 'standard' reading.

One should keep in mind that to talk about states of things as configurations of objects can be problematic. For example Wittgenstein says in 2.01 'Der Sachverhalt ist eine Verbindung von Gegenständen' – 'Verbindung' and not 'Konfiguration'. He uses the notion 'Konfiguration' for saying 'Der Gegenstand ist das Feste, Bestehende; die Konfiguration ist das Wechselnde, Unbeständige' (2.0271) and 'Die Konfiguration der Gegenstände bildet den Sachverhalt' (2.0272). This seems to be difficult to reconcile with a state of things as configuration of objects.

In the following chapters (3–4) van der Does proceeds to a deeper discussion of projection, logical space and the notion of elementary proposition. This seems appropriate, since Wittgenstein's picture theory directly follows on his ontological remarks.⁵ The basic consideration can be identified in establishing a holistic notion of projection (54 ff.) to offer a more detailed discussion of elementary propositions in chapter four.

Chapters five to eight are about propositions of finite logical complexity – an infinite variant is presented in the chapters eleven and twelve (cf., 168) – and finally in chapter eight we have a discussion of truth and the related notion of logical consequence. It is shown convincingly that truth-functionality occurs in the *Tractatus* in terms of truth-tables, graphical signs and truth-operations, and that as presented they are essentially identical; also that truth-operations are based on truth-functions (77–99).

⁴ This seems not to be surprising at all. Van der Does has little to say about resolute reading (so e.g. in 170 f.). To him this form of interpretation is weak and against the existing evidence (see fn 3, xiv). However, van der Does is aware of the problem of saying and showing. He concedes, that the possible observation that he attempts to say what according to Wittgenstein can not be said, is not always [!] correct (xv). The question is: Can you *say* what in this system *can't be said* at all?

⁵ Recent studies on the *early* Wittgenstein – here I am thinking primarily of Luciano Bazzocchi's work (e.g. 'Trees, Levels and Ladders', in *Language and World, Part 1: Essays on the philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. V. Munz, Heusenstamm, 2010, 329–42) – emphasise against the resolute readers the importance of the numbering system of the *Tractatus*.

In the short chapter six (101–12), the status of signs and symbols as facts is set out. Chapter seven brings the discussion on complex propositions in dealing with Frege's philosophy of language to an end.

The chapters nine and ten can be read as interludes. Starting with an explanation of the perfect notation of sense in chapter nine (an interesting finding is his taking into consideration of the Lindenbaum algebra (158)), chapter ten follows in offering a very readable account on Russell's paradox and its influence on Wittgenstein.

In the 13th and last chapter before van der Does summarizes his results, he addresses the 'somewhat thorny issue of quantification' (215). Although I do not believe this chapter is essential for the systematic, semi-formal approach, it provides interesting results (cf., 235 f.). So, I can agree that the differences between Wittgenstein's account on quantification and the modern one are not least due to differing philosophical approaches.

The technical aspects were only discussed sparingly, because I do not believe that a coherent reading of the *Tractatus* as a system – formal or semi-formal – can be ensured in this way. One is certainly reminded on Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell's theory of types in 3.33–3.332. To read the *Tractatus* as a coherent system – formal or semi-formal – can therefore not be guaranteed by allowing derogations. One way out of this trap could lie in a reevaluation of the Tractarian solipsism with regard to the ontological remarks and the usage of the notion of 'verstehen'. Maybe it is plausible to read 'verstehen' as 'Grenze' and the 'Verständnis' of the individual serves as a bridge between ontology and epistemology. It would also be of particular interest to evaluate his notion of 'verstehen' in, e.g. 'On Certainty'.

However, this does not change the fact that this book with its more than 90 definitions and propositions is very valuable to all readers who are primarily interested in the logic of the *Tractatus*. I am sure that this book can provide the impulse for further discussions in the future as well. Thus, I recommend the reading of this book to all Wittgenstein scholars.