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Representation and Reality in Wittgenstein's Tractatus, BY JOSÉ ZALABARDO, OXFORD, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015, pp. VIII + 263.

This is an engaging and illuminating book, which anyone interested in the *Tractatus* should read. It offers thoughtful interpretations of some of the key passages of this puzzling work, and is full of interesting insights. There are two striking things about the way the *Tractatus* is presented here. First, Wittgenstein's account of representation and reality is interpreted as above all a response to certain problems which Bertrand Russell had been struggling with: this was certainly a crucially important factor in the formation of Wittgenstein's views, and Zalabardo does also consider other influences, but the general character of his account is strongly shaped by this Russellian orientation. And secondly, Zalabardo for the most part simply presents his own view of the text, offered as a solution to a range of interpretative puzzles, but not generally compared with other interpretations (although the two Appendices provide notable exceptions).

The main body of the book is devoted to explaining the details of what Zalabardo calls the *Tractarian Account of Representation and Reality* (TARR). TARR has three components: first, the view that everyday propositions represent the world by way of a special class of *elementary propositions* (everyday propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions); secondly, an account of the nature of elementary propositions and the way they represent the world; and thirdly, an account of the structure of reality. The book presents TARR as a response to problems which Russell was trying to deal with in the first decade or so of the twentieth century, in particular in his *Theory of Knowledge*, a manuscript which he abandoned unfinished in 1913 after criticism from Wittgenstein. The solution which TARR provides is influenced in part by lessons learned from Frege, but also by a particular conception of our knowledge of logical properties and relations, which Zalabardo calls *epistemic formalism*.

The book has six chapters. The first three are devoted to explaining the difficulties Russell faced in providing a theory of judgement — a theory of what it is for someone to think that something is the case — and Wittgenstein's solution to those difficulties. Zalabardo first explains with careful scholarship and judicious quotation Russell's own shift from a 'dual-relation' theory — someone's thinking that something is the case is their being related to a proposition — to a 'multiple-relation' theory — Othello's thinking, for example, that Desdemona loves Cassio is Othello's being related to what might be thought of as the constituents of a proposition: Desdemona, Cassio, and love. Russell himself thought that the first theory produced unpalatable results when the proposition in question is false. The second theory was the target of the famous, though slightly obscure, objection of Wittgenstein's which led Russell to abandon his *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript.

As Zalabardo explains, Russell's best version of the 'multiple-relation' theory required the introduction of 'forms'. Russell's forms are supposed to be things which are added in thought to more familiar objects of judgement (in Othello's case, Desdemona, Cassio, and love) in order to show how those more familiar objects are combined (so that what Othello thinks is that Desdemona loves Cassio, rather than merely that Cassio loves Desdemona). Zalabardo explains carefully the nature of these Russellian forms: they are fully existentially generalized facts. He then explains Wittgenstein's response to Russell as involving a rejection of these Russellian forms, and the introduction of 'forms' of quite a different character. Whereas Russell had taken judgement to involve a relation between a subject (Othello, for example) and a represented complex (whose elements in this case are Desdemona, Cassio, and love), together with a form presenting the mode of combination of the elements of the represented complex, Zalabardo's Wittgenstein takes thought to involve two complexes — one representing and one represented — whose elements are entirely different, but whose mode of combination is the same. There is something immediately illuminating in this account: against the Russellian background, we can suddenly see that the idea that judgement involves a *picture* — a representation, with elements of its own — is both novel and well-motivated. But there is also something a little limiting in the conception of form which Zalabardo presents here. Zalabardo describes the pictorial form of a picturing fact as 'the way in which its constituents are actually combined' [p. 72]. But this seems not to have been Wittgenstein's own view at the time of the *Tractatus*: there he says, 'Let us call this connexion of its elements the *structure* of the picture, and let us

call the *possibility* of this structure the pictorial form of the picture' (*Tractatus*, 2.15; my emphasis). That is to say, by the time we get to the *Tractatus*, form is an essentially *modal* notion.

Wittgenstein's adoption of a modal conception of form seems to have been gradual, and he seems to have begun with a conception very like Russell's (though perhaps formed independently of, and in advance of Russell, as Zalabardo notes). Zalabardo's characterization of the steps in the transformation of Wittgenstein's notion of form is generally careful and well-illustrated. But it is significant that he doesn't make much of the final — and I think decisive — step to thinking of forms as essentially modal. I think this makes a serious difference to his presentation of Wittgenstein's argument for the claim that no picture can depict its own form (*Tractatus*, 2.172-2.174). Zalabardo's account is very clear in outline, and ingenious in its detailed exposition, but the argument could surely have been swifter if the modal nature of forms had been more clearly acknowledged; and it might have been easier to apply its conclusions with the kind of generality which Wittgenstein thought he could (with the ultimate goal of being able to dismiss all philosophy as nonsense). Zalabardo notes that his version of Wittgenstein's argument cannot be generalized so easily — though perhaps he has reasons of his own for being happy with that result (as will emerge later).

Further details of Zalabardo's exposition of Wittgenstein's account of form are ingenious and interesting: in particular, for example, his account of the difference between pictorial form in general and logical form in particular. It might have been nice to see an argument in favour of this account over alternatives, but there is much to learn from here.

In Chapter 3 Zalabardo presents Wittgenstein's dramatic response to the problem of explaining what it is for someone to think that something is the case: there is no such thing as someone thinking that something is the case. Zalabardo ingeniously presents this solution as the result of the argument which Wittgenstein presented against Russell's own 'multiple-relation' theory of judgement. This gives him a nicely precise reading of Wittgenstein's objection to Russell — the 'nonsense objection' — which Zalabardo is able to compare favourably with other interpretations in Appendix I.

Chapter 4 is concerned with Wittgenstein's solution to an issue which dogged all of Russell's attempts to provide a theory of judgement: the problem of the unity of the proposition. Zalabardo argues convincingly that Wittgenstein derived from Frege the view that the proposition is basic, and interpreted it in a particularly strong way: words are not, strictly speaking, components of sentences, but common characteristics

of sentences. This is something I have argued for myself, so not surprisingly I find it attractive. Zalabardo also extends this to the realm of facts and objects. This extension must be right, given that the form of sentences is the form of reality, but it remains bold and striking when explained explicitly.

The chapter continues with a development of the metaphysics and ontology of the *Tractatus*. A key part of this is the interpretation of the famous substance argument of 2.0211-2.0212. Zalabardo here rejects what he calls the ‘empty-name’ interpretation of this argument (and there is a whole appendix — Appendix II — elaborating the reasons for that rejection), and has abandoned the interpretation he previously proposed himself. Instead, he offers an interpretation according to which the key claim of the argument is this [p. 145]:

If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition p had sense would depend on the truth-value of a proposition asserting that the referents of the constituents of p can be combined into a state of affairs.

Again, since this is something I have previously argued myself, it obviously seems compelling to me. On the other hand, it seems to me again that the fact that Zalabardo doesn’t seem to bring out quite clearly enough the modality of the notion of form leads him to make slightly heavier weather than necessary of the move from that to the claim that if objects make up the substance of the world, they cannot be composite (*Tractatus*, 2.021). His interpretation of the substance argument is left incomplete in Chapter 4, only to be completed — interestingly and with nice precision — at the end of Chapter 5.

The rest of Chapter 5 is concerned with the limits of representation, which include Wittgenstein’s treatment of Russell’s Paradox and formal concepts, and attributes to Wittgenstein a view which Zalabardo calls *syntacticalism*: the view that the combinatorial properties of symbols are determined by the intrinsic properties of the symbols themselves, and not by any further stipulation, and not by what the symbols denote. Again, the detail throughout the chapter is always interesting and suggestive.

The final substantive chapter is concerned with Wittgenstein’s view of logical knowledge, which Zalabardo calls *epistemic formalism*: the view that ‘we can determine that a proposition is a logical consequence of a set of propositions on the basis of information provided by their structure’ [p. 191]. Zalabardo argues convincingly that this view gives Wittgenstein further reason for two key claims of the *Tractatus*: that ordinary

propositions can be analysed as truth-functional combinations of elementary propositions, and that objects are simple. In my view, this raises the question where Wittgenstein's epistemic formalism comes from. It seems to me to be a deep and significant feature of his whole approach to philosophical problems, and it pretty clearly does not come from Russell. Pressing this issue further might change one's conception of the kinds of influence which Wittgenstein was responding to, as well as one's conception of the character of the problems to which the *Tractatus* was supposed to be a solution: after all, Wittgenstein did say in the Preface, 'I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems', having previously told us 'The book deals with the problems of philosophy'.

Zalabardo's book has a slightly more cautious and more modern approach. The substantial chapters which I have described are framed by an Introduction and a Conclusion. A significant part of these is concerned with Zalabardo's interpretation of the point of the *Tractatus* as a whole. On his view, the ultimate goal of the *Tractatus* is to convince us that the whole enterprise of philosophy is illegitimate, but it aims to achieve that goal in two stages: first, by convincing us that the book provides the final and decisive solution to the problems of philosophy; and second, by convincing us that it follows from the solution which the book provides that the propositions of philosophy are nonsense. Zalabardo himself thinks we can only get some of the way through the first of these stages. He therefore hopes to have shown that 'on each of the problems that it is meant to address, [the *Tractatus*] makes powerful and appealing proposals, which may provide fundamental ingredients of satisfactory solutions to these problems' [p. 232].

I am not quite as happy with this progressive conception of philosophy as Zalabardo is, and I am perhaps a little more pessimistic about the strength of the proposals to be found in the *Tractatus*. But Zalabardo's book certainly provides us with a whole set of insights into the problems which Wittgenstein was addressing, and constantly interesting interpretations of the solutions he provided.

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