

How to understand nonsense? The role of imagination in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein has claimed in the famous thesis 6.54 of *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that his work consists of nonsensical pseudo-propositions, and the reader must throw them away like a ladder if she correctly understands the author of the work. This thesis is very surprising. Initially, it may seem that Wittgenstein's book is a classical philosophical work, comprising of statements, arguments and conclusions, which we draw on the basis of the earlier sentences. However, proposition 6.54 invalidates the initial impression and leaves us with a series of questions. How is it possible to understand a work consisting of nonsensical pseudo-propositions? Why do the nonsensical Tractarian sentences seem as intelligible as meaningful sentences of other philosophical and scientific works? If Wittgenstein's work does not contain any meaningful sentences, why do we seem to perceive the logical relations between these sentences? Are we justified in drawing any philosophical conclusions on the basis of these nonsensical pseudo-propositions? The aim of my research project is to answer these questions. I want to show that by an appeal to the properties of imagination, we are able to explain why the Tractarian sentences seem to be psychologically intelligible and how their 'understanding' differs from an understanding of meaningful sentences. Apart from the characteristics of imagination, the project analyses other key concepts for the reading of Wittgenstein's work such as nonsense, ineffability, propositional knowledge and practical knowledge.

An understanding of a meaningful sentence consists in grasping a proposition expressed by this sentence. Since if we understand a meaningful sentence, then there is a proposition that we are able to entertain. This proposition stands in logical relations to other propositions. However, it is a common ground that nonsensical sentences do not express any propositions and do not stand in logical relations. According to proposition 6.54, the Tractarian sentences are nonsensical; therefore, they neither express propositions nor possess logical consequences. How, then, to account for our feeling of understanding while we are reading this work? How are we able to draw consequences from the Tractarian sentences? My proposal does not challenge the standard assumption that nonsensical sentences do not express propositions. It postulates that our understanding of the Tractarian sentences is modelled on the working of a set of imaginings that possess a structure and logical relations. On the other hand, an imaginary content may differ from a believed content in being gappy, incomplete or incoherent. These properties of imagination make it particularly well-suited to expressing impossible or even nonsensical contents. Such impossible or nonsensical contents are not uncommon in literature and art. For instance, Lewis Carroll uses nonsense intentionally in his works. Maurits C. Escher's woodcuts, in turn, appear to represent mathematically impossible events, and various personifications common in literary works infringe the rules of logical syntax, thereby bringing a special type of nonsense. The main theories of fictionality put imagination in the centre of the mechanism of understanding of fictional contents. For this reason, the crucial part of my project consists in description of the characteristics of imagination in the contemporary fiction theories.

The issue of how to understand nonsensical sentences should long ago be at the heart of any interpretation of *Tractatus*. However, this did not happen. There are two possible explanations for this state of affairs. Firstly, it was believed that the Tractarian sentences are not nonsensical in a strict and literal sense but in a quasi-technical and theoretical way, which was a consequence of Wittgenstein's acceptance of the picture theory of language. Secondly, it was maintained that proposition 6.54 concerns only a definite set of sentences that was characterized in *Tractatus* as that what cannot be said but what can only be shown. In the project, I embrace a literal interpretation of both nonsense and proposition 6.54. I maintain that it is not possible to understand in a strict sense nonsensical sentences and that these sentences cannot convey (or show) any content. Proposition 6.54 is not confined to only a small group of sentences that inaptly try to show something, but this thesis applies to all philosophically loaded propositions in the book. In the project, I analyse the concept of ineffability and defend the austere conception of nonsense to justify these theoretical choices. My project shall constitute a substantial contribution to the current debate concerning the correct reading of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* due to the innovative nature of the project on the global scale and the importance of the problems it deals with.