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The Tractatus and the first person

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*The Tractatus and the First Person**Maria van der Schaar***7.1 Introduction¹**

When reading Wittgenstein's 1913 'Notes on Logic' and the 1914 'Notes Dictated to Moore', one can see that many of his ideas came early to him. There are, though, some important differences between these notes and the *Tractatus*; the most striking one is that there is no mention of the philosophical I in these early writings. Wittgenstein introduces the idea in the *Notebooks*, in a note dated 23 May 2015: '*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*' (Wittgenstein 1979: 49). Why does Wittgenstein introduce here the first-person indexical? And is this really the first occurrence in his writings that is philosophically relevant? Is there perhaps a relation with a letter to Russell from the day before? When Russell had written that he could not understand Moore's notes, Wittgenstein answers:

And now I'm afraid that what I've written recently will be still more incomprehensible, and if I do not live to see the end of this war I must be prepared for all my work to go for nothing. ... The problems are becoming more and more lapidary and general and the method has changed drastically (die Methode hat sich durchgreifend geändert). (Letter from 22.5.1915, McGuinness and von Wright 1995: 101–2)

In what sense has Wittgenstein's method changed thoroughly since the notes from 1913 and 1914? It seems that the *Notebooks* note dated 23 May 1915 gives a glimpse of the new method, namely when Wittgenstein imagines having written a book *The World as I Found It*. As I will explain in this chapter, Wittgenstein's new method is throughout

¹ I thank Colin Johnston for comments on a first version of this chapter, and Oskari Kuusela for a stimulating discussion after the presentation of this material at the *Heytingday 2022* in Amsterdam, Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences (KNAW).

first-personal and thereby departs from his early often more Russellian approach to philosophical questions.

If the first person plays a fundamental role in Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical issues, there seems to be a danger of psychologism. As Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus*: 'Does not my study of sign-language correspond to the study of thought processes which philosophers held to be so essential to the philosophy of logic? Only they got entangled for the most part in unessential psychological investigations, and there is an analogous danger for my method' (4.1121).² How are we to prevent a psychologistic reading when we take a first-person methodology to be crucial to the *Tractatus*? When Wittgenstein turns to his *Notebooks* again in 1916, the transcendental reflections start soon. This might be seen as an answer to the threat of psychologism. Such reflections do play a role in the *Tractatus*, but precisely regarding the transcendental ego and the correlated *a priori*, there are crucial differences between Kant and Wittgenstein. These differences, in combination with a first-person method, may lead to solipsism. How is Wittgenstein to overcome psychologism, on the one hand, and transcendental idealism and solipsism, on the other?

In the next section, Wittgenstein's development towards the *Tractatus* will be described as a development towards a first-person methodology. Questions concerning language, logic, and ethics have to be addressed as a first person, from the inside. This first-person method demands something of the reader, too: one should be involved as a first person; one should *do* something as a philosopher when reading the *Tractatus*. In the third section, the question is raised, what the role of the first-person indexical is in remarks such as 'We make ourselves pictures of facts' (2.1); 'we use the sensibly perceptible sign . . . of the *Satz* as a projection of the possible state of affairs' (3.11); 'we cannot think anything illogical' (3.03); and 'The *Satz* is a model of reality as we think it is' (4.01). Are these remarks compatible with Wittgenstein's idea that no judging subject is needed in logic, and that logic is to take care of itself? Is the use of the first-person indexical in these passages accidental, or is there an essential role for the first person in logic and language? Do these passages not bring in mental acts as empirical phenomena and an empirical subject, and would this not imply a form of psychologism? In the fourth section, the question is raised of how we are to understand the first person, indicated in such passages. Can we identify it with the transcendental ego, or with the subject of

² I use the Ogden and Ramsey translation (Wittgenstein 1922), making small changes where appropriate.

solipsism? And how do Wittgenstein's remarks on the philosophical I in the 5.6s relate to the general first-person methodology? Finally, in the concluding section, I will note how the idea of a first-person methodology also may help us in understanding Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics and internal relations.

7.2 The Beginnings of a First-Person Methodology

In the 1913 'Notes on Logic', Wittgenstein directly engages with issues raised by the work of Russell, his tutor at the time. Writing in English, Wittgenstein uses the term 'proposition' for a linguistic entity, to be called the *Satz* in the *Tractatus*. He thus departs from Russell, for whom a proposition is a non-linguistic abstract meaning. In order to make it possible to connect the topic to the *Tractatus*, and to prevent confusion with propositions in the modern, Russellian sense, I will use the term 'sentence' instead of 'proposition'.³ Sentences, for Wittgenstein, are not names of truth-values, as Frege thought, nor are they names of complexes, as Russell sometimes suggests. Sentences are essentially different from names, for they are themselves facts; they are structured. Sentences in the strict sense have two poles: they can be true, and they can be false (Potter 2009b: B23); they are bipolar, having thus a different relation to the world than names. In logic, assertion is irrelevant: 'There are only unasserted propositions. Assertion is merely psychological' (Potter 2009b: C40; cf. C45). This means that 'The assertion-sign is logically quite without significance' (Potter 2009b: B32).⁴ By excluding the assertion sign from logic, Wittgenstein defends a more radical form of anti-psychologism than we find in Russell or Frege.

Influenced by Frege, Russell had introduced the assertion sign in the logic of *Principia Mathematica* (1910) to indicate that the authors assert something (Whitehead and Russell 1910: 8–9). Being a science, logic makes assertions about the world, thereby expressing the most universal laws holding of objects, properties and relations in the world. On this conception of logic, shared by Frege and Russell, logic has content, and, as

³ Alas, 'sentence' is weaker than the German 'Satz', think of 'Grundsatz' and 'Lehrsatz', where 'Satz' cannot be translated as 'sentence'. As the sentence here is to be true or false, it is the sentence together with its meaning; not the mere sentence as sign.

⁴ I follow Michael Potter's convenient numbering system of his edition of the 'Notes on Logic'. The B notes are probably a translation by Russell of notes dictated in Birmingham. The C notes, the Cambridge notes, can be read as a reformulation of or a comment on the B notes by Wittgenstein; apparently, Wittgenstein dictated them directly in English. See Potter (2009b: Appendix A).

Frege acknowledges in his mature writings, it has a special subject-matter, the logical functions referred to by the logical constants, such as negation and implication, and it has its own concepts, such as subsumption and subordination of concepts (Frege 1906: 428).

Already in the 1913 Notes, Wittgenstein realised that logic ‘cannot treat [of] a special set of things’ (Potter 2009b: C9; cf. C15). As he writes to Russell (Letter 22.6.1912, McGuinness and von Wright 1995: 15), ‘Logic must turn out to be of a *totally* different kind than any other science.’ And this likewise holds for philosophy: ‘The word “philosophy” ought always to designate something over or under, but not beside, the natural sciences’ (Potter 2009b: B67). ‘Philosophy consists of logic and metaphysics: logic is its basis’ (Potter 2009b: B61); ‘Philosophy can neither confirm nor confute scientific investigation’ (Potter 2009b: B60). In a certain sense, these passages could still be read as expressing a Fregean understanding of logic and philosophy. For Frege, logic is a foundational science on which all other sciences, including metaphysics and psychology, are founded (Frege 1893: xix).⁵ The fact that Wittgenstein realises that logic has no special subject-matter and that assertions are irrelevant to logic will mean, though, that his method must also be very different from Frege’s. Although it is true that a first-person engagement is essential to Frege’s Begriffsschrift – this is precisely what the judgement stroke indicates (van der Schaar 2018), the *Tractatus* asks for a deeper engagement. Whereas a first-person engagement in Frege’s Begriffsschrift is conditional on our aiming to know the laws of logic, the *Tractatus* demands an unconditional engagement of its reader as thinking agent.

In this section, I do not aim to make a comparison between Frege and Wittgenstein. It is the relation with Russell that is more apparent in the 1913 Notes. Although the influence is strong, Wittgenstein is already critical of Russell’s conception of logic in 1912, and his conception of philosophy in 1913. In 1915 he criticises Russell’s general method in philosophy more explicitly: ‘Russell’s method in his ‘Scientific method in philosophy’ is simply a retrogression from the method of physics.’⁶ In 1914, Russell aims for a scientific method in philosophy, providing logical constructions of matter and the physical world. He combines a logical with an empirical approach to philosophical questions, where both are understood to be part of a scientific method.

⁵ English translation: Frege (2013).

⁶ (Wittgenstein 1979: 44). Perhaps Wittgenstein is referring to *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, where Russell advocates a ‘logical-analytic method of scientific philosophy’ (Russell 1914: 72), or to ‘On Scientific Method in Philosophy,’ Herbert Spencer lecture delivered at Oxford, 18 November 1914 and published by the Clarendon Press as a pamphlet the same year, later to be published in *Mysticism and Logic* (Russell 1918a).

This approach is used by Russell in his multiple relation theory of judgement that Wittgenstein was at least familiar with through *The Problems of Philosophy* (Russell 1912). During the time that Wittgenstein was preparing his thoughts for the 1913 Notes, Russell was working on a new variant of the multiple relation theory of judgement. Probably, Russell discussed this version with Wittgenstein. Essential to all variants of the multiple relation theory of judgement is that it is a non-propositional account of judgement and that the question of judgement is approached by means of an analysis of judgement- or belief-attribution: how is one to analyse ‘Othello judges that Desdemona loves Cassio’? In 1913, Russell gives the following analysis of judgement: $J(S, F, x_1, x_2, \dots x_n)$ (Russell 1984: 144), where J is a predicate standing for the relation of judging, S has to be substituted by a name for the judging subject, and F has to be substituted by a name for the logical form of what is judged. For Othello’s judgement we get: $J(o, R(x,y), d, l, c)$, where $R(x,y)$ represents the logical form of what is judged by Othello, o , d , and c stand for, respectively, Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, and l stands for loving as non-relating relation. The reasons why Russell has given this analysis are well-known.⁷ Let me therefore directly focus on Russell’s method, the way the question of judgement is addressed. Russell approaches the question from the outside; he addresses the question of what it is for *someone else* to make a judgement or to have a belief. He sees judgement as an empirical phenomenon in the world, preferring the term ‘belief’ to ‘judgement’, as the former denotes more clearly a ‘particular dated event which may be studied empirically by psychology’ (Russell 1984: 136).

For Russell, judging, like acquaintance, is an empirical relation in the world to be denoted by a predicate, J , while the judging subject is to be one of the related terms. The judging subject is thus an empirical object among others that can be given a name. Strictly speaking, we have to be acquainted with all the terms (objects, terms of a relation) of the analysed judgement, and this means that the name for Othello has to be changed to a definite description. For Russell, the only logically proper name that we could use here is the first-person indexical as standing for one’s own mind. This does not change any of the methodological points, though, for one’s own mind is likewise considered as a term of the empirical relation of judging. Russell’s outsider’s approach to the question of judgement holds as much for the analysis of Othello’s judgement as for the analysis of one’s own judgement. The problem with Russell’s analysis of judgement is that

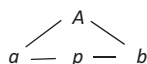
⁷ A more extensive treatment of Russell’s theories of judgement I give in (Van der Schaar, forthcoming).

it takes belief-attribution as starting point, while neglecting what it is for a first person to make a judgement by means of an utterance of the declarative 'Desdemona loves Cassio'.

For Wittgenstein's 1913 Notes, Russell's propositional account of judgement in 1904 is also relevant. Around 1904, Russell understands judgement and belief as attitudes towards propositions (Russell 1904: 523). What is common to the early and later analyses of judgement is that on both accounts judgement is understood as an empirical relation between a judging subject and a complex object, or several objects. In both cases, judgement can be represented by a predicate, and the judging subject is among the objects in the world to which a name can be given.

For Russell, judgement and acquaintance are external relations. Russell follows G.E. Moore's (logical) realism, in which the object of knowledge and thought is taken to be independent of the act of judging and thinking. As Peter Hylton puts it in his presentation of the views of the early Moore: 'An internal relation is one that is in some way essential to, or constitutive of, the identity of the objects related' (Hylton 1990: 121). For both Moore and Russell, the object of thinking, judging, or being acquainted is independent of being thought or judged by a subject. This thesis opposes the Bradleian idea that subject and object of thought can be understood only as part of a unified whole and that we cannot get hold on the object in abstraction from its relation to thought. Wittgenstein's thesis in the *Notebooks* of the logical identity of sign and signified relates to this issue (note dated 4.9.14). Later, he will refer to this as there being an internal relation between name and object named.

In the 1913 Notes, Wittgenstein makes, like Russell, a distinction between propositional attitudes, such as judgement, question, and command, and the 'unasserted proposition': 'Judgment, question and command are all on the same level. What interests logic in them is only the unasserted proposition' (Potter 2009b: C45; cf. B68). It thus seems that for Wittgenstein, too, judging is an empirical, external relation between a subject and an object; the proposition is independent of whether it is judged or not. For Wittgenstein, though, judgement is not a two-term relation between a subject and a sentence ('proposition'), but a four-term relation between a subject, a sentence, and its two poles, as we can see in the picture taken from Potter (2009b: B55):



In the picture, the bipolarity, called *a* and *b*, that is, the proposition's being true or false, is not internal to the proposition; the picture suggests that we can think of a proposition *p* without its bipolarity. The analysis in the picture further shows that the judging subject can be given a name, '*A*', and that judgement is understood as an external relation. For the terms of the relation are given independently of the relation of judging. Like Russell, Wittgenstein thus gives an analysis of judgement from an outsider's point of view without asking what it is for a first person to make a judgement, what judgement is for oneself.

It is to be doubted, though, whether a picture can give an accurate presentation of '*A* judges *p*' on the account presented in the Notes. The judging relation between *A* and the sentence seems to be unique, for the sentence has sense; it has direction. In the Cambridge Notes, Wittgenstein implies that judging is *analogous* to a relation (Potter 2009b: C15). The subject *A* is related to both poles of the sentence, but this 'is obviously not a relation in the ordinary sense' (Potter 2009b: C41). If the sentence is one of the terms of the relation of judging, it seems nothing but a name, but this does not fit in with Wittgenstein's stress on the distinction between names and sentences. 'When we say "*A* believes *p*," this sounds, it is true, as if here we could substitute a proper name for "*p*"' (Potter 2009b: B55), but this cannot be right. The *p* has to be a place-holder, not for that-clauses but for complete sentences including the verb. We have to mention a whole sentence judged by *A* (Potter 2009b: C29), *with* its declarative form, like 'this rose is red'.

There is one moment in the 1913 Notes when Wittgenstein seems to realise that the question of judgement is not to be addressed the Russellian way:

Every right theory of judgment must make it impossible for me to judge that this table penholders the book. Russell's theory does not satisfy this requirement. (Potter 2009b: B33)

If one gives an analysis of '*A* judges that *p*', the *p* has to be a sentence *for me* who is attributing the belief. Without this step, no full account of judgement can be given, and the nonsense objection cannot be warded off. Wittgenstein starts to realise that the question of judgement has to be addressed, not as a question regarding belief-attribution but as a question that has to be formulated in terms of the first-person indexical: what is it for me, as a first person, to make a judgement by means of an occurrence of the declarative sentence *p*? The judging agent as a first person cannot be referred to, because it is not a part of the empirical world; a first person's

judgement is not a state of affairs with objects that can be named and stand in external relations to other objects. The first person is not external but internal to the act of judging and thinking; the act of judging is not an external relation between a subject and an object that have an identity independent of judgement and thought. In Norway, 1914, Wittgenstein explicitly uses the first-person indexical:

The relation of 'I believe p' to 'p' can be compared to the relation of "p" says (besagt) p' to p: it is just as impossible that *I* should be a simple as that 'p' should be. (Wittgenstein 1979: 119)

Any suggestions that 'I' could be used as a referring term have disappeared in the analysis. Wittgenstein now realises that no name is needed for the judging subject. The 'p' in the analysis indicates that it is *direct* rather than indirect speech that we have to turn to in the first place.

By 22 May 1915, when he writes to Russell that his method has changed thoroughly, Wittgenstein may have come to realise that we need a first-person approach not only regarding the question of judgement but in all philosophical questions that concern logic, language, and metaphysics. In the *Notebooks* note from 23 May 1915, we see that the philosophical question concerning the limits of language has become a question that concerns 'my language' and 'my world'. In the same note, Wittgenstein introduces an important aspect of his new method in the *Notebooks*:

In the book 'The World [as] I found [it]' I should also have to report on my body and say which members are subject to my will, etc. For this is a method of isolating the subject, or rather of shewing that in an important sense there is no such thing as the subject; for it would be the one thing that could *not* come into this book.⁸

One imagines oneself to be writing down this book, and this first-person method makes any talk about the subject meaningless. Of course, Wittgenstein has to make use of the term 'subject', but this does not imply that the term has a meaning: '[Because] a way of speaking is nonsensical, it is still possible to go on using it'.⁹

⁸ (Wittgenstein 1979: 50, emphasis in the original). The original translation uses 'a way of' instead of 'a method'. I prefer the latter, because the German has: 'eine Methode'.

⁹ (Wittgenstein 1979: 50). The translation gives 'a bit of language' instead of 'a way of speaking', which is less apt, because this 'bit of language' cannot be a part of language. The German has 'Deswegen, weil eine Redeweise unsinnig ist, kann man sie noch immer gebrauchen'. Wittgenstein writes this just above the passage on the imagined book and the subject.

On 29 May, the same year, Wittgenstein asks: ‘But is *language* (“die *Sprache*”) the *only* language?’ (Wittgenstein 1979: 52). ‘Why should there not be a mode of expression through which I can talk *about* language? . . . I myself only write *sentences* down here. And why? *How* is language unique?’ There is only one language, the language that one uses and understands, the language one cannot go beyond, ‘my language’, the language of the first person (cf. 5.62). There is no other language in which one could formulate philosophical questions; there is no other language in which one could talk about one’s language; there is just the language that one uses and understands. Philosophical questions concerning language and thought and its limit have to be asked from the inside (cf. 4.114), by a first person, who is already using the language. The limits of *my* language are the limits of *language*.

Instead of a spectator’s point of view, we need an agent’s point of view when we are involved in philosophical issues, as Peter Winch put it in relation to Wittgenstein’s ethics (Winch 1972: 211). These are not two different points of view on an equal level, though, that one can change at liberty; one cannot step out of the agent’s ‘point of view’, as it is not a point of view but an engagement of oneself as a first person, the agent, when addressing philosophical problems. A spectator describes empirical facts, but in philosophy we do not describe anything; there are no philosophical facts, as though they could be studied from the outside.

7.3 The *Tractatus*: The First-Person Method and the Problem of Psychologism

As we have seen earlier, the analysis of judgement plays an important role in the development towards a first-person method. What is Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell’s account of judgement in the *Tractatus*? When Russell addresses the problem of judgement in the writings that Wittgenstein was familiar with, we see that the idea of a judging subject plays an essential role. In his early account of judgement, Russell understands judgement as an external relation between a subject and an objective proposition consisting of elements of the world. In this sense, judgement is a relation in the world on a par with other relations. The subject and the proposition are independent of the relation of judging. Furthermore, for Russell, judgement is an empirical relation, and this means that the judging subject is an empirical subject in the world. It is this theory that Wittgenstein criticises in 5.541: ‘Here it appears superficially as if the proposition *p* stood to the object *A* in a kind of relation.’ A similar criticism applies to

Russell's multiple relation theory of judgement, mentioned in 5.5422. As we have seen, this theory gives an analysis of judgement by taking belief-attribution to be paradigmatic. On this account, judging is likewise understood as an external, empirical relation, though in this case a multiple relation between the judging subject, Othello, in the example, and the objects Desdemona, Cassio, loving as term and the logical form. Judgement is an external relation in the empirical world, relating an empirical subject to such objects.

In 5.541–5.5422 Wittgenstein is not giving his own account of judgement but rather aims to show what is wrong with the analysis of judgement, as proposed by Russell. He also gives his own analysis of belief-attribution, in concise terms, as I do not think belief-attribution is a central issue for him. The point from the 'Notes on Logic' is repeated: the p that stands on the right side of 'judges' in 'A judges p ' is a sentence, not a name. This means that what is on the left side of 'judges' cannot be a name either; 'A' as a name has to disappear in the analysis, for what is on the left side needs to have the same complexity as p . What is logically relevant in 'A believes that p ', 'A thinks that p ', and 'A says p ' is nothing but " p " says p '. The idea of an empirical subject disappears from the analysis, and what is expressed is a correlation of a picture-fact and the fact that p through a correlation of their elements. In the Othello case, the first ' p ' describes a picture-fact in Othello, and this picture-fact is said to be projected on a fact, in this case a negative fact, the non-being of the state of affairs that Desdemona loves Cassio (cf. 2.06; see also Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1922: 20)). The latter fact is described by the second p , while all p 's in the sentence " p " says p ' are in the *attributor's* language.

The language used in the proposed analysis is thus the language of the agent who is attributing a belief to A. In the analysis, 'Desdemona loves Cassio' on the right side of 'says' has to be a sentence for the one who attributes the belief, and nonsense is thereby excluded. The analysis of 'A judges p ' may thus bring the reader of the *Tractatus* from a focus on A to which belief is attributed, to the one who does the attributing, who is *using* the language, the first person. Together with one's understanding that the idea of an empirical subject is irrelevant to a philosophical analysis of judgement, the passage can thus be understood not only as providing insight into Wittgenstein's first-person method but also as a preparation for the 5.6s on the philosophical I.

Why does the insight that the sentence p has to be a sentence for the attributor guarantee that nonsense judgements are excluded? To answer

this question, we have to turn to the 3.05 on the thought ('der Gedanke'), for sentences are a special kind of thought, a thought 'expressed perceptibly through the senses' (3.1). After *the thought* has been introduced as the logical picture of the facts in TLP 3, we can find what James Griffin has called 'Wittgenstein's own theory of judgement' (Griffin 1964: 112). And this *is* a central issue in the *Tractatus*. Before one can give an account of belief-attribution, as in the 5.54s, one first has to understand what it is for oneself, as a first person, to judge and think. We have to understand that '[w]e cannot think anything illogical, for otherwise we should have to think illogically' (3.03). Judging nonsense is excluded, because it is not in our capacity to think that way. There is no way to construct a sentence illogically (3.031, 3.032), for the names in the sentence come with their possibility of being combined with other names in sentences; there is thus no way to combine them the wrong way. As the names are internally related to the objects as their *Bedeutung*, these objects come with the same possibilities of combination, as will be explained more fully later in the chapter. In this way, the sentence as a connection of names is a picture of a possible state of affairs. A judgement or thought, being not essentially different from a sentence, thus 'contains the possibility of the situation which it thinks. What is thinkable is also possible' (3.02).

How is the 'we' to be understood as it occurs in 3.03, as well as in other passages where the first-person indexical seems to be philosophically relevant? An early passage in the *Notebooks* gives: 'By my correlating the components of the picture with objects, it comes to represent a situation and to be right or wrong' (26 November 1914, Wittgenstein 1979: 33–34, emphasis in the original). If my correlating would be understood as a mental act, a psychic fact in the empirical world, it could be investigated by psychology, but it would have no philosophical relevance. The remark is not repeated in the *Tractatus*. We have to be careful when using remarks from the *Notebooks* to understand the *Tractatus*, especially if they have an early date. The way this remark is formulated makes one think that names and objects are given independently of each other, which would then have to be related by an external, empirical act of the mind. The objects in the *Tractatus*, though, are the result of analysis, not starting points. Its equivalent in the *Tractatus*, 2.1513–2.1515, shows that we can only speak of a picturing relation as correlation of elements and the things they stand for *within* a picture. Mental acts, as external relations in the world, would never be able to make such a connection. If we abstract from conventional differences and consider a name purely as a name of this object, there is an internal relation between name and object; we cannot understand what a

name is without bringing in the object to which it is correlated (3.34–3.3411). It is not that we first start with correlating names with objects, for these names have only a role in the sentences as we use them. Given that we use a certain sentence, that the sentence is significant, the names are already correlated with objects. It is the significant use within a sentence that gives the sign a meaning. The significant sentence, the thought, is thus an applied sentence, a sentence in use (3.5, 4). When Wittgenstein writes in the 4s that a sentence *says* something, he is speaking of the significant sentence, the sentence in use (4.022, 4.21). This means that the object named is the name's contribution to the sentence, not to be understood as a complex name but as expressing a certain truth-condition, as having bipolarity. When we see that a name is essentially a name as part of a sentence and that a sentence is essentially a sentence in use, we understand that the first person is internal to the sentence, just as it is internal to judging and thinking.

According to the context principle, the meaning of names can only be understood insofar as they have a role in a sentence (3.3). This explains that names and objects come with the same possibilities to enter certain structures, respectively, in sentences and in the corresponding possible situations. The accidental features of names can be explained in terms of conventions, that is, in psychological terms, and we can now see that these are irrelevant to the philosophical question of how names can stand for something. As in Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic* (Frege 1980a), there is in the *Tractatus* a relation between the principle that the psychological is to be sharply separated from the logical, and the context principle: 'If the second principle [the context principle] is not observed, one is almost forced to take as the meanings of words mental pictures or acts of the individual mind, and so to offend against the first principle as well' (Frege 1980a: x). On Wittgenstein's account, if the context principle is not observed, one understands names and objects named to be given independently of each other. Name and object would then have to be related psychologically in order for the name to be the name of this object.

We can go back now to occurrences of 'we', as in 3.03 and 2.1: 'We make ourselves pictures of facts.'¹⁰ The 'we' is to indicate any thinking agent, any user of language. First-person *plural*, for at this point

¹⁰ The *Prototractatus* has less emphasis on the first-person plural: 'Die Tatsachen begreifen wir in Bildern' (Wittgenstein 1971: 2.1). The order in the *Tractatus* is the same order as in Herz's corresponding sentence: 'Wir machen uns innere Scheinbilder oder Symbole der äusseren Gegenstände' (Hertz 1894: 1).

Wittgenstein has not introduced yet the distinction between arbitrary, conventional aspects, and essential aspects of signs. If we then come to the 5.6s, we know that the philosopher can abstract from conventional differences, that part of language that relates to a community. Only the language used by the first-person singular, one's own language, is relevant to the philosopher. If one understands one's language, one understands language, the essence of language, and thereby one understands the limits of thought. The idea of the first person was there right from the beginning. It is most clearly put forward in 2.1, but it is already there in 2.0121, in the remark that we cannot think of an object without its possibilities to connect with others.

There is thus no need to mention mental acts or judging subjects in the analysis of a first person's judgement, or in the analysis of what we can say, think, and judge. Russell addresses the question of judgement, and philosophical questions in general as a spectator, as an outsider, as though he is dealing with an empirical question, but there is no such position for the philosopher, on Wittgenstein's account. We now see that philosophy is very different from the sciences, because of its first-person methodology. This still leaves us with the question of how to understand the first person in the *Tractatus*.

7.4 The First Person in the *Tractatus*: Solipsism and the Transcendental

The first person is finally thematised in the 5.6s, which start with the remark that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world that is crucial to understanding Wittgenstein's struggle with solipsism, as we will see later. By using the first-person method of imagining a book *The World as I Found It* (5.631), it becomes clear that the I cannot be found in this world. Neither is it anything besides the world (5.6331), perhaps as a kind of world-soul, in which different subjects could participate, as was suggested by Brian McGuinness (McGuinness 2002a: 138), for there is nothing beyond the world. It is true that 'die Weltseele' is mentioned in the *Notebooks* (23.5.15 (Wittgenstein 1979: 49)), but in the *Tractatus* this does not come back. The idea of a first person excludes the idea of different subjects, subjects that one would be able to count. We have seen that the attribution of thoughts to others, to humans, lions, and trees, is nothing but the acknowledgement of picture-facts in the world. The idea of a world-soul may have been a temptation for Wittgenstein when writing in his notebooks, but there is no place for it in the *Tractatus*. As the I is

essentially first-personal, it is not the case that the world can be identified with 'the neutral, intersubjective states of affairs', as Marie McGinn (2006: 276–77) has proposed, in line with McGuinness. This is not to say that states of affairs are subjective, for the idea of a first person does not bring in a point of view, nor any specific characteristics that would allow us to make a distinction between different subjects. The first person in its purified form, the moment it reaches full understanding, is impersonal. There is simply no difference to make here. One's path towards this, the path of the reader, engaged in freeing oneself of philosophical demons, is unique, though, depending on the demons one has to struggle with.

Transcendental idealism seems to be one of the demons in the *Tractatus*. There is no doubt that there is a Kantian and Neo-Kantian background to Wittgenstein's thoughts, given the cultural background in the German-speaking world at the time, and elements of (Neo-) Kantianism in Frege's writings. Kant's anti-psychologism and his thesis of the priority of judgement over concepts were important strands of Neo-Kantianism. In some respects, Neo-Kantianism seems to be the stronger influence on the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's view on Newtonian mechanics is typically Neo-Kantian (6.34–6.341), and there is in the *Tractatus* no distinction between appearances and things in themselves; we cannot imagine anything beyond logical space. There are, though, important differences between Wittgenstein and the Neo-Kantians. In the first place, we have to realise that the question of validity of knowledge that has been central to Neo-Kantianism is absent from the *Tractatus*. The Neo-Kantian ideas of truth and knowledge as a value that Wittgenstein must have known through Frege's writings, are absent from the *Tractatus*. The more Kantian idea that subject and world form a unity that Wittgenstein was familiar with through Schopenhauer's writings, plays an important role in the *Tractatus*, but the importance of language gives a modification to it. In the *Tractatus*, language and world are internally related; language and world are a unity. The question thus arises: what is left of the subject, the I, for whom this is a unity? Not that much, as we will see.

Turning now to the more strictly Kantian views, there is no doubt that a transcendental question plays a role in the *Tractatus*. Given that there is language through which something is said about the world, what are its necessary conditions? Identity of logical form in the picture and what is pictured seem to play a central role in the answer. The problem, though, is that there is no way in which we could say something about logical form, given that it is a necessary condition for any language. There are thus no truths with content that we could determine as *a priori* conditions for the

possibility of language. This means that the Kantian idea of philosophy as critique pointing out the limits of knowledge cannot be straightforwardly applied to a question of the limits of what we can say or think. All we can do is understand each sentence as the result of an *a priori* construction from elementary sentences; each construction we thus can foresee by means of the formal operations that we can apply to the elementary sentences (5.556). And we thus understand that there is no way in which this could go wrong. Equally, each elementary sentence already says something, as it consists of names that already come with their possibilities of combination. These two ways of constructing sentences determine the limit of what we can think from the inside. No judgemental form of unity is needed to bring any elements into a certain order to allow for judgement; formal logic already provides for that. All judgements, all sentences, have the same judgemental form that comes in when the names are connected in a chain: *Es verhält sich so und so*; so and so is the case (4.5; Wittgenstein 1973: 30). Given that names already contain their possibility of combination in sentences, there is no way in which names could be combined the wrong way, as we have seen in the previous section. And, as these names are internally related to the objects they name, and these objects thus come with corresponding possibilities of combination in states of affairs, what can be expressed in language coincides with the realm of logical space. The result of this transcendental approach to the question of language is that logic essentially applies to the world and that the Kantian distinction between formal and transcendental logic collapses (KrV: A57).¹¹ For Wittgenstein, formal logic *is* transcendental.

The *a priori* structure of the world is thus a purely formal one. There is no possibility of knowing this *a priori* structure, for it has no content. There is thus no possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgements; there is no extension of knowledge regarding the *a priori*. As Peter Sullivan has noted, this idea of a purely formal *a priori* has consequences for the way the ego is to be understood, for it means that the I has no substantial role to play: 'emptiness and formality go together' (Sullivan 1996: 211). Because logic is purely formal, and transcendental logic coincides with formal logic, the ego is empty. There is thus no question of how subjective conditions of thought could have objective validity (KrV: A90), and no transcendental deduction is thus needed.¹²

¹¹ I use KrV to refer to Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Kant 1998).

¹² The third section of Hao Tang's 2011 paper is illuminating on this point (Tang 2011).

This leaves us with the final question of whether the first person, the I in the *Tractatus* can be identified with the transcendental subject, the I in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Kant, the *I think* is a transcendental notion (KrV: A341). This notion, or judgement, the *I think*, accompanies all our judgements. As Kant makes clear, nothing can be said about the I, about the transcendental subject, for as soon as we make a judgement about it, we would already make use of the ego (KrV: A346). The I in the *Critique of Pure Reason* thus seems to be as empty as the I in the *Tractatus*. I do think, though, that there is an important difference here between Kant and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is not in need of the same *I think* that accompanies all one's thinking and judging; there is for him no question of the unity of self-consciousness, from which the unity of thought arises. As we have seen, my language is the language, and this identification can also be read from right to left: the language is my language. There is no way in which thoughts as significant sentences could not be mine; no story is needed to account for 'the unity of the contents of one's thoughts, and *thereby* of oneself as the agent of that unity'.¹³ For those less familiar with Kant's writings, a similar contrast can be made between Wittgenstein and Frege. The judgement stroke in front of the different sentences in a Begriffsschrift is without content, and so far there is an agreement between the three philosophers. But when we take the Fregean *Begriffsschriftsätze*, including the judgement stroke, together, we may see that the presence of the judgement stroke in these cases points to a unity of the judgements made that is not needed in the *Tractatus*. It is thus possible for Frege to give different variants of a Begriffsschrift with somewhat different axioms as concept-script assertions, as we can see when we compare the Begriffsschrift from 1879 with the one presented in the *Grundgesetze*, a distinction that does not get hold on the *Tractatus*.

If, then, the ego is just me, this may bring in a form of metaphysical solipsism, probably the strongest temptation for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (5.62, 5.63): 'I am my world' and 'the world is my world' (5.641). Because the limit of my language is the limit of language, the limit of my world is the limit of the world. Thus, I am the world. As David Bell has pointed out, the identity 'I am the world' can be read in two ways. From right to left, it means that the world reduces to the I. This is metaphysical solipsism: the world is nothing but what appears to me; the world thus reduces to the metaphysical subject. In the *Tractatus*, one has to read it, though, from left to right: 'it is the I who disappears' (Bell 1996:

¹³ (Longuenesse 2017: 81); I substituted 'one's' for 'her', and 'oneself' for 'herself' for stylistic reasons.

161); cf. Sullivan (2013: 265). Wittgenstein's is a 'self-effacing solipsism'. It is thus that 'solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism' (5.64; 5.631–5.64).

The 'I' we use when speaking of the first person cannot be used as a referring expression, for there is no such object in the world that could be named. Together with the thesis that the 'I' has no substantial content, this seems to leave us empty-handed. This is true, but it also means that we have to look for the first person elsewhere. Overcoming the division of I and world, and the submission of oneself to the world has important consequences for the question of how to live. One way of understanding this is to relate the *Tractatus* to the author, to Wittgenstein himself. As Gottfried Gabriel puts it, solipsism is 'the *Leitmotif* in Wittgenstein's life and philosophy' (Gabriel 2017: title). Gabriel is right that Wittgenstein's struggle with solipsism is visible on the pages of the *Tractatus*. Diamond's thesis that the reader is to understand not the propositions but the author of the *Tractatus* (Diamond 2000b: 155) has a strong focus on the author, too. When we read the 'I' as the author, though, we also miss something. As Amos Oz writes, it is not the distance between what is written and the author that needs to be ploughed but the distance between what is written and you. You, reader, have to imagine to be in Raskolnikov's place (Oz 2003: Ch. 5).¹⁴ The I is both the author and the reader.¹⁵ The idea that philosophy demands a first-person methodology shows itself in the identification of the first person with you as a reader.

7.5 Conclusion: The First-Person Method in the *Tractatus*

We have seen that a first-person methodology is essential in order to understand judgement, thought, and the question of the limit of what we can think. To what extent can the method be noted elsewhere in the *Tractatus*? As we have seen earlier, internal relations play a role in the account of names and sentences and their meaning: there is an internal

¹⁴ The chapter is deleted from the English edition (Oz 2017).

¹⁵ Cora Diamond and James Conant have also drawn attention to the role of the reader with respect to the *Tractatus*, see for example Diamond (2000b: 164, 165) and Conant (2011: 628). Compare also the work of Kremer (2004). The students at the seminar *Thought and the Limits of Language*, Leiden 2022, have pointed to a problem with Diamond's understanding of the role of the reader. As the reader has to approach the sentences of the *Tractatus* in a make-believe way (Diamond 2000b: 169), it seems that the reader's method is a psychological one. In the end, though, I think that Diamond acknowledges the reader as a first person, as she takes the aim of the *Tractatus* to be a reader's self-understanding (Diamond 2000b: 161).

relation between name and object, and between a picture and the possible state of affairs it pictures, abstracting from conventional differences between languages. They also play a crucial role in logic. A standard account of internal relations does not seem to involve the idea of a first person. In 5.131, Wittgenstein understands the relation of logical consequence (*folgen*) as internal. As he explains, these relations ‘exist as soon as, and by the very fact that, the sentences exist’. This explanation conforms to the one that may have come to him through Moore, the one we noted in Section 7.2: an internal relation is constitutive of the identity of the objects related. When Wittgenstein gives an account of internal relations for the first time, he puts it, though, in a different way: ‘A property is internal if it is unthinkable that its object does not possess it.’ And, if two objects stand in an internal relation, ‘[i]t is unthinkable that *these* two objects should not stand in this relation’ (4.123). This already shows that the notion cannot be understood without bringing in the thinking or judging agent, the first person. How are we to reconcile this account with the explanation given in 5.131, and with the thesis that logic is to take care of itself? The point is that (non-elementary) sentences are ordered in a formal series, a series which is ordered through internal relations (4.1252). Every sentence is thus the result of successive applications of an operation upon elementary sentences (6.001). The language-using agent is internal to the sentence – there is no sentence without a first person using the sentence. This means that the logical relations between the non-elementary sentences can be recognised by us, because we ourselves are able to construct the non-elementary sentences from elementary sentences through the successive applications of the operation. It is thus possible for us to recognise these internal relations between sentences if they are formulated in a logically perspicuous language. We can then recognise them just by the look of these sentences, by our understanding of how they can be constructed.¹⁶ If the logician has made such a logically perspicuous language, no inference rules are needed, and logic can take care of itself. The mere inspection of the sentences that function as premises and conclusion makes one see that the inference is valid.¹⁷ This means that the truth of logical sentences, the tautologies, can be recognised from the symbol alone.¹⁸ For we can see how the elementary sentences are internally

¹⁶ ‘da wir ja in einer entsprechenden Notation die formalen Eigenschaften der Sätze durch das blosse Ansehen dieser Sätze erkennen können’ (6.122).

¹⁷ ‘so wird der innere Zusammenhang offenbar’ (5.1311).

¹⁸ ‘dass man am Symbol allein erkennen kann, dass sie wahr sind’ (6.113).

related to each other within such a logical sentence. This recognising or seeing we do on the basis of our logical capacity, but it does not result in propositional knowledge, for internal relations cannot be expressed in sentences the way we can express external relations (4.124).¹⁹ One can recognise these internal, logical relations only insofar as the sentences are part of one's own language, the language of the first person. The 'seeing' is a first-person understanding of these logical relations, captured by our ability – 'how to go on' (cf. Kremer 2004: 62).

It also seems that the idea of the first person is not to be neglected with respect to the question of the value of life. Ethics, at least, ethics as it is understood in the *Tractatus*, concerns 'a man's understanding and assessment of his own life', as Peter Winch put it (Winch 1972: 2). On the one hand, Wittgenstein writes that the meaning of life cannot be found in the world (6.41, 6.432): all sentences are of equal value, and this means that no state of affairs is of more value than any other. On the other hand, the world of the happy (*der Glückliche*) is different from the world of the unhappy (6.43). It makes a difference to the world, to my world, whether I am happy or not. This must mean that the happy and the unhappy view the world in different ways; in this way the value of one's life may penetrate everything in the world, and may change the world, my world, without changing any state of affairs as part of it. The question is thus how I see the world, a question for me as a first person. Seeing the value of the world and of life is not something I can learn from others by teaching, for we cannot talk about it in terms of true or false sentences. As Wittgenstein is to put it later in his discussion with Schlick on ethics: 'The ethical cannot be taught.'²⁰ In the same discussion, Wittgenstein refers to his 'Lecture on Ethics' from 1929 or 1930: 'I have in my talk on ethics talked in the first person. I believe that this is something essential. Here one can say nothing factual, I can only step out as personality, and speak in the first person' (Waismann 1965: 14). Here a new element of the first-person methodology is introduced, a personal element, because people may differ in the way they see value in the world and their life. As Wittgenstein puts it

¹⁹ Here my paper connects to Kuusela (2023): Kuusela makes it clear that logical knowledge is non-propositional.

²⁰ 'Das Ethische kann man nicht lehren' (Waismann 1965: 14). As Miles Burnyeat put it in relation to Augustine's *De Magistro*: 'no man ever does or can teach another anything' (Burnyeat 1987: 1). As Burnyeat explains, this relates to Augustine's conception of knowledge as understanding. Of course, I can tell you about a fact that happened, and you may thereby have learned something that has the form of propositional knowledge. What cannot be taught is something that demands understanding, something that relates to the connection of true propositions. Understanding is something that one can only do for oneself.

in the lecture, '[T]his is an entirely personal matter' (Wittgenstein 1965: 8), because it concerns a personal experience, such as *I wonder at the existence of the world*. Whereas the logical connections between sentences that penetrate the whole of language are the same for any user of language, there may be a huge difference in the way people see the world as a whole. Such a personal element was absent when questions of language and logic were addressed. As in the *Tractatus*, in the lecture on ethics Wittgenstein takes the verbal expression of such an experience to be nonsense: 'I am misusing language' (Wittgenstein 1965: 8). '[I]t is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing' (Wittgenstein 1965: 9). The fact that it is nonsense says something about the essence of our experience. Most personal experiences can be described as an empirical phenomenon in the world; one's wonder at the existence of Mount Everest is a state of affairs among others that may be studied by psychology. Ethical experiences that relate to the meaning of life cannot be described that way; they are first-personal in a deeper sense. For such questions relate to you, the reader, the first person: you see the meaning of your own life, when you know how to live your life, when you know how to go on.