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Reviewed by Joshua Eisenthal

Review: *Representation and Reality in Wittgenstein's* Tractatus, by José Zalabardo

Joshua Eisenthal

1. Introduction

I recommend *Representation and Reality* to anyone interested in Wittgenstein's early philosophy, including (or even especially) those who find themselves disagreeing with aspects of Zalabardo's approach. The book contains a good deal of insights into the *Tractatus*, and where I found myself unconvinced, thinking through Zalabardo's careful argumentation was always a fruitful exercise. With this in mind, in the following review I will outline a couple of the more significant points where I found myself in agreement or disagreement with Zalabardo's interpretation. I want to situate these points of agreement and disagreement, however, by beginning with a brief discussion of what is perhaps the longest-running debate in *Tractatus* scholarship.

Elsewhere, I have described this debate as between *ontologically oriented* and *logically oriented* interpretations.[1] A *locus classicus* of the logically oriented approach is Hidé Ishiguro's seminal 1969 paper, *Use and Reference of Names*. Here, Ishiguro begins by criticizing the supposed contrast between the 'picture theory of meaning' of the *Tractatus* and the 'use theory of meaning' of the *Philosophical Investigations*, writing, 'I believe that talk of such contrast is highly misleading, and that it arises out of a misunderstanding of the *Tractatus* view of what it is for a name to refer to (*bedeuten*) an object' (Ishiguro 1969, 20).

[1] See Eisenthal (forthcoming, a). The expressions 'ontologically oriented' and 'logically oriented' were suggested to me by Thomas Ricketts.

The 'interesting question,' she continues, 'is whether the meaning of a name can be secured independently of its use in propositions by some method which links it to an object, as many, including Russell, have thought, or whether the identity of the object referred to is only settled by the use of the name in a set of propositions' (Ishiguro 1969, 20–21). This distinction between two conceptions of how to understand naming in the *Tractatus* suggests the following gloss of the contrast between ontologically oriented and logically oriented interpretations. On an ontologically oriented interpretation, it is their correlations with Tractarian objects that secures the meanings of Tractarian names, and it is because of these correlations that elementary propositions have sense. Ordinary (non-elementary) propositions have sense in turn because they are truth-functions of the elementary propositions. Sense thus 'flows upwards', so to speak, beginning with the injection of meaning into names.[2] In contrast, a logically oriented interpretation of the *Tractatus* denies that ontological considerations play this kind of role, and agrees with Ishiguro that 'the problem of the object a name denotes *is* the problem of the use of the name' (Ishiguro 1969, 21). The use in question here must be derived from our use of ordinary (non-elementary) propositions. Indeed, it is only through a process of logical analysis that we could arrive at a use for elementary propositions. The names that appear in elementary propositions would thereby have meaning, and it is only at this point that the idea of a Tractarian object—the referent of a Tractarian name—would find its significance. A logically oriented interpretation thus moves in the opposite direction to an ontologically oriented interpretation: the sense of ordinary propositions 'trickles down' to the elementary propositions and the names that appear there.

[2] A systematic presentation of this kind of interpretation is David Pears' *The False Prison*, where he writes, 'the *Tractatus* is basically realistic in the following sense: language enjoys certain options on the surface, but deeper down it is founded on the intrinsic nature of objects, which is not our creation but is set over against us in mysterious independence' (Pears 1987, 6–7).

More would need to be said in order to fully characterize the distinction between these two families of interpretations of the *Tractatus*.[3] But it is worth noting that this debate was in progress well before the debate between so-called resolute and irresolute interpretations, inaugurated by Diamond (1988). It will also be evident that, at least at a first pass, the two debates seem to be independent of each other. But I will have some more to say about the relation between these two debates and where Zalabardo's account fits in in this regard in Sections 3 and 4 below.

Although an increasing number of commentators now argue in favor of a logically oriented interpretation, the ontologically oriented interpretation was dominant for a long time. *Representation and Reality* is an interesting case in the sense that Zalabardo hovers between the two. As I believe that we are not far from settling the matter decisively in favor of a logically oriented interpretation, I will situate my agreement and disagreement with Zalabardo by reference to where he aligns with a logically oriented or ontologically oriented interpretation respectively. I will begin by considering a central component of Zalabardo's discussion of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Russell, revolving around Wittgenstein's criticism of the notion of *form* that Russell introduces in the 1913 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. I will consider how Zalabardo brings attention to an important connection between Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell and the 'substance passage' in the *Tractatus* (2.021-2.0212), and reflect on Zalabardo's critique of the standard ontologically oriented interpretation of that passage. Next, I will turn to criticize the way in which ontological considerations continue to play a primary role in Zalabardo's interpretation, and suggest that this makes it difficult for Zalabardo to accommodate Wittgenstein's descriptions of his own methodology. Finally, I will turn to a consideration of resolute readings of the *Tractatus* and argue that, although Zalabardo claims that his interpretation is consistent with a resolute reading, he is not aligned with the majority of (self-proclaimed) resolute readers.

[3]Besides Ishiguro (1969), examples of logically oriented interpretations include Rhees (1970), Kremer (1997), McGuinness (1981), and Ricketts (2014). Besides Pears (1987), examples of ontologically oriented interpretations include Black (1964), Griffin (1964), and Hacker (1997).

2. Russell's Notion of Form and the Substance Passage in the *Tractatus*

Zalabardo begins with a survey of Wittgenstein's engagement with Russell, beginning with their earliest discussions in 1911 through to Wittgenstein's dictation of the *Notes on Logic* in 1913. Zalabardo highlights the tensions within Russell's views at this time, particularly some of the views expressed in his 1913 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript which Wittgenstein heavily criticized. These criticisms reveal important points in Wittgenstein's own thinking as he worked his way towards the *Tractatus*, particularly with regard to the notion of *form*.

Russell introduces the notion of form in an attempt to deal with the problem of the unity of the proposition, or, as Zalabardo labels it, the 'mode of combination problem'. This is an acute problem for Russell because he regards the constituents of a proposition as identical with the constituents of the represented situation. In the proposition '*A* and *B* are similar', for example, the constituents are simply *A*, *B* and similarity. But as Russell stresses:

> we cannot *actually* 'unite' [*A*, *B* and similarity], since either *A* and *B* are similar, in which case they are already united, or they are dissimilar, in which case no amount of thinking can force them to become united. (Russell 1984, 116)[4]

In order to solve this problem Russell suggests that, in an episode of understanding, an agent is related to a proposition's form in addition to that proposition's constituents. This stands to provide a solution to the mode of combination problem because the

[4]Quoted by Zalabardo on p. 31.

agent's relation to the relevant form allows them to think of the proposition's constituents as combined in a certain way without *making it the case* that they are combined in that way: 'The process of "uniting" which we *can* effect in thought is the process of bringing them [A, B, and similarity] into relation with the general form of dual complexes' (Russell 1984, 116).[5] Russell proposes further that forms are fully existentially generalized facts. For dual complexes, the relevant fully existentially generalized fact is *something has some relation to something*, or $(\exists x, y, \rho)x\rho y$. Despite the apparent complexity of such facts, the pressures of Russell's position force him to regard forms as simple. (If they were complex, they would have constituents combined in a certain way, and this mode of combination would be a new form with its own constituents combined in a certain way, and so on *ad infinitum*.) Russell's proposal is thus that forms are among the simple items in the world with which agents can be acquainted.

Turning now to Wittgenstein, Zalabardo shows how he rejected the idea of treating fully existentially generalized facts as forms in this way. An early manifestation of Wittgenstein's departure from Russell in this regard is the following remark in the *Notes on Logic*:

> It is easy to suppose that only such symbols are complex as contain names of objects, and that accordingly '$(\exists x, \phi).\phi x$' or '$(\exists x, y).xRy$' must be simple. It is then natural to call the first of these the name of a form, the second the name of a relation. But in that case what is the meaning of (e.g.) '$\sim (\exists x, y).xRy$'? Can we put 'not' before a name? (Potter 2009, 276)[6]

Here, Wittgenstein is evidently thinking through the idea of treating fully existentially generalized facts as something like Russellian forms: if one were tempted by the idea of treating fully existentially generalized facts as simple forms, then it might indeed be natural to call an expression such as '$(\exists x, \phi).\phi x$' (or '$(\exists x, y, \rho)x\rho y$') the name of a form. But we can, of course, consider the negations of such facts, and this simple observation makes clear that 'something has some relation to something' is still a *proposition*. Existential generalization has not brought us to a new kind of simple entity with which we can be acquainted.

The significance of this point lies in its application to the interpretation of later remarks in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*. Of particular importance is the following remark from 21 October 1914:

> I thought that the possibility of the truth of the proposition ϕa was tied up with the fact $(\exists x, \phi).\phi x$. But it is impossible to see why ϕa should only be possible if there is another proposition of the same form. ϕa surely does not need any precedent. (Wittgenstein 1998, 17)[7]

Here, again, we find Wittgenstein reflecting on a role for something like a Russellian form—in this case, the idea that the possibility of the truth of ϕa depends on the fact that $(\exists x, \phi).\phi x$. In the passage from the *Notes on Logic*, Wittgenstein gestured at the idea that fully existentially generalized facts are propositions, not names. On that understanding, Russell's claim that we must be acquainted with fully existentially generalized facts implies that the possibility of understanding one proposition depends on another proposition being true. (In the case at hand: the possibility of ϕa depends on the obtaining of $(\exists x, \phi).\phi x$, i.e. that some proposition, such as ψa for example, is true.) As Wittgenstein is seeing things in October 1914, however, it is untenable to claim that the possibility of one proposition depends on the truth of a second proposition. As he puts it in the *Notebooks*: 'suppose there existed only the two elementary propositions "ϕa" and "ψa" and that "ϕa" were false: Why should this proposition make sense only if ψa is true?' (1998, 17).

[5] Quoted by Zalabardo on p. 32.
[6] Quoted by Zalabardo on p. 39.
[7] Quoted by Zalabardo on p. 42.

In the *Tractatus*, this idea re-emerges in the 2.02s:

> 2.021 Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why they cannot be composite.
> 2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.
> 2.0212 In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false).

This passage has been the single most important piece of textual evidence that proponents of an ontologically oriented interpretation have appealed to. It has also, unsurprisingly, been the most difficult passage for proponents of a logically oriented interpretation to accommodate. It is therefore of great interest that Zalabardo argues forcefully that the standard ontologically oriented interpretation of the substance passage is incorrect.

According to the standard ontologically oriented interpretation, the sense of one proposition depends on the truth of a second proposition when that second proposition is about the existence of a referent of the first proposition. The problem in view here is that the sense of a proposition such as 'The broom is in the corner' depends on the truth of 'The brush is attached to the broomstick'.[8] If the second proposition were false, then the broom referred to in the first proposition would not exist. And if a referent of the first proposition didn't exist, so the thought goes, then that proposition would lack a sense. Here a regress threatens: the brush and the stick are obviously not simple—they have component parts themselves. Thus propositions concerning the brush and the stick will again depend on the truth of further propositions; propositions asserting that the component parts of these objects are arranged in the appropriate ways ('The bristles are attached to the brush head,' and so on). If this analysis into smaller and smaller components is not to go on forever, it must terminate on ontological simples—entities which have no internal structure at all. This is a key part of the argument for necessarily existing simple objects: the sense of propositions consisting of names of such objects would *not* depend on the truth of any further propositions. In this way, the substance passage is interpreted as offering a kind of transcendental argument for the existence of ontological simples. As Peter Hacker puts it:

> The simple objects are, Wittgenstein thought, the final residue of analysis, the indecomposable elements that are the meanings of the unanalysable names that occur in elementary propositions. . . There must be unanalysable objects if language is to be related to the world, and they must be indestructible. For only thus can the need for a firm anchor for language be met. (Hacker 1997, 65–66)

Opposing such an interpretation, Zalabardo points out that it lacks some important textual evidence. In the passage from 21 October 1914 in the *Notebooks*, the possibility of ϕa did not depend at all on the existence or non-existence of a; rather, it depended on the truth of another proposition of the same form. Taking a survey of other nearby remarks, Zalabardo argues that we have no good reason to think that the possibility of complexes going out of existence was ever one of Wittgenstein's concerns:

> while we have extensive textual evidence of the kinds of difficulties that Wittgenstein saw with treating names as referring to complexes [in the May and June entries in the *Notebooks* from 1915], we have no evidence that the possibility of complexes going out of existence was one of them. (143)

Furthermore, Zalabardo dedicates an appendix ('The Empty-Name Reading of the Substance Passage') to a methodical criticism of the ontologically oriented interpretation of the substance passage. Although the details of this appendix are too intricate to be reconstructed here, Zalabardo's argument culminates in the claim that the most plausible version of the ontologically oriented reading of the substance passage relies on interpreting 2.0211 as the claim that 'If the world contained no simple/necessarily existent items, then an elementary proposition (with the sense that it

[8] This is the example that Pears adapts from the *Philosophical Investigations*; see Pears (1987, 77).

actually has) wouldn't receive a truth-value from every possible situation' (252). Zalabardo then argues that the only good reason to interpret 2.0211 in this way is if one is already committed to the idea that the substance passage advances a version of the 'Empty-Name Argument':[9]

> It is important to appreciate the precise character of the exegetical question that we need to pose in order to assess this line of reasoning. We are not supposed to *assume* that the *Tractatus* endorses the Empty-Name Argument and then ask, on this assumption, whether the substance passage should be read as giving expression to it. We have reached a situation in which we have no independent reason for claiming that the *Tractatus* endorses the Empty-Name Argument. (253)

More generally, Zalabardo motivates the idea that a proper understanding of the substance passage requires drawing a connection back to Wittgenstein's original criticism of Russell's notion of form. Now, this is clearly not yet a logically oriented interpretation of the 2.02s. Although Zalabardo defends his own alternative reading of the substance passage, it relies (as I hope to show in what follows) on elements that are alien to a logically oriented interpretation. But given that the 2.02s have typically been regarded as providing the best textual evidence for an ontologically oriented interpretation, Zalabardo's arguments in this area are of great interest and point to an important avenue for future research.

3. The Ontologically Oriented Nature of Zalabardo's Approach

So far, I have considered one of the main ways in which Zalabardo's account is in line with a logically oriented interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, Zalabardo's approach remains fundamentally ontologically oriented in the sense that the Tractarian ontology (as Zalabardo understands it) still plays a primary role. As we will see, Zalabardo's path to his interpretation of the Tractarian ontology is a somewhat circuitous one, beginning with a discussion of Wittgenstein's notion of an expression (or symbol) introduced in the early 3.3s:

> 3.31 I call any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense an expression (or a symbol).
> (A proposition is itself an expression.)
> Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression.
> An expression is the mark of a form and a content.
> 3.311 An expression presupposes the forms of all the propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions.

Zalabardo considers in some detail 'how we should conceive of the common characteristic marks of propositions that Wittgenstein calls *expressions* and of their correlates for other facts' (120). Defining ρ as 'the relation that x bears to y when x is written to the left of y with "R" between them' (120), Zalabardo interprets the proposition 'aRb' as the fact that 'a'ρ'b'. He then considers the question: what are the parts of 'aRb' that characterize its sense and that it can have in common with other propositions? Emphasizing Wittgenstein's point that an expression is the mark of a form and a content, Zalabardo argues that:

> the expression of 'a'ρ'b' corresponding to, say, 'a', will have to specify not only the item involved ('a') but also the mode of is involvement—what we would want to describe as the way in which 'a' is combined with the remaining constituents. (120)

On this basis, Zalabardo suggests that the expression corresponding to 'a' is: *consisting in 'a' bearing some binary relation to some individual*. This is most helpfully presented as a propositional variable, '$a'Xy$, demarcating the class of propositions

[9] The 'Empty-Name Argument' is Zalabardo's label for the argument which takes as a premise the claim that a proposition would lack a sense if the referent of one of its names didn't exist, and reaches the conclusion that names must therefore refer to necessarily existing ontological simples.

corresponding to replacing the variables X and y with constants ('aSc,' 'aTd,' etc.). Indeed, as Wittgenstein remarks:

> 3.313 Thus an expression is presented by means of a variable whose values are the propositions that contain the expression.
> (In the limiting case the variable becomes a constant, the expression becomes a proposition.)

A list of the expressions contained in 'aRb' is: '$a'Xy$, $xY'b'$, $x\rho y$, '$a'\rho x$, '$a'X'b'$, $x\rho'b'$, and '$a'\rho'b'$ itself. As Zalabardo notes, this list is partially ordered in the sense that the class of propositions determined by one expression is sometimes contained within the class of propositions determined by another. The expression corresponding to the original proposition, '$a'\rho'b'$, determines a 'minimal point' in this partial ordering—it is (of course) contained in all of the classes determined by the other expressions. This partial ordering also has three 'maximal points'—the expressions determining classes of propositions that are contained in none of the other classes: '$a'Xy$, $xY'b'$ and $x\rho y$. On Zalabardo's account, these maximal points 'correspond to the ultimate constituents of the proposition' (121).[10]

If we have reached the ultimate constituents of a proposition, then presumably we have reached Tractarian names. Now, of course, the maximal points listed above are not examples of Tractarian names. We will only reach the true ultimate constituents of a proposition when we have carried out that proposition's complete analysis, i.e., when we have written it as a truth-function of elementary propositions, something that seems impossible to do in practice. Hence Zalabardo is claiming that *if* we had before us examples of elementary propositions, we could analyze the expressions that occur in them to thereby arrive at the maximal points corresponding to Tractarian names. But is it plausible that Tractarian names have the characteristics of propositional variables as Zalabardo's account suggests?

Here it is important to recall the remark with which the 3.3 sequence begins: 'Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning.' This is Wittgenstein's version of the 'context principle,' a remark that has been the focus of a good deal of discussion in the literature.[11] For present purposes, we can simply note that the context principle certainly helps to make plausible the idea that names carry their possibilities of occurrence in propositions with them; that they presuppose 'the forms of all the propositions in which [they] can occur' (3.311). In other words, 3.3 helps us to see why we can understand Tractarian names as propositional variables in the way that Zalabardo recommends.

We can now (finally) turn to the notion of a Tractarian object. In the 2.0s we are told that 'Objects make up the substance of the world' (2.021) and that 'Objects, the unalterable, and the subsistent are one and the same' (2.027). In their intimate connection with substance, we also find out that objects (like expressions) involve form and content:

> 2.024 Substance is what subsists independently of what is the case.
> 2.025 It is form and content.

In the same way that Zalabardo interprets 3.31 to get to the idea that names carry with them their possibilities of occurrence in propositions, he interprets 2.025 to get to the idea that objects carry with them their possibilities of occurrence in states of affairs. This idea is also reinforced by a number of other nearby

[10] Note that, on this account, 'aRb' and 'Fa' do not have a constituent in common. In fact, Zalabardo discusses an even more fine-grained account that can be attributed to the *Tractatus*, according to which there isn't even a unitary subject-predicate form but rather a multitude of different subject-predicate forms (as well as dual relation forms, etc.). See 176–79 (and also Johnston 2009, who Zalabardo cites in this regard).

[11] See Kremer (1997) in particular for an important and influential discussion of the change in the role of Wittgenstein's context principle between the *Prototractatus* and the *Tractatus*. Note that Kremer also discusses the significance of the context principle for the debate between logically and ontologically oriented interpretations (labeling the two sides *left-wing* and *right-wing* 'for no very good reason'); see (1997, 107–8).

remarks, for example: 'If things can occur in states of affairs, this possibility must be in them from the beginning. . . If I can imagine objects combined in states of affairs, I cannot imagine them excluded from the possibility of such combinations' (2.0121). Zalabardo therefore has substantial textual evidence in his favor when he offers a strictly parallel account to his account of the ultimate constituents of propositions:

> As with expressions, these features of the fact are partially ordered by the relation of set inclusion between the classes of facts in which they are present. The maximal points of this partial ordering are the ultimate constituents of the fact. (122)

The constituents of the fact that Will loves Kate, for example (122), would include *consisting in Will bearing some binary relation to some individual* (Will X y), *consisting in some individual bearing the love relation to Kate* (x loves Kate), and so on. And if the fact of Will's loving Kate were a Tractarian state of affairs, then the maximal points in the associated partial ordering would be our Tractarian objects.

Now, although we are on our way to an assessment of the fundamentally ontologically oriented nature of Zalabardo's account, everything so far is, in fact, perfectly in line with a logically oriented account. (Indeed, the reader might be forgiven for thinking that Zalabardo seems to be in complete agreement with Ishiguro's claim that the problem of the object a name denotes is the problem of the use of the name.) But if some proponents of a logically oriented interpretation would be happy to follow Zalabardo this far, they would not then take the further step of ascribing to these ultimate constituents of facts a significance that floats free from the linguistic analysis that brought us here. However, taking such a step is precisely what Zalabardo himself does next.

Zalabardo pivots to an account of the connection between language and reality that revolves around the idea that in episodes of 'immediate apprehension' we grasp the constituents of a fact as related to one another in a certain way. This provides a means of associating the constituents of a representing proposition (in thought or language) with the constituents of the represented fact:

> In these episodes of apprehension of a fact as articulated, its constituents would be paired with the constituents of the representing fact. This is how propositional constituents would be mapped on to their referents. Once these referential links are established, the constituents of these propositions can be recombined to represent combinations of their referents which may or may not obtain. (140)

On this view, when we apprehend facts in the world around us, the ultimate constituents of the associated proposition (names) somehow latch onto the ultimate constituents of the fact (objects). In some more detail, Zalabardo presents the following 'three-level ontological construction' (133). At the bottom level there are actually obtaining states of affairs, 'these are the ultimate reality'. At the next level there are Tractarian objects, 'conceived as common structural features abstracted from actually obtaining states of affairs'. And at the third level there are possible (but non-actual) states of affairs, regarded as 'complete compresence sets of objects present in actual states of affairs'. A *complete compresence set* is a set of objects that uniquely specifies a state of affairs, a notion which Zalabardo illustrates with the following example (131–32). Let us assume that Will being taller than Harry and Pip being older than Kate are two states of affairs that do, in fact, obtain. Among the objects that can be abstracted from these states of affairs are W: *consisting in Will bearing some binary relation to some individual*, P: *consisting in Pip bearing some binary relation to some individual*, T: *consisting in some individual bearing the* taller than *relation to some individual*, and H: *consisting in some individual bearing some binary relation to Harry*. An example of a complete compresence set is then {P, T, H}, where the corresponding unique state of affairs is (obviously enough) Pip being taller than Harry. This is a candidate example of a possible (but non-actual) state of affairs. (In contrast, {P, W, H} is not a

compresence set—there is no unique state of affairs consisting of these three objects.) In this way, Zalabardo argues that the possible is derived from the actual.

As should now be evident, Zalabardo regards the insights into the ultimate constituents of propositions (gained from our study of the 3.3s) as a kind of guide to the ultimate constituents of reality. That reality, however, is self-standing—the states of affairs which obtain (and the objects that are their ultimate constituents) have a significance that is independent of thought or language. Furthermore, Zalabardo's appeal to episodes of immediate apprehension is precisely the kind of method for securing the meaning of names *independently of their use in propositions* which Ishiguro warned against. An idea of this shape is a central component of any ontologically oriented account.

At this point it will be necessary to sketch a brief overview of the kind of alternative picture that a logically oriented interpretation of the *Tractatus* is supposed to offer. To begin, it should be noted that a logically oriented interpretation simply rejects many of the questions that the ontologically interpretation attempts to answer. In particular, on a logically oriented view, the *Tractatus* does not offer an *explanation* of how language represents reality. It is a premise, not a conclusion, that the propositions of our language are truth-apt; that they are 'logical pictures'. The truth or falsity of one proposition can guarantee the truth or falsity of another, and more generally two propositions with sense will stand in some sort of logical relationship. The process of logical analysis is the process of making these logical relationships explicit. According to a logically oriented interpretation, reflecting on the process of logical analysis leads to a number of insights (or, perhaps better: leads away from a number of confusions). Indeed, Zalabardo's own discussion of expressions, the common characteristic marks of classes of propositions, provides examples of the kinds of insights that might be gained in this way. Although it would take me too far afield to attempt to argue the point here, a further insight that we should eventually reach is the idea that the process of logical analysis must eventually terminate. And it is here, via a consideration of what this final stage of analysis would look like, that we would arrive at a conception of elementary propositions: logically independent concatenations of simple names.[12] Note, however, that this conception of elementary propositions arises entirely from reflecting on the process of analyzing our ordinary propositions. The only 'ontological' consideration in this story was the premise that we started with—that our propositions describe possible situations in the world, and hence can be correct or incorrect, true or false.

A familiar sticking point in attributing this kind of view to the *Tractatus* revolves around the difficulty of accommodating the overtly realist tenor of its opening sections. The *Tractatus* certainly seems to present a grand metaphysical theory—the kind of theory that might traditionally be expected of a treatise in fundamental philosophy. At the same time, however, that appearance sits uncomfortably with Wittgenstein's repeated insistence that he is not in the business of philosophical theorizing. Remarks to this effect are common enough after Wittgenstein's return to philosophy in 1929, including a number of remarks collected together in *The Big Typescript* ('As I do philosophy, its entire task is to shape expression in such a way that certain worries disappear' Wittgenstein 2013, 310) not to mention remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations* ('Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything' Wittgenstein 2001, §126). Importantly, however, remarks in this vein are already present in the *Tractatus*. At 4.003 Wittgenstein writes: 'Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical'. Furthermore, Wittgenstein

[12] Wittgenstein writes at 4.221, 'It is obvious that the analysis of propositions must bring us to elementary propositions which consist of names in immediate combination'. Whether it's fair to say that this is *obvious* is contentious to say the least.

famously describes a 'strictly correct method' for philosophy at 6.53:

> The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—this method would be the only strictly correct one.

One way to put my criticism of Zalabardo's interpretation is to say that he does not offer a convincing way to unite these strands in Wittgenstein's thought.[13] At its base, the issue here stems from the ontologically oriented nature of Zalabardo's account. The path to a more satisfactory interpretation would build on the kind of logically oriented interpretation fleshed out by those who have attempted to develop the insights contained in (or related to) Ishiguro's 1969 paper in a sustained way. And it is here, in fact, that we find a connection with the emergence of so-called resolute readings. Although the issue of the apparently realist pronouncements in the *Tractatus* was already at the center of a sustained debate before Cora Diamond brought attention to Wittgenstein's specifically methodological remarks,[14] the nature of the debate changed dramatically following her intervention. As a number of commentators came to realize:

> We were working in the wrong direction: from the denial of realism to how the seemingly realist remarks had to be read. That they had to be read in some sort of transformational manner was, to be sure, correct. But it was the manner of reading that had to be put first, and clarified independently of the issue of realism, in order to make progress. (Goldfarb 2011, 12)

Here, then, we have arrived at the question of how to understand Wittgenstein's remarks about how to read the *Tractatus*, and in particular his claim that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are themselves nonsense.

4. A Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*

In the introduction to *Representation and Reality*, Zalabardo considers Wittgenstein's infamous remark at 6.54:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after has has climbed up it.)

Although this issue frames Zalabardo's book, it is not one he engages with in great detail. After all, we must first climb the ladder if we hope to eventually throw it away, and Zalabardo stresses that *Representation and Reality* is primarily engaged with the first part of this journey, not the second.

With 6.54 in mind, Zalabardo outlines a notion of 'Wittgenstein's programme'—a programme that involves initially taking the Tractarian propositions to be meaningful in order to later reject them as nonsense—and links this with the following interpretation of Wittgenstein's own path to the *Tractatus*. When he began his philosophical work with Russell, Wittgenstein was in the grip of what he later came to regard as a philosophical

[13] The 'irresolute' move at this juncture is to appeal to the Tractarian distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown, so that Wittgenstein's claim that his own propositions are nonsense 'is compatible with treating the propositions of the *Tractatus* as expressing, in some other way, philosophical doctrines that Wittgenstein accepts and wants us to accept' (2). This in turn provides a corresponding interpretation of Wittgenstein's description of the 'strictly correct' method in philosophy at 6.53. Putting to one side the fact that this way of interpreting the *Tractatus* has been heavily criticized, it is not a move that is available to Zalabardo himself, who anyway describes it as 'as a measure of last resort' (2).

[14] Besides Ishiguro (1969), see Rhees (1970), McGuinness (1981) and Winch (1987).

illusion. In particular, Wittgenstein thought that the philosophical questions that he was engaging with were well-posed, and that the kinds of doctrines he was in the process of formulating might lead to the correct answers. However, when he later came to recognize his doctrines as nonsensical, he took this as damning evidence that the whole philosophical enterprise was flawed. This was because he thought that the *only* candidate solution to those philosophical problems was the nonsensical account of the *Tractatus*. This, however, was the key to escaping the illusion that the questions were well-posed in the first place. In order to get to the same place, then, Zalabardo suggests that we might follow the same path:

> We start off thinking of philosophical questions and problems as perfectly legitimate and, following the rules of the enterprise, we find the correct answers and solutions. But then we discover that what we regarded as correct answers and solutions are nothing but nonsense. We remain convinced, however, that in endorsing these 'answers' and 'solutions' we didn't make any mistakes in applying the rules of the enterprise: these pieces of nonsense are the 'answers' and 'solutions' that the rules designate as correct. The only way out of this impasse is the rejection of the rules and of the enterprise they define, and this is the outcome that Wittgenstein's programme is intended to produce. (4)

On Zalabardo's reading, the *Tractatus* advances particular theories of logic and language which delimit what propositions can express. The propositions of the *Tractatus* can ultimately be recognized as nonsense, then, because they violate the rules that they themselves lay down:

> Wittgenstein doesn't establish the nonsensicality of his propositions on independent grounds. What he shows is that they entail their own nonsensicality, since the limits he defends on what propositions we can produce are grounded in his theory of propositions. (5)

Note that Zalabardo's approach allows for the possibility for the propositions of the *Tractatus* to simply be *false*: '*if* the propositions of the *Tractatus* express correct doctrines, *then* they are nonsensical. Unless we accept the antecedent of this conditional, we will be under no obligation to accept its consequent' (5). Hence we could regard Wittgenstein's theories of logic and language as perfectly meaningful though false, and so refuse to accept the notion of nonsensicality that they imply.

This is not, however, the way that the majority of resolute readers have articulated their view. Most resolute readers do not regard Wittgenstein's notion of nonsense as a technical term, backed up by theoretical arguments.[15] Nonsense is, as Wittgenstein puts it in his preface, 'simply nonsense' (*einfach Unsinn*), and on this point it is important to note the contrast that Wittgenstein describes between himself and Frege:

> 5.4733 Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its constituents.
> (Even if we think that we have done so.)

Wittgenstein here denies that he has a view of 'legitimately constructed' propositions which are meaningful because they have been constructed according to certain rules. Rather, when we find that a proposition does not have sense 'that can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its constituents'. On a resolute reading, the occurrence of 'can only be' here does not express a theoretical commitment to a unique explanation of nonsense. Rather, Wittgenstein is suggesting no more than that, as readers of the *Tractatus* engage with the book, they may come to recognize that they did not have something coherent in mind as to what was meant by certain terms in expressions they had previously been tempted to utter.

[15] See, for example, Goldfarb (2011, 17): 'it must be admitted that "nonsense" cannot really be a general term of criticism. . . Wittgenstein's talk of nonsense is just shorthand for a process of coming to see how the words fall apart when worked out from the inside'.

This points to a very different approach to a resolute reading than the one that Zalabardo recommends. Rather than reading the propositions of the *Tractatus* as espousing theories of logic and language, albeit ones with the unfortunate consequence of entailing their own nonsensicality, one might find oneself stymied in the attempt to find a meaning for some of the constituents of those propositions. (We might even think we had done so, only to realize upon later reflection that we had done no such thing.) This in turn suggests the following alternative picture of what ascending the Tractarian ladder might be like. As we work with the text, we will become more familiar with its logical structure (the numbering system) and see how certain themes dominate certain sections or how various strands appear to be related to one another. Our initial attempts to interpret various remarks will thus be refined or abandoned as this familiarity deepens. However, this sense of progress may never be fulfilled: we may find ourselves continually rejecting our putative interpretations of the text. At the same time, we may find ourselves undergoing a change of perspective. As we come to understand the unsatisfactory nature of various putative theories—such as those of Russell or Frege, as well as our own failed attempts to attribute similar theories to the *Tractatus*—we may come to realize that the questions we were originally asking only arose because of an underlying state of confusion. In freeing ourselves from that state of confusion, then, the problems themselves might lose their grip on us.

This conception of a resolute reading carries with it a conception of a full-throated philosophical engagement with the propositions of the *Tractatus* that leads to the abandonment of those propositions as nonsense, but not because they contain a theory of language that entails their nonsensicality. The value of engaging with the *Tractatus* lies rather in its potential to lead us out of certain confusions and away from a tendency to ask certain confused questions. As Wittgenstein wrote later, 'work on philosophy is actually closer to working on oneself. On one's own understanding. On the way one sees things. (And on what one demands of them)' (Wittgenstein 2013, 300e).

Although I have argued that Zalabardo's approach does not align with the majority of resolute readers, those who are not persuaded by that majority may regard this as a point in Zalabardo's favor. At any rate, it is certainly reasonable for Zalabardo to articulate a different way for readers of the *Tractatus* to try to take 6.54 at face value. Beyond this, the view that I have outlined above is only a conception of a resolute reading, not yet a resolute reading itself. Much work still needs to be done to make such an approach to the *Tractatus* fully convincing.[16]

With this in mind, I will conclude with a brief indication of one avenue for further research in this direction. As is generally well-known, an influence that Wittgenstein continued to refer to throughout his career was the physicist Heinrich Hertz. On several occasions, Wittgenstein quoted a passage from Hertz's *Principles of Mechanics* in which Hertz describes a state of confusion that has come about because we have associated too many conflicting ideas with a given term. Hertz writes that we have 'an obscure feeling of this and want to have things cleared up,' and that this leads us to ask certain confused questions. But those questions cannot be resolved, and the answers to such questions are not really what we wanted anyway. Instead, we need to go back and free ourselves from the original state of confusion so that the questions will no longer seem pressing. In a recent paper, I have explored how Hertz achieved this with the notion of force through his reformulation of classical mechanics.[17] What remains to be done is to consider how deeply

[16] See again Goldfarb (2011, 15): 'An actual resolute interpretation of the text will involve the working-out of how the interrogation of its pronouncements goes, of what processes—what demands placed on the notions—lead us to the recognition that those pronouncements are nonsense. It must be done case by case. In short, the idea of a resolute reading is programmatic, and our understanding of its results depends entirely on the execution of the program'.

[17] See Eisenthal (forthcoming, b).

this Hertzian methodology is present in the *Tractatus*, and, if so, what the implications of this are for the idea of a resolute reading.

In closing, I should emphasize that I have only touched on a couple of aspects of Zalabardo's interpretation and that there are many important points that I have not discussed. Indeed, Zalabardo's book provides an impressively systematic interpretation of the *Tractatus*, and Zalabardo himself highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of his account. In its helpful and clear discussions of many central themes in Wittgenstein's early philosophy, *Representation and Reality* is a valuable contribution to the literature and helps to move the debate forward in a number of ways.

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