

Book Reviews

THE TRACTATUS, WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY. By Nikolay Milkov. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2026. 303 pp.

Nikolay Milkov's *The Tractatus, Wittgenstein's Method and Analytic Philosophy* sets itself the explicit goal, as the title already indicates, of "present[ing] a valid interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" (p. 1). To this end, Milkov seeks to overcome what he regards as the limitations of one-sided or partial readings by employing what he calls the "method of 'logical-contextual history of philosophy'" (p. 3). This method combines the results of archaeological studies on the composition of the *Tractatus* with careful consideration of Wittgenstein's other texts and materials, integrating them into a properly philosophical and interpretive reflection. At the same time, Milkov declares his intention to adopt a "historical-philosophical approach to Wittgenstein" (p. 6), situating him within the broader development of Western philosophy. Taken together, these aims are meant to support the book's central thesis: that the fundamental principle of Wittgenstein's philosophy is methodological, insofar as it promotes the cultivation and exercise of a particular skill designed to improve our thinking.

The book is accordingly divided into three parts. The first addresses the influences on the *Tractatus* (Russell, Frege, and Tolstoy). The second offers a systematic interpretation of the *Tractatus* and constitutes the core of the volume. The third focuses more specifically on Wittgenstein's method, the *Philosophical Investigations*, and their relation to the *Tractatus*, concluding with a discussion of the connection between Wittgenstein's method and both earlier and later analytic philosophy. The overall scope of the topics addressed is therefore quite broad, and only some aspects can be discussed here. Yet this breadth is fully consistent with the book's historical-philosophical approach: to interpret the *Tractatus* correctly also means to understand its place within Wittgenstein's thought and, more generally, within the history of analytic philosophy. Moreover, as stated in the *Preface*, the book may be read "as a polemic directed at the 'New Wittgensteinians'" (p. vii). It is animated throughout by a sustained critical engagement with the resolute reading, culminating in the central chapters but already evident in the anti-resolute use made of Wittgenstein's materials and documents. Nevertheless, I do not think that the sets of arguments advanced against the resolute reading will prove convincing to readers who are not already unsympathetic to that interpretive programme.

The first part is devoted to the influences that shaped the *Tractatus*. It begins with a discussion of Russell's place in this story, the joint philosophical programme he shared with Wittgenstein, and the mutual influences between them, as well as the role played by Frege in the crisis of that programme. The second chapter turns to Frege himself, presented as the structural matrix of the Tractarian symbolism. Here, Milkov raises the issue of Wittgenstein's inheritance of certain Fregean themes, including the idea of a concept-script, the notion of showing, and, interestingly, Frege's "logical organicism" (p. 54), with particular emphasis on the spatial character of symbolism. The central claim of the chapter is that Wittgenstein "transformed Fregean doctrine by recasting it into a minimal or 'soft' theory (philosophy) of language and thinking" (p. 56). The idea of a minimal, non-metaphysical theory of language at the heart of the *Tractatus* is crucial for Milkov and will reappear in the book's central chapters; here it is prepared through the discussion of Frege's legacy. Already at this stage, the anti-resolute thrust of this position is made explicit, in a familiar and unsurprising

argumentative move: “we can clarify neither our thoughts nor our language without a minimal theoretical ground, a minimal founding theory” (p. 57). The third chapter, devoted to Tolstoy and closing the first part, is probably the most suggestive. Milkov is keen to argue that Tolstoy’s influence (especially *The Gospel in Brief*) is not to be confined to Wittgenstein’s early view of ethics, since “Tolstoy also influenced Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, as well as his thinking on logic and grammar” (p. 78), both in the *Tractatus* and in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The proposal is intriguing, though the reader may at times have the impression that the affinities are evoked rather than strictly argued for. The chapter also includes sections defending the claim that Tolstoy’s influence was more significant than that of Dostoevsky, reflections on the literary dimension of both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, and finally a brief conclusion aimed at denying that Wittgenstein was a mystic of any sort. This last point leaves the impression that Milkov is particularly uneasy with the very theme of the “mystical” and the term itself. Occasionally, one also encounters somewhat puzzling formulations, as when Milkov writes: “Wittgenstein’s writings are closer to the non-imaginative literature, his ‘facts’ being the available language” (p. 89). Although it is reasonably clear what Milkov means by describing Wittgenstein’s work as a “chronicle of human language” (*ibid.*), in a sense akin to travel literature, it is nonetheless surprising to see Wittgenstein’s writing characterized as “non-imaginative.” In his case, the appeal to the facts of human natural history and to the grammar of language does not exclude reference to fiction and imagination; rather, it arguably calls for it.

The second part of the book contains its core, namely the substantive interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Touching on several major figures of the philosophical tradition (Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel), Milkov presents the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* as defending a distinctive form of idealism, according to which logic and ontology are two sides of the same coin, and what we can know is only the form of the world—“the a priori order of the world, or its scaffolding,” which “is what is intelligible” (p. 114). In the following chapter (“Arguments against the Resolute Reading”), drawing on familiar and traditional criticisms of the resolute interpretation, Milkov attempts to advance his alternative view, centered on the idea that “the *Tractatus* is a logico-philosophical *instructional handbook*” (p. 128). Through a distinction between training (or pedagogy) and therapy, he seeks to explain the “*transient status*” (p. 134) of the Tractarian concept-script. This concept-script functions as a kind of logical scaffolding: once it has been used to clarify the logical structure of the propositions of our language, it can be discarded, since it no longer serves any purpose. At that point (so it seems), it becomes nonsensical insofar as it is useless: “now it is nonsensical *to us*, albeit not in itself” (p. 169).

Here, however, Milkov’s position appears somewhat confusing, and his proposal to employ “the analogy of language learning” (p. 135) to explain the functioning of the Tractarian sign-language brings this lack of clarity to the surface. In fact, a major tension runs throughout the book, stemming from the combination of two distinct claims. On the one hand, the function of the *Tractatus* is described in terms of elucidation and clarification—for instance: “the objective of the Tractarian propositions is nothing else than to elucidate the functioning of the given language and thinking” (p. 137). On the other hand, Milkov maintains that the aim of the *Tractatus*, conceived as an “instruction manual,” is “to improve our command of language and thinking” (p. 135). He further draws a parallel between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* insofar as both “offer themselves as manuals for emendation of language” (p. 12). In my view, however, this second claim, according to which “Wittgenstein undertook to demonstrate [...] how to achieve a better command of our language (and thinking), genuinely to master it” (p. 232), together with the very idea of an emendation of language, is misleading. A more plausible alternative would be to say that the reader of the *Tractatus* already masters her language simply in virtue of being a competent speaker. What she may gain, rather, is not improved mastery but a clarified understanding of her own relation to language. This line of thought resonates with certain strands within the resolute programme, whose internal diversity Milkov arguably underestimates, treating them instead as unified by a few shared features, such as the much-discussed distinction between the frame and the body of the *Tractatus*¹.

For reasons of space, I cannot discuss the remaining chapters in detail. Let me simply note that, although the idea that the animating principle of Wittgenstein's philosophy lies in training, exercise, and the cultivation of a philosophical skill is certainly intriguing, one may wonder whether its combination with an idealistic interpretation of the *Tractatus*, together with the substantial theoretical weight assigned to its ontology (albeit distinguished from metaphysics) and to the notions of logical scaffolding and scaffolding of the world, provides the most fruitful framework for developing those methodological insights. That said, readers interested in these issues should examine the following chapters for themselves, beginning with Chapter Nine, which contains a curious discussion of what Milkov calls "Wittgenstein's Ways," where 'way' is said to be synonymous with 'method' from an ontological standpoint.

It is, however, in the third and final part of the book that the issue of method receives more sustained attention, especially in Chapter Eleven. Milkov offers here a closer account of what he terms Wittgenstein's philosophical skill, the "principle of immediacy" operative in Wittgenstein's philosophy, and several examples of these methodological tendencies at work. The final chapter, while continuing the anti-resolute polemic, presents Wittgenstein as the exemplary analytic philosopher and portrays his epigones as responsible for partial and selective appropriations of his philosophical project. At this point, readers may wish for a more detailed account of the relation between these successors and Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is treated somewhat briefly. Still, the book already offers a wealth of material for reflection and concludes with a short epilogue in defense of the value of Wittgenstein's philosophy for thinking better.

In conclusion, Milkov's book is undoubtedly challenging and original in its presentation of central issues in the debate on the *Tractatus*, at times in decidedly heterodox terms. It is occasionally controversial, and readers interested in Wittgenstein's philosophy will find in it many stimulating (and divisive) lines of argument worth engaging with critically.

Notes

¹ Interestingly, Cora Diamond herself, while continuing to endorse a resolute reading of Wittgenstein on nonsense, has stated: "One relatively minor change in my views about such issues is that I think the image of the 'frame' of the *Tractatus* turned out to be unhelpful" (*Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going On to Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2019, p. 5).

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THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO GLOBAL COMPARATIVE LITERATURE. By Zhang Longxi and Omid Azadibougar (Eds). New York and London: Routledge, 2025, 423 pp.

This edited volume of twenty-eight chapters is organized in four sections and endeavors to decenter Eurocentrism from the discipline of comparative literature studies adding to the ongoing conversation in the field with other twenty-first century projects such as *A Companion to Comparative Literature* (2011), *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2018), *A Companion to World Literature* (2020), and *The Cambridge History of World Literature* (2021).

In Part I, "Institutions and Comparative Literature," Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas accentuate the travailing work of defining the discipline when it is progressively becoming a site of development for modern language and literary studies. The newer generation of comparatists study non-European literature and linguistic traditions in a bid to decolonize and get past its rooted Eurocentrism, with the universities and colleges also adapting their curriculum and pedagogy to edify students