

BOOK REVIEWS

Wittgenstein and Logic Today: *The Logical Must* by Penelope Maddy

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Maddy, Penelope. *The Logical Must: Wittgenstein on Logic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 152 pages.

Maddy's book is a most welcome contribution to literature on Wittgenstein in that it tries to engage with Wittgenstein from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of logic, rather than treating him as a figure of some historical interest, but mostly surpassed by subsequent analytic philosophy. Regrettably, the latter seems to be the more common perception in mainstream analytic philosophy. (Regrettably, because this assumption seems wrong.) Indeed, it seems a fairly common conception in contemporary analytic philosophy that Wittgenstein has no later philosophy of logic – or at most only a negative one that denies the philosophical value of the logic of Frege, Russell and the *Tractatus*. Never mind that in the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein lists the philosophy of logic as one of

the six key topics addressed in the book. Against this perception of Wittgenstein, Maddy's book seems a refreshing exception, and I confess to pre-ordering the book before it was out, and before I was invited to review it.

More specifically, *The Logical Must* is a discussion of Wittgenstein's early and late philosophy of logic from the point of view of a form of naturalism which Maddy calls "second philosophy". (To set the scene, she starts with a brief discussion of Kant and how to naturalize his transcendental philosophy.) Second philosophy itself is an empiricist account of the nature of logical truth, according to which logic is grounded in and justified by the structure of the contingent world, with evolution having tuned our "cognitive machinery" to detect relevant structures there. But while

the *Tractatus* too, according to Maddy, seeks to ground logic on the structure of reality, Wittgenstein insists there on “the priority of sense”, a view according to which the sense of a proposition must be understandable independently of knowledge of facts. According to Maddy, this commitment to the priority of sense is ultimately optional, however, so that a “naturalizing move” (slightly different from the naturalization of Kant) can be applied to the *Tractatus*, which brings it into conformity with second philosophy. Moreover, given that the later Wittgenstein rejects the priority of sense himself, he seems even friendlier to second philosophical naturalization. The only obstacle now is, Maddy maintains, Wittgenstein’s “prohibition of science”. Luckily, this is only a personal idiosyncrasy, however, and “nothing essential to the late Wittgenstein is lost when the prohibition against science is removed” (p. 125). According to Maddy, no principled justification can be found in Wittgenstein for the view that philosophy shouldn’t be complemented and supported by empirical science, and so Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be read in the light of her second philosophy.

More problems could be raised regarding Maddy’s reading of Wittgenstein and, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, regarding her second philosophical outlook than is possible in this review. I raise two issues, one relating to the *Tractatus* and one to the later philosophy, that indicate some sources of my disappointment

with the book. For ultimately I was disappointed in just that respect in which I had originally welcomed it: despite Maddy’s claim that the “primary aim” of the book is “to understand Wittgenstein better” (p.3.), the book seems to almost completely fail to engage with Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and it seems that this is exactly because of Maddy’s desire to read him through second philosophical lenses. In speaking here of her failure to engage with Wittgenstein I’m only partly referring to her heavy reliance on selected secondary literature, most notably the controversial realist reading of the *Tractatus* by David Pears. This is certainly significant in that on this reading the key claim of the *Tractatus* is a metaphysical one concerning the determination of the structure of language/thought/logic by the structure of reality, and only on such a reading it even begins to look like Maddy’s naturalizing move might be applicable here. By contrast, on an interpretation that seems much better supported by the text, the key claim of the *Tractatus* is that logic cannot be justified with reference to facts because logic involves no factual claims. Rather, logic is something shown, its principles being relied on in making any statements and giving justifications (cf. Sheffer’s logocentric predicament). Accordingly, correctness in logic means something quite different from correctness in factual discourses. It is not a matter of whether the structure of language/thought/logic matches reality, which is how Maddy

conceives the question of the truth, correctness or validity of logic. (From what perspective would such comparisons be made anyway? It seems this would have to involve the infamous McDowellian sideways glimpse.) This illustrates how what Maddy claims to be only “the secondary aim” of the book (p.3), i.e. to reveal new aspects of the second philosophical outlook, eclipses the book’s primary aim. No space seems to be left for genuinely engaging with Wittgenstein’s thought, and in this regard Maddy’s reliance on the Pears-interpretation is presumably only symptomatic of her failure, rather than its cause. More likely the real cause is the secondary aim, and the two aims seem to turn out to be incompatible.

Maddy does quote and refer to Wittgenstein himself more when discussing the later philosophy. But here too she has a tendency to take the meaning of Wittgenstein’s words to be obvious and not in need of much reflection. Curiously, this seems to lead to her missing the problem at the very heart of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of logic, which arises when he stops thinking about language/thought/logic as if it were an abstract entity, and acknowledges that what logic is, is not independent of contingencies relating to language users and their environment. This view of logic as embedded in contingencies is something that Wittgenstein and the second philosopher do share, and Maddy is right about that. But whereas this acknowledgement seems

to signal the end of philosophy of logic for Maddy in that all we need to do now is to admit this state of affairs and give up thinking of logic as “something special”, i.e. that its claims involve necessity and generality that differs from the empirical sciences (chapter 6), for Wittgenstein this constitutes one of the core questions of the philosophy of logic. For, if the task of logic is to describe and clarify contingent (but not only that, also: inexact and complex) uses of language, does this not make the statements of logic contingent too (as well as inexact and imperspicuously complex)? But then how can logic avoid a collapse into psychology or anthropology (or for Maddy, cognitive science)? And how is it now possible to explain the curious feature of logical statements that, unlike empirical statements, they seem to exclude the very possibility, not only actuality, of exceptions. For instance, in a system where ‘ $p \wedge \sim p$ ’ is a contradiction, it is never the case that both sentences are true. There simply is no room for the consideration that perhaps sometimes this would not hold, whereas any empirical generalization admits the possibility of exceptions, even if they are actually excluded. (That there may be different logical systems is irrelevant to this question, as is the possibility that the system might not be applicable everywhere, for instance in quantum mechanics. The question is how to explain exceptionless necessity right here, as a feature of the system mentioned as an example.) This is what Wittgenstein

means by the hardness of logical must, and as he says in a remark that Maddy quotes as a motto in the beginning of her introduction “What you say seems to amount to this, that logic belongs to the natural history of man. And that is not compatible with the hardness of the logical ‘must’” (p.1, cf. 93; see also *Investigations* §242).

Arguably, the main thrust of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of logic consists in his solution to this problem (along with his answer to the question, how it can be legitimate to require exactitude and simplicity from logical systems, if the uses of language targeted for clarification by their means are neither exact nor simple). The solution turns on his rethinking of the status or function of logical statements. But Maddy seems to fail to see that there is even a problem here, as opposed to helping us to ‘understand better’ Wittgenstein’s solution. Instead, she asserts that the differences between her and Wittgenstein can be dismissed as depending on Wittgenstein’s personal and idiosyncratic dislike of science. If Wittgenstein wouldn’t suffer from this bias he, too, would adopt a second philosophical outlook (p. 110, 119, 122). Now, perhaps it is excusable that

Maddy fails to see Wittgenstein’s problem. After all, Wittgenstein thinks that Ramsey failed to see it due to his desire to align logic with natural science. Consequently, however, what I find perhaps the hardest to get my head around is how a logician can rely, at this crucial juncture of her book, on an argument that seems to be merely *ad hominem*, trying to derive its force from Wittgenstein’s alleged personal likes and dislikes. How could this kind of argument possibly help to address any issues in the philosophy of logic, either relating to Wittgenstein’s view or Maddy’s second philosophy? And incidentally, is it even plausible that a man who listed Hertz and Boltzmann as key influences on his approach to philosophy was so averse to science? I’ve come to believe that this is but an academic legend.