Wittgenstein's *Grundgedanke* as the key to the *Tractatus*

Oskari Kuusela

This paper argues that the key to unlocking the philosophical significance of the *Tractatus* is what Wittgenstein calls his *Grundgedanke*, his fundamental or basic thought. The interpretational strategy that takes the *Grundgedanke* as its starting point is contrasted with two traditional and one more recent interpretational approach that appear unable to do justice to the novelty of Wittgenstein's early philosophy on which its relevance for contemporary philosophy arguably depends.

1. Three interpretational strategies

The difficulty that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* poses to its readers is indicated by fundamental disagreements about its interpretation a century after its publication. This situation is not – or not only – due to the intricate details of the book and Wittgenstein's style that limits explanations to a minimum. Whilst there's no denying that these features of Wittgenstein's work constitute a significant source of difficulty for its reader, ultimately the problem of understanding it seems due to the novelty and originality of Wittgenstein's thinking. By this I mean his rejection of philosophical theories or theses or of true/false propositions regarding exceptionless necessity and possibility, which has proven particularly difficult for his readers to come to terms with (TLP 4.112, 4.122). This is reflected certain common strategies for reading the book which might be described as follows. One strategy is 1) to effectively ignore Wittgenstein's rejection of theses and to explain it as a result of theses that he does hold. Another is 2) to explain his rejection of theses in terms that can't be found in Wittgenstein's work, early or late. A third one is 3) to explain his rejection of theses in terms found in

Wittgenstein's later work. Remarkably, what all these strategies share is the assumption that expressing positive philosophical ideas, insights or views, in the kind of detail usually expected in philosophy, commits one philosophical theses or theories; such views are only expressible in terms of theses or theories. Consequently, it seems, Wittgenstein must either have such theses or reject commitment to any positive ideas, insights or views regarding, for example, the philosophy of logic or whatever the *Tractatus* ostensively speaks about. Instead, the aims of the *Tractatus* might then be understood as merely negative as the third strategy takes them to be, i.e. that Wittgenstein only wishes to show the impossibility of philosophical theorizing by inviting the reader to see how his theses collapse into nonsense.

In what follows I will outline a fourth strategy, explain how it can avoid problems that arise with strategies 1-3, and argue that something like the fourth strategy is required to unlock the *Tractatus* so as to correctly understand its philosophical significance, including its significance to the later Wittgenstein. Importantly for exegetical methodology, everything required for spelling out this interpretation can be found in the *Tractatus*, in the pre-Tractarian *Notebooks*, or correspondence at the time, although additionally the reading finds support in later remarks too. Before outlining the alternative strategy, let me make matters less abstract by illustrating the preceding strategies by means of examples. The first one is represented by G.E.M. Anscombe:

> Convinced that he had penetrated the essential nature of truth, falsehood and negation with his picture theory, Wittgenstein now had a great programme to carry out. He had to shew how the vast number of propositions that do not immediately appear to fit in with his theory do in fact fit in with it. There was a residue that would never fit in with it; these he dismissed as nonsensical: perhaps simply nonsensical, perhaps attempts to say the inexpressible. (Anscombe 1971, 79)

Anscombe then provides a long list of types of propositions that Wittgenstein had to deal with, including propositions about logical necessity and possibility, the laws of inference, and so on, in order to explain how they can be understood consistently with the picture theory. What matters most for my purposes is not the details of how this would be worked out, but how Anscombe's strategy places the so-called picture theory, according to which every possible proposition is a true/false representation of a contingent state of affairs, at the core of the *Tractatus*, portraying it as something which Wittgenstein views about language and logic must be made to fit (1971, 80). Anscombe is of course aware of a difficulty with this strategy, namely, 'the comical frequency with which, in expounding the *Tractatus*, one is tempted to say things and then say that they cannot be said' (Anscombe 1971, 86). It is important that this difficulty arises for the picture theory too, insofar as it is an attempt to say something that holds of propositions by necessity, not merely as a matter of contingent empirical fact. Somehow a place has to be found for the picture theory itself, too, in a manner consistent with its claim that propositions can only represent contingent states of affairs. But as long as it is treated as a philosophical theory/thesis regarding an exceptionless necessity pertaining propositions, it is hard to see how this could be achieved.[1]

Ultimately Anscombe leaves it somewhat unclear what the logical status of the picture theory is in the whole she sketches, i.e. whether she thinks it has priority over Wittgenstein's other ideas in the sense that they would be its consequences. Although it is hard to see how this could be the case with some items of Anscombe's list (she says as much about Wittgenstein's account of ethics), she comments on Wittgenstein's key insight, according to which there is only logical necessity, that this 'appears to be a pure exigency of the picture theory of propositions' (Anscombe 1971, 80). If this means that Wittgenstein's rejection of

[1] Similarly Russell speaks of intellectual discomfort caused by the fact that Wittgenstein apparently succeeds in saying quite a few things about what cannot be talked about (TLP, Introduction, p. 22).

metaphysical necessity or necessary truths or facts were forced upon him by the picture theory, Anscombe gets things fundamentally wrong, I believe.

An example of the second strategy is provided by Peter Hacker who describes Wittgenstein as advancing an account of philosophy as logical analysis which is intended to replace metaphysical philosophy and its illegitimate nonsensical theses about necessity. On this account the book itself doesn't preach what it practices, however. When providing his account of the nature of logic and language, thus drawing limits to sensible language use including metaphysical language use, Wittgenstein tries to stand on both sides of the limit, making statements about necessity of the kind that he himself rejects. The *Tractatus* thus constitutes a swansong of metaphysics, an attempt to overcome metaphysics by means of metaphysical theses that ultimately make manifest their own impossibility or nonsensicality (Hacker 1986, 21, 24-25, 27).

Hacker's strategy is clearly reminiscent of Anscombe's in that both portray the *Tractatus* as simultaneously putting forward philosophical theses regarding exceptionless possibility and necessity (or essence) as well as rejecting such theses.[2] However, Anscombe's acknowledgement of a problem with this strategy is replaced by Hacker by a theoretical commitment attributed to Wittgenstein, albeit one that Wittgenstein never explicitly acknowledges in the *Tractatus*, the *Notebooks* or other writings. This is Wittgenstein's commitment to ineffable metaphysical necessities, i.e. Hacker's suggestion that Wittgenstein's nonsensical theses somehow manage to establish such ineffable necessary facts or convey truths about ineffable necessities to the reader, even though they cannot be said or thought, i.e. entertained. As Hacker writes, 'Wittgenstein did think, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, that there were ineffable metaphysical necessities.' (Hacker 1986, 54; cf. 51) It is notable, however, that although Wittgenstein himself refers to what he calls 'the

[2] Another classic commentary expresses the same/similar view as follows: 'From the assumptions that the internal structure of reality cannot be described in sentences and that all meaningful sentences are descriptive follows that all 'statements' on the internal structure of reality are in effect 'nonsensical'." (Stenius 1960, 182)

inexpressible' – 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; […]' (TLP 6.522) – the notions of ineffable metaphysical necessity, i.e. a necessary fact or ineffable truth, never occur in his writings. Rather than assimilating the notion of showing with metaphysical necessary facts Wittgenstein always carefully keeps it distinct from the notion of truth.[3] Since failure to keep the distinction would mean that Wittgenstein himself falls into what he describes as a 'confusion, very widespread among philosophers' between internal relations or properties and external (contingent) relations or properties (TLP 4.122), this failure to respect his own distinction should be ascribed to him only on compelling grounds. (Anscombe never seems to connect the inexpressible with the notion of ineffable truth or fact.)

The problem with Hacker's strategy thus culminates in the notion of an ineffable metaphysical necessity. It's difficult to see how anything that Wittgenstein says could lead the reader to the comprehension of facts or truths that cannot be spoken or thought about. Besides this philosophical difficulty, Hacker's interpretation faces the mentioned exegetical difficulty of how the interpretation of the *Tractatus* in terms of the notion of ineffable metaphysical fact or truth can be justified. Given Wittgenstein's emphasis on the distinction between saying and showing, what is the evidence for him having failed to respect his own distinction by postulating necessary facts or truths? That it is hard to see what Wittgenstein could be doing unless he is putting forward theses of some kind – ineffable, comical or otherwise – can't justify the interpretation, because it begs the question against Wittgenstein's attempt to abandon philosophical theses.

There is also a difficulty that Anscombe and Hacker share. Insofar as Wittgenstein's rejection of propositions regarding exceptionless necessity and possibility is thought of as following from or dictated by his account of the nature of propositions or representation, Wittgenstein's argument against Frege's and Russell's accounts of logic is dogmatic in a

[3] To see how this is possible and in order to assess the correctness of this interpretational claim we need an account of the function of the sentences of the *Tractatus* that doesn't portray them as theses. Such an account will be outlined in connection with the fourth interpretational strategy.

Kantian sense. Rather than arguing against Frege and Russell from within their positions by revealing their internal inconsistencies, and so on, Wittgenstein is seen here as arguing against them on grounds that Frege and Russell need not accept, i.e. his own account of the nature of propositions and representation. According to Hacker, 'The limits of the thinkable are set in language, determined by the essential nature of representation. What lies beyond those limits cannot be said. […].' (Hacker 1986, 23) This seems naturally read as suggesting that Wittgenstein does adopt the problematic dogmatic argumentation strategy, although Hacker is well aware that historically Wittgenstein view of logical propositions as fundamentally different from scientific propositions preceded his account of propositions as pictures (Hacker 1986, 12ff., 56). Since historical priority doesn't determine logical priority, perhaps this fact is meant to be put to the side as a curiosity, however.

By the third strategy I mean the so-called therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus* that adopts the notion of therapy from the later Wittgenstein.[4] Although this reading does account for Wittgenstein's rejection of theses, it seems to do so at the costs of not being able to attribute to Wittgenstein any detailed positive ideas, insights or views about philosophy of logic, such as Wittgenstein seems to put forward in the *Tractatus*. Rather, the book itself is to be seen as an expression of a metaphysical impulse which Wittgenstein wants to expose as confused by bringing his reader to recognize his book as nonsense. Rupert Read and Rob Deans write:

> […] the *Tractatus*, itself, as a whole, demands to be seen as yet another expression of the impulse towards metaphysics; namely that a complete analysis of logical form is

[4] Therapeutic readings ought to be distinguished from the so-called resolute readings, although the two are sometimes combined, and according to a widespread misconception are one and the same (see Crary and Read eds. 2000). However, a resolute reading, such as developed by Cora Diamond and James Conant (who never to my knowledge themselves describe their approaches as therapeutic), is minimally only committed to the rejection of truths or theses about ineffable necessities and to the assumption that the readers of the *Tractatus* have a tacit comprehension of logic by virtue of being language users (See Conant and Bronzo 2017, 178-181). The fourth interpretational strategy shares these minimal commitments.

> possible, and that logical form thus understood determines the limits of the application of signs. What is then thrown away is not just the cumulative nonsense arising from engaging with particular propositions of the text that deal with particular "philosophic matters", but the very idea inherent in the text that there are hidden necessities that determine the limits of the use of language (Read and Deans 2003, 252).

On this account, for example, Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing, like the account of logical analysis seemingly offered in the book or what Wittgenstein calls the strictly correct method of philosophy in 6.53, are all to be recognized as nonsensical (Read and Deans 2003, 243, 250-251, 254; cf. Read and Hutchinson 2010, 154-155). Thus, once the reader has finished with the book, very little of what it seems to talk about is left standing. Contrary to Hacker, for example, no method of logical analysis, such as the book seems to articulate, is introduced, although this doesn't mean entirely denying the possibility of logical analysis. According to Read and Deans, such analyses can be given with the purpose of making perspicuous the uses of language in some looser sense, but complete analyses in the sense in which the *Tractatus* seems to speak about them are an illusion (Read and Deans 2003, 259).[5] Consequently, however, the same exegetical problem arises for this strategy as for Hacker. It is unclear how the interpretation can be justified with reference to what Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* or in the preceding *Notebooks*. How can it be justified that Wittgenstein held already in the *Tractatus* the views about philosophical methodology that he only seems to spell out in the *Philosophical Investigations*? If he held such views earlier, why didn't he say so? And why does Wittgenstein seem to criticize the Tractarian account of logic and philosophy in his later work? Philosophically it seems disappointing that, on this account,

[5] This suggests again that a key source for this interpretation of the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein's later work, given his criticisms of the notion of a complete logical analysis there.

Wittgenstein does not, after all, spell out the interesting criticism and alternative to Frege's and Russell's philosophies of logic that he seems to do (see Kuusela 2019b, Chapter 2).

In order to address problems with these three interpretational strategies and to unlock the philosophical significance of Wittgenstein's early work, I will next outline a fourth strategy that regards what Wittgenstein calls his fundamental thought or basic idea (*Grundgedanke*) as the key to *Tractatus*-interpretation

2. Fourth interpretational strategy: *Grundgedanke* and the non-substantiality of logic

Wittgenstein wrote to Russell in 1912: 'Logic is still in the melting-pot but one thing gets more and more obvious to me: […] there are NO logical constants. // Logic must turn out to be of a TOTALLY different kind than any other science' (CL, 15; 22.6.1912). Such a view of logic, which rejects Frege's and Russell's views of logical constants (TLP 5.4), is then spelt out in the *Tractatus*. More broadly, Wittgenstein contests Frege's and Russell's accounts of logic as an axiomatic science based on axioms understood as substantial self-evident a priori truths (TLP 5.4731). The *Tractatus* articulates Wittgenstein's earlier vision as follows:

> Theories which make a proposition of logic appear substantial are always false. One could e.g. believe that the words "true" and "false" signify two properties among other properties, and then it would appear as a remarkable fact that every proposition possesses one of these properties. […] Indeed our proposition [about "true and "false"] now gets quite the character of a proposition of natural science and this is a certain symptom of its being falsely understood (TLP 6.111; my square brackets).

> The correct explanation of logical propositions must give them a unique position among all propositions (TLP 6.112).
>
> It is the characteristic mark of logical propositions that one can perceive in the symbol alone that they are true; and this fact contains in itself the whole philosophy of logic. And so also it is one of the most important facts that the truth or falsehood of non-logical propositions can *not* be recognized from the propositions alone (TLP 6.113).

These points are intimately connected with Wittgenstein's fundamental thought or basic idea, his *Grundgedanke*: 'My fundamental thought is that the "logical constants" do not represent. That the logic of the facts cannot be represented' (TLP 4.0312).[6] The connection of this with the preceding remarks is easy to see. Were logical constants a possible object of reference or representation, i.e. some kind of abstract objects that are part of reality, logic would be a substantial science that establishes truths about reality in just the sense Wittgenstein thinks logic isn't a substantial science. On the fourth interpretational strategy it's this idea about the special status of logic, rather than the picture theory or what Wittgenstein says about language and representation, that constitutes the *Tractatus'* philosophical core. Indeed, as Wittgenstein says, the idea of non-substantiality of logic, one face of which is the idea that we can recognize the truth of logical propositions from the symbols alone, 'contains in itself the whole philosophy of logic'. Given that the main concern of the *Tractatus* is with the philosophy of logic, this further supports the view that Wittgenstein *Grundgedanke* is indeed fundamental to it. However, if Frege and Russell don't share the *Grundgedanke*, one might wonder, isn't this an equally dogmatic basis for arguing against them as placing the picture

[6] One might wonder why Wittgenstein would present his fundamental thought in such an odd place, considering the number of the remark. The answer is simple: the *Grundegandke* is contrasted here with what, according to the *Tractatus*, is fundamental for contingent true/false propositions, i.e. that names in them refer to objects: 'The possibility of propositions is based upon the principle of the representation of objects by signs' (TLP 4.0312).

theory at the heart of the *Tractatus*? A good way to bring out the importance of the *Grundgedanke* is to start from this issue, which illustrates how the *Grundgedanke* helps to solve tensions and inconsistencies in Frege's and Russell's philosophies of logic.

On Russell's account, as he explains it in the spring of 1914, logical form is the basis of understanding inferences and language. Although it's possible to know logical form without knowing the constituents of the proposition, as exemplified by knowledge of the form in the case of Russellian propositional functions, in order for one to understand a proposition one must have knowledge of both form and constituents (Russell 1926, 52–3). Russell concludes: 'Thus some kind of knowledge of logical forms, though with most people it is not explicit, is involved in all understanding of discourse. It is the business of philosophical logic to extract this knowledge from its concrete integuments, and to render it explicit and pure' (Russell 1926, 53). This view, that language users must be presumed to have an implicit grasp of logical forms or the principles of logic more generally, which is a requirement for understanding language, is shared by Wittgenstein. However, in his work it is given a more prominent place, and expressed in terms of another principle, according to which, 'Logic must take care of itself', first formulated in August 1914 and singled out in this connection as 'an extremely profound and important insight' (NB, 2; 22.8.1914). As this principle can be explained, what is allowed in logic, i.e. what it makes sense to say, what inferences are correct, and so on, doesn't depend on anything established by logicians, such as rules of inference or rules for the construction of propositions, but only on language itself, as it's used by language users. Part of being a language user is to be able to distinguish sense from nonsense, to tell correct inferences from incorrect ones, and so on, with a certain fallible reliability. This is the sense in which logic takes care of itself: because thinkers and language users must be already assumed to have a grasp of logic in order to be able to think and use

language in the first place, thinking and language don't require logicians to control and regulate it (TLP 5.13ff., 5.473ff).

Why this is 'extremely profound and important' has to do with its consequences for the study/discipline of logic and the philosophy of logic. It means, for example, that logic can't be understood as a 'normative science' in Frege's sense (Frege 1979, 128), and that there's no need or room for anything like Russell's theory of types, i.e. a set of rules that would regulate the use of signs, as Wittgenstein explains in a letter to Russell (CL, 124-126; 19.8.1919; TLP 5.4733). Indeed Wittgenstein's principle implies that logic can't be understood as a science at all, since what language users already know can't be the object of discoveries, and it's not possible to inform language users about what they already know, in contrast to how one can be informed about scientific discoveries. Instead, logic must be understood as a clarificatory discipline that reminds thinkers and language users of what they already know. As Wittgenstein also remarks, 'Logic takes care of itself; all we have to do is to look and see how it does it' (NB, 11; 13.10.14).

Now, insofar as logic can't be understood as a substantial science, it can't be founded on axioms *qua* true propositions. Based on such substantial truths logic would be a substantial science, but insofar as the comprehension of logic or logical forms is a requirement for understanding propositions in the first place, this view suffers from internal tensions. Logic can't both be already known, and the object of discoveries of which language users are informed with the purpose of regulating language use. More specifically, as the possibility of understanding the truth of any Fregean and Russellian axioms already presupposes the comprehension of logic, logic can't be clarified in terms of such propositions, as they already assume what they are meant to clarify, i.e. the principles of logic. Logic precedes the possibility of saying anything true, and thus true propositions as a way of clarifying logic always arrive on the scene too late. On the positive side, the view that

language users already have implicit knowledge of logic releases one from the problematic Fregean-Russellian assumption that the justification of the axioms of logic would depend on the self-evidence of their truth (TLP 5.1363, 5.4731).

Wittgenstein's view of the non-substantiality of logic can therefore be understood as an insight he employs to solve from within problems with Frege's and Russell's philosophies of logic. Evidently, Russell can't have it both ways, i.e. to maintain that comprehension of logic is always already presupposed in understanding discourse, and that logic is a science that makes discoveries and informs language users on this basis about what it is possible to say. That knowledge of logic is already always assumed when thinking or using language is not consistent with his and Frege's views about the regulatory-normative role of logic. However, if the preceding is the basis for Wittgenstein's rejection of the notion of logic as a substantial science, there is no need or grounds for thinking that his rejection of substantial logical truths or propositions about logic would be based on his picture theory or of his account of language as a totality of true/false contingent propositions (TLP 4.001). It is important that there was no need to mention or assume the picture theory in the preceding explanation of Wittgenstein's rejection of true propositions about logic.

Accordingly, there is nothing curious about the picture theory[7] having emerged only a couple of years after Wittgenstein's statement that the propositions of logic have a unique status and after him having spelled out the principle that logic takes care of itself (NB, 7; 29.9.1914). Rather than the basis of Wittgenstein's views about logic, the picture theory is better understood as a further constituent of Wittgenstein's account of logic whose point is to explicate the notion of true/false proposition which, in accordance with the Fregean-Russellian aim of clarifying the principles that govern thinking that aims at truth, is at the

[7] For a brief characterization of the picture theory, see section 1.

heart of the logical system and notation introduced in the *Tractatus*.[8] As one might put it, the picture theory fills in details about what sort of entities propositions are, against the background of Wittgenstein's account of the general propositional form as the centre of his logical system (TLP 5.4ff., 5.47, 5.472). For, provided the central role of propositions in Wittgenstein's logical system, surely the notion of proposition ought to be further clarified. For example, this makes perspicuous the distinction between names as referring expressions and propositions as true/false representations, thus helping to address the confusions that Frege and Russell, according to Wittgenstein, have about these two notions (TLP 4.03ff., 4.431, 5.02). More specifically, the general propositional form constitutes the centre of Wittgenstein's account of logic in that it provides a rule for the construction of any proposition whatsoever. In this capacity it contains in itself the logical principles that govern thinking that aims at truth, which Wittgenstein aims to clarify in terms of his notion of general propositional form, the sole logical constant of his system. Merely being a rule for the use of signs, however, the logical status of the notion of the general propositional form is misconstrued if it is understood as a substantial truth about/in logic (TLP 4.5, 5.471-5.472, 5.5, 6ff.).

The preceding considerations also explain why Wittgenstein couldn't have communicated his insights about logic to his readers by means of theories or theses and why he has no need to try to communicate his insights in this way. Assuming that a theory constitutes a set of true propositions, logic can't be clarified by their means because, as noted, propositions already presuppose the principles of logic. But if so, it is crucial that there should be an alternative way to clarify logic and, further down the line when we engage in logical analysis, the logical forms of propositions, as Russellian philosophical logic aims to

[8] This is not to say that Wittgenstein's account of how representation works wouldn't be of interest in its own right. Despite the attention that the picture theory has got in the interpretation of the *Tractatus*, the down-to-earth-simplicity Wittgenstein's account of representation seems not to have been fully appreciated, due to how its interpretation has been connected with the presumed mentalism of the *Tractatus*, which gives the account a speculative flavour.

do. Otherwise it seems that Wittgenstein's philosophy of logic could only be negative. Reminiscent of therapeutic interpretations, it couldn't contain any specific or detailed positive insights. So, how does Wittgenstein think he can communicate his insights about logic to the reader without relying on theses?

A crucial assumption in this regard, but one that is easily granted to Wittgenstein, is that his readers are language users. Granted this, the readers, not only can't, but need not be informed about logic, thanks to the implicit understanding of its principles which they already possess by virtue of being language users. Thus, Wittgenstein's readers only need to be reminded of logic, just as Wittgenstein says in the earlier *Notebooks*-quote. They can meet Wittgenstein 'half-way' (cf. Frege 1960, 54), because in virtue of their implicit knowledge of logic they are in a position to recognise the correctness (or incorrectness) of how Wittgenstein lays out and clarifies the principles of logic, for example, that there is a general propositional form. By contrast, this kind of recognition is not possible in the case of new scientific information. Granted this possibility of meeting half-way, however, what is it that the readers are expected to recognize as correct? How is it possible for Wittgenstein to put forward an account of logic and philosophy thereof if he doesn't do it by means of theses?

Rather than expressed in terms of theses, Wittgenstein's logical insights, are encoded into the structure of the logical notation that the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce, and which Wittgenstein intends as a correction to 'the concept-script of Frege and Russell' that 'still does not exclude all errors' (TLP 3.325). This means that the proper expression for Wittgenstein's insights about logic, or for exceptionless logical necessities, is not the Tractarian sentences, but the notation the concepts and principles of which the sentences are intended to introduce. (Crucially, to introduce a language or a notation is not the same as putting forward true/false theses.) Characteristic of this notation then is, for example, that it distinguishes clearly between names and propositions, and that in Wittgenstein's notation it is

possible to express a proposition only in a way that makes it clear that all possible propositions share a common form. (If it's true that it's possible to express any possible proposition/sense in Wittgenstein's notation, as he says (TLP 4.5), it has been shown that propositions do have a common form. By contrast, if this view were presented as a thesis it would always be possible to doubt it, and thus theses fail to make logic perspicuous. Unlike Wittgenstein's notation which only allows one to express propositions in a manner which makes evident their possessing the general propositional form, theses can't exclude the possibility of wondering whether there could be other kinds of propositions.) What then is hoped from the reader is that they recognize this notation as correctly rendering the principles of logic that they are already familiar with. This doesn't mean that they are expected to simply see the correctness of Wittgenstein's account of logic, however. Ultimately the criterion of correctness for a logical account is that, when thinking or engaging in logical analysis in terms of this notation, things work out, i.e. no contradictions or anomalies arise that would force us to rethink the account of logic codified into the notation, such as arise for Frege and Russell. As Wittgenstein remarks, 'We are in the possession of the right logical account/conception [Auffassung] when everything adds up in our symbolism' (TLP 4.1213). Accordingly, later on the so-called colour-exclusion problem forced Wittgenstein to admit, by these very criteria, that the *Tractatus'* notation hadn't given the right expression to the principles of logic. As it turned out, there were propositions, such as 'a is red and green all over', whose exclusion couldn't be explained in terms of the *Tractatus'* truth-functional account of the construction of complex propositions or the notion of general propositional form as a rule for the construction of propositions (see RLF).[9]

[9] Further external support for the proposed interpretation that Wittgenstein considers a notation rather than theses as the ultimately proper expression for a philosophical view is provided by the following remark from 1929: 'R[amsey] does not comprehend the value I place on a particular notation any more than the value I place on a particular word because he does not see that in it an entire way of looking at the object is expressed; the angle from which I now regard the matter. The notation is the last expression of a philosophical view.' (MS 105, 10-12; my square brackets)

Finally, insofar it is Wittgenstein's the notation, not the *Tractatus'* sentences, that constitutes the proper expression for Wittgenstein's logical insights and his account of logic, there is no paradox of nonsensical theses in the *Tractatus*, such as the two first interpretational strategies give rise to. In short, on the proposed reading there is no paradox of nonsensical theses, because Wittgenstein is not putting forward any theses, but using his sentences to introduce the principles and concepts of a logical notation. After his sentences have done their introductory work, the reader can then really throw them away, unlike would be the case if Wittgenstein's insights were expressed in terms of theses. In this case throwing them away would also mean throwing away Wittgenstein's logical insights. On the proposed interpretation, however, the reader can hold on to these insights and clarifications as embodied in Wittgenstein's notation. Further, this notation is meant to be put to the work of logical analysis, as described by Wittgenstein in 6.53 where he distinguishes between the strictly correct method of philosophy and the one employed in the *Tractatus*. Hacker is therefore right that the purpose of Wittgenstein is to introduce a philosophical method and a novel philosophical approach. What is not correct is that the *Tractatus* itself would be trying to overcome metaphysics by means of metaphysics, by putting forward theses about exceptionless (ineffable) necessities, only to land in a paradox of nonsensical theses. Indeed, to think that Wittgenstein is committed to ineffable metaphysical necessity is in effect to maintain that he is committed to a substantial account of logical necessity like Frege and Russell, which is to lose sight of the key insight of the *Tractatus*.

Notably, given that Wittgenstein himself never mentions the presumed Tractarian paradox, the fact that interpretational strategies, such as the first two above, give rise to it, creating a serious anomaly within Wittgenstein's account of logic, indicates a problem with these interpretations by Wittgenstein's own criteria (TLP 4.1213). But neither is there any need to deny the possibility of Wittgenstein having detailed and specific views about logic in

order to solve the paradox, as therapeutic readings do. (For a critique of therapeutic readings, see Kuusela 2019a.) Thus, the proposed interpretational strategy seems able to avoid problems with all the three strategies in section 1.

3. The significance of the *Tractatus*

I suggested that the proposed fourth interpretational strategy would provide us with a key to unlocking the *Tractatus'* philosophical significance. Here a few remarks must suffice to indicate this. It's important that Wittgenstein's rejection of Frege's and Russell's axiomatic account of logic doesn't mean rejecting the idea that the principles of a logical system can be stated in terms of axioms at all. It only means that axioms can't be understood as substantial true propositions. However, understood as rules that state the principles governing the system, thus giving an overview of its workings, not as providing logic with a separately justified/established, i.e. self-evident, foundation similar to philosophical systems based on foundational truths, the *Tractatus* implies no objection to presenting a logical system in an axiomatic form. (This has some advantages insofar as the axioms can then be made use of in proofs.) Here we can see how Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of true propositions about logic, i.e. his emphasis that the logical status of statements about logic must be understood differently, propels him right at the verge of the contemporary distinction between meta- and object language, whereby the former consists of statements of a rule that are not true/false about anything. This view, that recognizes a fundamental difference between the logical status of propositions about logic and the logical status of the propositions of the object language was first articulated by Rudolf Carnap, although Carnap arguably exaggerated the difference of his position from Wittgenstein's, as indicated by Wittgenstein's accusations of plagiarism (see Kuusela 2019b, Chapter 3). Regardless of this

dispute, however, read as proposed the *Tractatus* can be seen as making a significant advance from Frege's and Russell's philosophies of logic that don't distinguish between propositions about logic and other propositions.

Wittgenstein rejection of theses or true propositions concerning logical necessity also continues to play an important role in his later philosophy, although this is eclipsed by interpretations of the *Tractatus* that attribute to him such theses, ineffable or otherwise. Corresponding to Wittgenstein's early insight that the proper way to express logical necessity is to codify it into the structure of a notation, the later Wittgenstein holds that the proper way to express relevant kind of necessities, or what is essential, is in terms of grammatical rules or other modes of representing language use, such as language games, not true propositions. Logical necessities are thus to be understood as structural to thinking, as reflected in the idea of their codification into the structure of a logical language in the *Tractatus*, and in this the early and later Wittgenstein agree. Here later Wittgenstein's point that essence is *expressed* by grammar (PI §371), i.e. not constituted by grammar or a grammatical construction, marks a crucial difference from other Wittgenstein-influenced positions, such as Carnap's conventionalism, in that Wittgenstein's position leaves open what the source of necessity might be in a particular case, i.e. whether it's nature or conventions, and thus Wittgenstein is not committed to a thesis about the source of logical necessity (see Kuusela 2008, Chapter 5). This allows him to steer a course between Carnapian conventionalism and Quinean empiricism on the one hand, and metaphysical realism such as Saul Kripke's, who criticises Carnap and W.V.O. Quine for their shared view that logic can be adopted like a scientific theory (Kripke forthcoming). The jury is still out which of these views, if any, best accounts for what is to be understood by logic and the study thereof. But it testifies to Wittgenstein's insightfulness that a hundred years later a leading logician, such as Kripke, would take a view on this issue that is similar in several important respects to that of the *Tractatus*. (Kripke's

view similarly treats the systems and logical calculi developed by logicians as articulations of the underlying principles of logic that themselves are too fundamental to be adopted.) Given then also Wittgenstein's later criticisms of the *Tractatus* on relevant issues, for example, that it misunderstood the role of ideal notions (PI §100-102), and failed to recognize its own account for what it is, i.e. a model (PI §130-131), Wittgenstein arguably remains at the cutting edge in the philosophy of logic, where the *Tractatus* first put him.[10]

Bibliography

Anscombe, G.E.M. *Introduction to Wittgenstein's* Tractatus. South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1971.

Conant, James and Bronzo, Silver. 'Resolute Readings of the *Tractatus*'. In Glock, H.-J. and Hyman, J., A *Companion to Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Crary, Alice and Read, Rupert eds. *The New Wittgenstein*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Frege, Gottlob. 'On Concept and Object.' In *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960.

Frege, Gottlob. *Posthumous Writings*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979.

Hacker, Peter. *Insight and Illusion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Kripke, Saul. 'The Question of Logic', forthcoming (September 2020 draft).

Kuusela, Oskari. *The Struggle against Dogmatism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Kuusela, Oskari. 'On Wittgenstein's and Carnap's Conceptions of the Dissolution of Philosophical Problems, and against a Therapeutic Mix: How to Solve the Paradox of the *Tractatus*'. *Philosophical Investigations*, 42: 3, 2019a, pp. 213-240.

[10] I would like to thank Mauro Engelmann for comments on a draft of this essay.

Kuusela, Oskari. *Wittgenstein on Logic as the Method of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019b.

Read, Rupert and Hutchinson, Phil. 'Therapy', in Jolley, Kelly, Dean ed. *Wittgenstein: Key Concepts*. Durham: Acumen, 2010.

Read, Rupert and Deans, Rob. '"Nothing is Shown": A 'Resolute' Response to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe and Vilhauer'. *Philosophical Investigations*, 26:3, 2003, pp. 239-268.

Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1926.

Stenius, Erik. *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1960.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge, 1951. (TLP)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 'Some Remarks on Logical Form'. In *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*. Indianapolis: Hackett. (RLF)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. (CL)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Notebooks 1914-1916*. Oxford: Blackwell. (NB)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Wittgenstein's Nachlass: Bergen Electronic Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Wiley, 2009. (PI)