

The Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: Toward a New Interpretation

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Abstract: This paper introduces a novel interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, a work widely held to be one of the most intricate in the philosophical canon. It maintains that the *Tractatus* does not develop a theory but rather advances an original logical symbolism, a new instrument that enables one to "recognize the formal properties of propositions by mere inspection of propositions themselves" (6.122). Moreover, the Tractarian sign-language offers to instruct us on how better to follow the logic of language, and by that token stands to enhance our ability to think. Upon acquiring the thinking skills that one can develop by working with the new symbolism, one may move on and discard the notation—"throw away the ladder" (6.54), as Wittgenstein put it.

1. The New Wittgensteinians

This paper introduces a novel interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In the process, it takes issue with the New Wittgensteinians, in particular Cora Diamond and James Conant,¹ who some twenty-five years ago fielded a comprehensive, essentially skeptical interpretation of the entire body of the *Tractatus*. Diamond and Conant argued that the core propositions of the *Tractatus* are literally nonsense, gibberish equivalent to phrases like "piggly wiggle tiddle" (Diamond, 2000, p. 151). To be more explicit, Diamond and Conant defended their view that the book's core content is philosophically vacuous by arguing (i) that the *Tractatus* is divided into a body and a frame; (ii) that the Preface, 3.32–3.326, 4–4.003, 4.111–2 and 6.53–6.54 compose the frame (Conant, 2001, p. 457), which Wittgenstein constructed as a substantive philosophical position; and (iii) that the rest of the Tractarian propositions constitute the body of the work, which Wittgenstein intended to be read "tongue in cheek." Further, Diamond and Conant asserted that the core propositions of the *Tractatus* function as elucidations² that rely "on the reader's provisionally taking himself to be participating in the traditional philosophical activity of establishing theses through a procedure of reasoned argument" (Conant, 2001, p. 422).

According to this New Wittgensteinian account, similar to what occurs in successful psychoanalytic therapy, the Tractarian reader is

progressively “elucidated” as he undergoes the “therapeutic” experience of understanding that the philosophical positions he entertained as he worked his way up to his ultimate frame of reference are nonsense. The final proposition of the *Tractatus*’s postulated frame putatively substantiates their reading:

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 he has climbed up it.) (6.54)

This, according to Diamond, Conant, et al., is the genuine purport of the *Tractatus*.

2. Initial Problems with the New Reading of 6.54

Decades prior to Diamond and Conant, around 1930, Otto Neurath repudiated Wittgenstein’s work (which put him at odds with the other members of the Vienna Circle, Moritz Schlick in particular) because it struck him that in 6.54 Wittgenstein essentially declared the philosophy of the *Tractatus* itself nonsensical. Of course, the reading of the *Tractatus* by Conant and Diamond differed from that of Neurath. The New Wittgensteinians do not repudiate Wittgenstein’s work but instead insist that we are to interpret it in a most literal key: we are to construe 6.54 as referring to the architectonic of the *Tractatus*. This, they were convinced, points the way to the most persuasive interpretation of the book. However, by thereby discarding what they call the “body” of the *Tractatus*, the New Wittgensteinians sweep much Tractarian material under the carpet and hence unwarrantably multiply the challenges the text poses to the serious reader.

Moreover, it is telling in this connection that in his frequent references to the *Tractatus* and in written commentaries on it, the so-called “later Wittgenstein” never said anything about having written the bulk of the work tongue in cheek (cf. §9). What’s more, while he would refer to written and unwritten parts of the book, Wittgenstein never alluded to any frame-and-body architectonic as a structural principle of the *Tractatus*. It is thus evident that the New Wittgensteinians introduced a division of the Tractarian propositions that stands at odds with the work’s authentic architectonic.

Besides, while Diamond and Conant saw section 6.54 as the key to genuinely understanding the *Tractatus*, one can read this section without

subscribing to their frame-and-body thesis. To be sure, while Wittgenstein indicated, on one hand, that the propositions of the book are ultimately “nonsensical,” on the other hand, he makes it clear that the point is for the reader to “climb up beyond them.” The imperative that the reader “must, so to speak, throw away the ladder *after he has climbed up it*” (italics added) makes plain that the treatise provides its content as a useful expedient, an instrumentality, and hence is not “nonsense”—not Diamond’s “gibberish” or “piggly wiggle tiddle.”

The New Wittgensteinians direct their criticism both against the interpretation of the *Tractatus* by the neo-positivists (*pace* Otto Neurath), and against the so-called “ineffability” interpretation of 6.54. Wittgenstein’s distinguished student and companion Georg Henrik von Wright originated the latter approach. Von Wright called attention to the fact that for the *Tractatus* the only propositions that possess sense are pictures of the states of affairs, or their truth-functions. By contrast, logical and mathematical propositions are tautologies and hence senseless (*sinnlos*). The propositions of the *Tractatus* itself, however, are neither propositions of science nor propositions of logic or mathematics: they are elucidations of the propositions of science and logic. It is in this respect that they are nonsense (*Unsinn*), which is different both from being senseless and from being nonsensical in the way in which the propositions of metaphysics are nonsensical (von Wright, 2006).³ More precisely, the propositions of the *Tractatus* are what, early on, Ramsey termed “important nonsense” (1931, p. 263), and what Peter Hacker more recently referred to as “illuminating nonsense.” As such, the Tractarian propositions illuminate by showing points about language that cannot be otherwise articulated (*said*).

The sections that follow demonstrate with concrete specificity how the propositions of the *Tractatus* are elucidations in the sense of 6.54. Besides discrediting the interpretation of Diamond and Conant, we shall see that this approach moves beyond the so-called “ineffability interpretation” that von Wright and Peter Hacker champion.

3. What Are Elucidations?

The first step in answering this question is clearing up what Wittgenstein understood as “elucidations.”⁴ To this purpose, it will be helpful to consider commonplace situations that find us referring in daily life to such elucidations. We know this approach from the Oxford ordinary language philosophers, upon whose thinking Wittgenstein exerted a shaping influence.

We commonly require and employ as “elucidations” sets of instructions when we operate a new appliance or unfamiliar work tool.

These elucidations inform us how it functions. Generally, once familiar with how an appliance works or with how to operate and maintain a new tool, one dispenses with the elucidations. It's worth noting that we do not necessarily need to know how the new appliance or tool is constructed. As a rule we wish an instruction manual simply to elucidate how most effectively to utilize it and to keep it performing optimally, which is by and large all the elucidation that instruction manuals supply.

A familiar "elucidation manual" that applies to a culturally specific symbolic form rather than a physical object is the foreign-language handbook. If one wishes to acquire speaking facility in Italian, for example, one obtains a text of instructions on how to speak the language that exists in literature and on the streets of Pisa, Bologna and Milan—one does not need first to invent or construct it. It goes without saying that as one grows fluent in Italian the once-indispensable handbook, stocked with "elucidations," will become superfluous.

In a like manner, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* teaches its readers to understand how the propositions of everyday discourse as well as of science logically relate to one another. Moreover, the book also aims to cultivate (train) the reader's thinking skills since its propositions, while empty of content in themselves, putatively sponsor "the logical clarification of thoughts" (4.112). Just as with an instructional handbook, Wittgenstein finds no need to describe how the language and thinking he clarifies are constructed since they are already available to the reader (cf. §7). Further, the *Tractatus* propounds no theory, nor does it posit truths. Wittgenstein's elucidations of thinking constitute an instruction set that simply suggests how to make better use of our thought.

This interpretation of the *Tractatus* fits perfectly well its description as a ladder that we are to throw away once we have reached by its aid a level beyond its use as a means of ascent. To be sure: (i) The instrument of training is precisely what we discard upon achieving a skill level that renders supererogatory any further training by means of that instrument. (ii) What is important about such instruments is not their content but their form. Someone might well construct a different type of instrument, alternative training set, for help in mastering the same skill. In this respect, the propositions of the *Tractatus* do not express necessary truths; rather, they are contingent, a point that Diamond underscored (see Diamond, 1991, p. 196).

4. The New Sign-language and Its Role

A first head upon which to question the New Wittgensteinian interpretation of the *Tractatus* is that Wittgenstein clearly stated the express task of

his treatise, namely to draw a limit to thought by drawing a limit to the expression of thought (P., pp. 3-4). The work undertakes to achieve this end by advancing a new logical symbolism, a new sign-language for elucidating our language and thinking. In this particular, the *Tractatus* marks a development, clearly a radical one, of Frege's work. Indeed, the program for a new "sign-language" (a term Wittgenstein employs throughout the *Tractatus*),⁵ which correctly presents the logical operations of our thinking, was something that Frege intensively promulgated. Importantly enough, he insisted that we can "compare" its role for thinking "to that which the microscope has to the eye" (Frege, 1879, p. xi). Ultimately, how Wittgenstein incorporates his transformation of Frege's project is manifest in the claim that "in a suitable notation [i.e., in the Tractarian sign-language] we can in fact recognize the formal properties [the logic] of the propositions by mere inspection of the propositions themselves" (6.122). In other words, the correct sign-language makes apparent the logic of the propositions, but it does not spell it out (4.022).

One of the consequences of this position is that the logically correct sign-language eschews all superfluous entities, such as "logical objects." It also shows that "the 'logical constants' are not representatives" (4.0312). Another consequence of adopting "the suitable" sign-language is that we "can do without logical propositions" (6.112), which from the standpoint of this "redundancy theory of logic" are merely tautologies. It follows from all this that there are no theoretical grounds for anything like an academic discipline of logic.

These points show that the Tractarian sign-language is something more than a Fregean optical instrument. As already indicated and as will be detailed in what follows, Wittgenstein's sign-language can also train our thinking. In sum, the basic idea is simple: once the Tractarian notation has fulfilled its purpose as an aid in training one to advance to a higher plane of thought, it becomes an irrelevancy and one can simply proceed without it.

In light of the foregoing it should be clear that to embrace the ideas of the *Tractatus* is to adopt a position on the task of philosophy that is, to say the least, quite different from that of a Christian Wolff or a Hegel. Being exclusively instrumental, no more than a training aid, philosophy on the Tractarian view has no message of its own, no story to tell about the world, and hence no independent meaning.

5. Tractarian Scaffoldings

But what about the numerous "ontological" propositions of the *Tractatus* articulated, for example, in 1-2.063, which allegedly give an account of the

structure of reality? These propositions exemplify those that Conant and Diamond declare to have been written “tongue in cheek” as therapeutic targets of thought that free us from the inclination to get involved in traditional philosophical doctrine. Can such propositions be part of a theory? Are they philosophical?

In order to effectively address this issue in definitive terms, we need first to get clear about that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein thinks of logic in two senses: (i) the logic of the world—relative to which he could declare that “logic pervades the world” (5.61), and (ii) logic as a discipline.

Importantly enough, logic in the first sense informs not only states of affairs and facts, but also objects. Indeed, the Tractarian objects feature an inner logic, which manifests itself in their forms.⁶ An object’s form, on this account, determines the possibility of that object occurring in a state of affairs (2.0141).⁷ This helps us see how, on Wittgenstein’s view, “we can talk about formal properties of [both] objects and states of affairs” (4.122). Both objects and states of affairs possess a logical structure.

Wittgenstein refers to the logical structure of objects and states of affairs as the “scaffolding of the world” (6.124). Since the propositions (tautologies) of logic are abstracted (extricated, distilled) from the logic of objects and states of affairs, logical propositions are what we can call “formally identical” with the logic of the actual world, which means that both have the same logical form. This formal identity of logic and ontology is manifest in Wittgenstein’s “logical scaffolding” trope, which is not to be confused with his reference to the “scaffolding of the world.”⁸ In short, the difference between them can be put into words this way: the discipline of logic constructs logical scaffolding in order to help to grasp the scaffolding of the world (see §6).

To understand the scaffolding metaphor, it is essential to bear in mind that Wittgenstein conceives both language and thinking as “constructions,” as experimental arrangements that depict (model) the possible forms that objects exhibit. He framed his view this way: “In a proposition a situation is, as it were, constructed by way of experiment” (4.031). In other words, a proposition constructs a situation, a fact of language, that models another situation, namely a state of affairs of reality. To be more explicit, propositional models show the precise structure of states of affairs. In Frege’s terminology, both have the same sense. It is a shared “pictorial form,” one that is “identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all” (2.161). This is the hinge upon which rides the relation of the language and thinking, on the one hand, and the world, on the other hand.

Worth remarking in this connection is that the elements in a

proposition—symbols, names—cohere in its (in proposition's) “nexus, concatenation” (4.22) on their own, and this thanks to their logical configuration (shape, topology)—and not on account of any logical constants (which do not *represent*) or any quasi-logical objects external to symbols and names. Wittgenstein held, moreover, that the logical scaffolding can surround and support *every* newly constructed picture or proposition, every new model of fact (of state of affairs). That scaffolding, however, serves no constitutive role. It *can* support the propositional signs that compose a proposition (picture), and in that way *can* contribute to the mutual coherence of the signs ingredient in propositions. Without such scaffolding, a propositional construct is subject to collapse, with the result that we *may* fail to grasp the objects in the structures we intend to build with the aid of the Tractarian logical notation (see Milkov, 2001). However, the well-trained language user (picture-maker) does not need logical scaffolding, which is no more than a dispensable aid means.

Significantly, an austere quasi-ontology correlates with the austere Tractarian sign-language.⁹ Just as the propositions are concatenations of names without logical objects to connect them, no *mortar* (no *tertium quid*) connects the Tractarian objects (Wittgenstein, 1973, p. 23). The objects composing the state of affairs cohere in virtue of their formal profile alone.

6. Tractarian Sign-language as Logical Scaffolding

Merely an expedient for cultivating our ability to produce and understand language and thought, the Tractarian logical scaffolding is, we've seen, disposable: it does not play a constitutive role in them. Our next remark is that the Tractarian sign-language is itself a kind of logical scaffolding. That is why, whereas the declared task of the old logic, including that of Frege and Russell, was to extract or distill in theoretical form the logical structure of the world, the task of the Tractarian sign-language—operative, again, as a kind of logical scaffolding—is more modest. Its purpose is merely to enable one to recognize the logical structure of the propositions of one's own language. Hence, while the propositions of the old logic (inclusive of Frege and Russell) are tautological and thus superfluous, the Tractarian sign-language sponsors elucidations that may meet our real needs, even if they are optional and ultimately to be abandoned. One may employ them so far as necessary, although one must not confuse them with the constitutive elements of what they help us to achieve.

The Tractarian sign-language thus assists us in finding our way in the logic of our language, and it is in this respect that the notation “elucidates” it. Upon mastering the instructions, however, we can jettison the logical scaffolding that the sign-language supplies, as what has in effect become

so much superfluous. More explicitly put, the sign-language of the *Tractatus* indicates how to apprehend the logic of language in the manner that one apprehends how the elements of a picture connect with each other in “logical space.” To achieve knowledge of this sort is to acquire insight into “how [the] things stand” (4.5) in the logic of the world. In other words, the notation makes it possible to acquire a grasp of the logic of facts (states of affairs) and objects.

We can compare the Tractarian sign-language to a system of “road signs” that help us find our way in the logic of language. But Wittgenstein also invokes another metaphor: “signs for logical operations are punctuation-marks” (5.4611). Without having any independent semantic content, they indicate how to read the logic of language. The logical signs thus have meaning only as instructions or—recurring to the more functionally precise term—as *elucidations*.

Importantly enough, the elements of the sign-language of the *Tractatus* themselves tend to disappear. In the end, what the reader has in hand are only correctly indicated relations among the propositional signs in the logical space of propositions. These relations are formulated in the truism of the general propositional form, Wittgenstein’s single logical constant: “this is how things stand” (4.5). In light of the correctly grasped logic of propositions, those with mastery of a language and thinking find their way in the world; without it they would be unable to discern the relations articulating the logical space that language shares with objects and states of affairs.

Wittgenstein thus posits the Tractarian sign-language as having a transient character.¹⁰ Prima facie, it is the logical form that constructively organizes the content of all propositions (as pictures, or models) with sense.¹¹ Then the reader realizes that this purely instrumental form does not actually organize anything: an organizing logical frame is not ingredient in the content of propositions. The logical scaffolding is, once again, just an expedient—an optional means that is in any case ultimately dispensable—by means of which we can acquire the ability to better recognize on our own the indispensable form of a language.

More fully to spell out this pivotal feature of the Tractarian sign-language, we can recur to the analogy of language learning. The textbook for advanced students of Italian is more literary in character and concerned with finer points of stylistics than one written for beginners and which concentrates principally on elementary grammar, syntax, and semantics. Moreover, students who achieve a perfect facility in the language will dispense with any language instructions. To take a step further and apply Wittgenstein’s own example, one can also imagine a highly proficient

reader of Italian, or of any other language, who is able correctly to decipher the logic of a text that lack punctuation marks.

The interpretation of the *Tractatus* introduced in the foregoing sections stands as a corrective to the New Wittgensteinian reading on still another ground. Conant alludes to a putative “experience” of seeing that the Tractarian “metaphysical” theories fall apart, an experience that he postulates Wittgenstein expressly sought to foster in the reader for its “therapeutic” effect. What is actually at issue here, however, is no therapeutic “experience” as such, but rather a rational pedagogical process in which the reader engages with the sign-language advanced in the *Tractatus* as a disposable mechanism for elucidating our language and thinking.¹²

7. Fatal Neglect

Scholars of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the New Wittgensteinians in particular, too often overlook or underestimate the relevance of two pivotal aspects of his thought: His position (i) on everyday language and (ii) on “the correct method in philosophy.”

(i) Commentators commonly fail to note Wittgenstein's claim that in daily life, we have the capacity to use language that is far from being scientific and yet is hardly senseless. “In fact,” he declares, “all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect order” (5.5563). We are able to speak quite sensibly even without knowing how we do so (4.002).

Among other things, this view reveals a solid link between the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*; for in both works Wittgenstein maintains that the language we use in daily life: (a) is not senseless, (b) is already available: we are not the first to invent it or to construct it. But whereas in his later text Wittgenstein concentrates on developing this point, in the *Tractatus* he merely takes it to be obvious and consequently does not discuss it, with the result that students of his philosophy often have unwittingly overlooked it.

In fact, that language and thinking are something given is the fundamental postulate of the *Tractatus*. They are available together as an expedient, or an “appliance,” that helps us to find our place in the world and to act in it. The objective of the Tractarian propositions themselves is nothing else than to elucidate the functioning of language and thinking. The assertion that “philosophy aims at logical elucidations of thoughts” (4.112) is consequently the kernel of the *Tractatus* and, *pace* the New Wittgensteinians, not a part of its “frame” that remains discrete from its “body.”

This core point of the *Tractatus* implies the priority of language over being (hence for Wittgenstein “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (5.6)) as well as their intrinsic interconnectedness. That we think and speak about elements of the world (states of affairs and objects) led Wittgenstein to develop a quasi-ontology. The prefix “quasi” applies since the Tractarian ontology is but only the flip side of its sign-language, which has but an elucidatory function and nothing more. It is in effect a kind of doppelgänger of the perfect logical symbolism. It is not a theory.

As we noted in §2, then, the Tractarian elucidations lack independent sense (*Sinn*) since they do not picture elementary states of affairs, nor are they truth-functions of such pictures. Rather, they show, without discursively articulating it, the logic of language and so of the world. One can see in this connection the shortcomings of Peter Hacker’s “ineffability reading” of the *Tractatus*. According to Hacker,

one can *mean* something that cannot be said, but rather expresses itself in a different way viz. is *shown* by features of our language. Moreover, [Wittgenstein] insisted, we *can* apprehend, indeed, can see some things which are thus meant but cannot be said. (2000, p. 368)

This characterization points in the right direction but is incomplete and ultimately inaccurate. Hacker fails to notice that the propositions that show something but say nothing are propositions of the new sign-language. They are, once again, elucidations that instruct us in how to understand the functionality, the “logic,” of the “appliance” that is our language. Thus, when we learn to follow the logic of the language on our own, we can dispense with the notation. That is why one more properly refers to the notation as “elucidating nonsense” rather than “illuminating nonsense,” as Hacker has it. Among other things, this alternative description directly ties this kind of Tractarian “nonsense” to the ultimate objective of Wittgenstein’s book: elucidation of the work of our language and thinking.

(ii) The second point that the New Wittgensteinians unwarrantably neglected, which, by the way, is connected with the first one, is the precise meaning of 6.53. What this culminating subsection of the *Tractatus* proposes is that “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” [emphasis added]. Clearly, what Wittgenstein means here is that the bulk of the propositions in the *Tractatus* are nonsensical only if we construe them as philosophical propositions. In fact, however, they are not propositions

pertaining to philosophy (to metaphysics) the purpose of which is to say something about the world as such. Rather, the Tractarian propositions simply elucidate the logic of human language and thought—as well as that of the minimal and ultimately disposable sign-language. And being such, they are simply “propositions of our everyday language... [and thus] are in perfect order” (5.5563).

In fact, all of the propositions that Conant and Diamond refer to collectively as the “body” of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* are of this nature. They are not propositions of fact and science, nor are they philosophical propositions by means of which to “see [to picture] the *world*” (6.54 [emphasis added]). They just show how our language and thought work. That is why they are also not nonsensical in the way that metaphysical sentences might be considered nonsensical. That said, as elucidations, the Tractarian propositions do not make sense in the way that sentences of fact and science do.

8. Five Cases of Tractarian Elucidation

We are now in a position to consider how the propositions of the *Tractatus* serve as elucidations in the sense established in 6.54. To be more exact, we can discern five forms of Tractarian elucidations.

First, the propositions that elaborate Wittgenstein’s sign-language are neither philosophical propositions nor propositions of science. Instead, they are propositions that elucidate our language as an instrument that helps us to find our way in the world. Oskari Kuusela implicitly makes something like this point in characterizing the Tractarian notation as engendering a “non-theoretic linguistic capacity that allows [the reader] to recognize something as philosophically or logically problematic” (2011, p. 137). To put this more accurately, however, we should say that the Tractarian *sign-language* enables one to recognize how language and thinking function—to recognize, that is, their logic. In other words, the case in point is not a non-theoretical linguistic capacity but non-theoretical notational capacity.¹³

Second, besides featuring propositions that articulate the notation, the main body of the *Tractatus* introduces propositions that are themselves elucidations of this notation, hence in effect they are elucidations of elucidations. The *Tractatus* thus elucidates the sign-language and *ipso facto* teaches how better to grasp the logic of sentences, and in the process to think with greater logical cogency.

Third, Wittgenstein’s logical notation elucidates the work of the received logical “gear,” the “old” new logic of Frege and Russell, in ways that correct it for its patent shortcomings.

Fourth, in view of the intrinsic connection between language and thought (cf. 7, (i)), the Tractarian sign-language elucidates our thinking. Indeed, Wittgenstein devised his notation as an instrument for recognizing the logical properties of the propositions of the science and the daily life in which we express our thoughts.

Lastly, the *Tractatus* also elucidates primitive signs (3.263).¹⁴ But the provisional, disposable character of its sign-language eventually led Wittgenstein to identify it with the general propositional form which in turn is only a primitive sign (5.472). In this way the fifth form of Tractarian elucidation overlaps with the first one.

9. Therapy, Irony, or Training?

A telling argument against the interpretation of the New Wittgensteinians is that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein entertained no such idea as “analytic therapy.” Indeed, while he may have first read Freud prior to the publication of the *Tractatus* in 1922,¹⁵ he first adopted the idea that philosophy has a therapeutic objective only in 1933 (see Milkov, 2012, pp. 73-4).

Contrary to the thesis fielded by Conant and Diamond, the *Tractatus* advances no program for therapy but rather argues for an activity designed to teach readers better to understand their language, and by that means trains them to think with greater cogency. (In this way Wittgenstein subscribes to the classic Cartesian view that the vocation of philosophy is to cultivate clear and distinct thought (4.112).) It is true that both sorts of activity, therapeutic and pedagogic, are alike processes that occur in stages; moreover they both serve to improve our thinking and to eliminate epistemological error (cf. §6). Still, therapy and pedagogy have two clearly different objectives, the former to cure an intellectual disorder and the latter educationally to develop our mastery of language and our understanding.

This difference is crucial since the two leading schools of interpretation argue for mutually incompatible views of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, a circumstance that sparked the so-called “*Tractatus* wars.” To be sure, whereas intellectual illness is something patently irrational, to have problems with the orientation in the logic of languages and the world is not. Moreover, the interpretation of the New Wittgensteinians suggests that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is close to continental philosophy. In this sense, Peter Hacker correctly sees this line of interpretation as “post-modernist” (in that Wittgenstein allegedly employed pervasive irony, writing the bulk of the propositions of the *Tractatus* “tongue in cheek”) and “deconstructivist” (it held that almost all propositions of the *Tractatus* are sheer nonsense).

This side of the New Wittgensteinians' interpretation is patent in their insistence that to achieve his putative therapeutic goal, Wittgenstein forged a clever plan. With the aim of subverting the human inclination to get taken in by philosophical theories, he propounded instead philosophical quasi-theories, which in fact are no more than successive rungs of the therapeutic ladder that the reader ascends step by step through the course of the *Tractatus*. In other words, as the New Wittgensteinians would have it, Wittgenstein purposed to deceive his readers in order to cure them.

This story cannot be right, however, since Wittgenstein's method and style throughout the *Tractatus* are genuinely consequential and demonstrably mark a radical development of early analytic philosophy as pioneered by Frege, Russell and G.E. Moore. First of all, despite the fact that he didn't offer a new philosophical theory, Wittgenstein laid out his views in formally discursive terms. That he repeatedly identifies the *Tractatus* as a "treatise" (*Abhandlung*), and not as a dialectical dialogue, testifies to as much. A second factor corroborating this judgment is that Wittgenstein composed this most intricate work on a nerve-shatteringly tight time budget, while serving as a soldier at the Eastern Front in World War I. As a result, the book has a highly compressed character which sets about addressing with utmost economy and formal rigor a constellation of the most intricate problems of philosophical logic. The very notion, espoused by the New Wittgensteinians, that under such circumstances as the author of the *Tractatus* labored he would seek to communicate his highly technical ideas in an ironic, tongue-in-cheek manner stretches credulity.

10. Epilogue

The foregoing sections make the case that the New Wittgensteinian interpretation of the *Tractatus* is inconsistent, and that on a variety of counts it is out of touch with what Wittgenstein demonstrably gives us in his treatise. That said, however, the challenge to traditional readings of the *Tractatus* mounted by the New Wittgensteinians had also one unquestionably positive effect. For it impelled the crowded community of *Tractatus* scholars to revisit and in many cases revise their interpretations with an eye to more faithfully revealing the true sense of Wittgenstein's early masterwork. The present paper counts itself as one such attempt.¹⁶

Notes

¹ Other defenders of this reading are Oskari Kuusela, Denis McManus, and Rupert Read in Great Britain, and Juliet Floyd, Warren Goldfarb, Michael Kremer and Thomas Ricketts in North America. For recent discussion on this standpoint, see Read and Lavery (2011).

² The declared purpose of Conant (2001, p. 378) is to discuss just this term, plus the term ‘nonsense.’

³ They are nonsense if we see them as philosophical propositions (cf. §7, (ii)). Incidentally, that there are different kinds of nonsense was also demonstrated by Edmund Husserl in his *Logical Investigations* (cf. Husserl, 1900-1, vol. 2, Part One: Fourth Investigation).

⁴ Wittgenstein did not originate the concept of elucidation in philosophy. Hacker (1975) and Geach (1976) identify its earlier appearance in Frege. Long before Frege, however, Kant (1800, §§104 ff.) made extensive use of it opposing elucidations to synthetic judgments. The philosophical history of this concept is not, however, a concern here.

⁵ This point was also mentioned in Glock (2008, pp. 35ff.): “For Wittgenstein, the logical calculus developed by Frege and Russell is not an ideal *language*, one that avoids the alleged defects of natural languages [cf. §7], but an ideal *notation* which displays the logical structure that all natural languages must have in common under their misleading structure.”

⁶ That objects have logical structure is evidenced by the fact that it is impossible “for two colors... to be at one place in the visual field. ... It is excluded by the logical structure of color” (6.3751).

⁷ To be more exact, the object’s forms are space, time and color (2.0251). Incidentally, Wittgenstein failed to notice that sound, too, can be considered as an object’s form.

⁸ On the difference between the Tractarian concepts “logical scaffolding” and “scaffolding of the world” see Milkov (2001).

⁹ There is more to say below, in §7 (i), about why this ontology is “quasi,” as well as why it corresponds to the Tractarian sign-language.

¹⁰ The transient character of the Tractarian sign-language explains why some of its interpreters (cf. Goldfarb, 1997) maintain that Wittgenstein failed to suggest a sign-language at all.

¹¹ Cf. 4.023: “A proposition constructs a world with the help of a logical scaffolding.”

¹² There will be more to say about this difference in §9.

¹³ What is inaccurate in Kuusela’s interpretation is also the claim that we may need such a notation when there is something problematic, in the sense of metaphysical, to be eliminated. In fact, we need it all the time, whenever we think and speak.

¹⁴ In fact, this form of elucidation has genealogical priority over the other four forms. That primitive signs are to be elucidated was already underscored by Kant and Frege (cf. n.4), and later by Russell.

¹⁵ There are no pieces of evidence for this assumption, though. For example, Brian McGuinness' standard biography of the early Wittgenstein (1988) never even mentions Freud.

¹⁶ The initial version of this paper was delivered at the 26th International Wittgenstein Symposium, Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria, in August 2003; a second, revised draft was read at an Open Section of the Mind Association and the Aristotelian Society Joint Session in Brighton (Sussex) in July 2011. Finally, the paper was presented at the 6th annual conference for the Study of the History of Analytic Philosophy in Calgary, Alberta, in May, 2016. The author is indebted to stimulating remarks offered by Guy Stock, Chon Tejedor, Carolyn Wilde and David G. Stern. The paper also benefitted from the numerous remarks of the anonymous reader for the *Southwest Philosophy Review*. Thanks go also to all those who supported my work with criticism and encouragement, in particular to Phillip Stambovsky, who helped me by improving the English of the paper.

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