Yet another study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

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Abstract

[NB: The part of this abstract printed in boldface describes the main flow of information. Some follow-up points are inserted in between.]

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1922) has done its job and is now outdated; or so the story goes. But I have a different story to tell. The *Tractatus*, once properly understood, poses a serious challenge to the mainstream of English-speaking philosophy after 1922. This is because the *Tractatus* delves deeply into a fundamental feature of our language that post-1922 mainstream philosophy tries to resist rather than assimilate or cultivate. The distinctive idea of the *Tractatus* is that our language in its representing relation to the world is an irreducible phenomenon. To say that language is a nonexplicitable, primitive phenomenon, among other things, is to say that there is 'a kind of fundamental – internal – identity', as Wittgenstein calls it, at the level of which we cannot draw a meaningful distinction between a proposition and what it represents. We cannot interpose something else – a mental representation or causal process – between language and the world, in order to explain the intentional, representational character of language. The intentional relation of language to the world can only be shown forth. In my view, each and every one of the propositions in the text revolves around this point. In my dissertation I make a case for the plausibility of this claim, through a careful analysis of key passages from the *Tractatus*, supported by texts drawn from Wittgenstein's pre-*Tractatus Notebooks* as well as from his later writings.

Many commentators see in the *Tractatus* an attempt to provide an explanatory account of language, especially in the so-called 'picture theory' of language. Such an explanatory account of language is however exactly what the *Tractatus* rejects, and for powerful reasons. In Chapter One, I criticize attempts to interpret Wittgenstein as putting forward such an account. Properly understood, Wittgenstein's talk of language as picture supports the irreducibility of language.

Wittgenstein's understanding of language as a nonexplicitable, primitive phenomenon is revealed in the following remarks. The first is from the pre-*Tractatus* notebooks:

> So it looks as if the logical *identity* between signs and things signified were not necessary, but only *an* internal, *logical*, relation between the two. (The holding of such a relation incorporates in a certain sense the holding of a kind of fundamental – internal – identity.)

By 'the logical *identity* between signs and things signified', Wittgenstein refers to a wrong conception of representation (or intentionality), which seems to be his own old view. In formulating his new view Wittgenstein shifts emphasis from 'identity' to 'logical' (or 'internal'). This suggests that his old view locates identity in the wrong place. Detached from the 'internal' relation between a proposition and what it represents, identity is misplaced. Following the lead of Anscombe, however, many commentators have mislocated the necessary identity between a proposition and what it represents in connection with the external or actual structure of the proposition. Wittgenstein pitches his picture theory at a higher level. A picture cannot itself depict the connections that make up the picture. The connections that make up a picture – or the depicting relation that makes something into a picture – are not to be found in this or that external or actual structure of the picture. Instead, they are buried deep down into the picture in an inextricable (and inexplicable) way. That is what Wittgenstein means by 'a kind of fundamental – internal – identity.' At the level of 'internal identity', we cannot draw a

meaningful distinction between a picture and what it depicts. Wittgenstein's response to the question of what is operative in the proposition's representing what it represents is the *absence* of any *answer* to the question.

For Wittgenstein, we make to ourselves *pictures* of possible facts in compliance with our own design, instead of *mirroring* language-independent reality. From an image in a mirror we can infer what stands before it. That is not the case with a picture. A picture wears our contribution on its sleeves: we make a picture. Our language is not a *mirror*. That our language is not a *mirror* is the gist of Wittgenstein's *picture* theory of proposition. The autonomy of representation involved in the picture theory of proposition is tantamount to saying that representation is a nonexplicitable, primitive phenomenon. If representation were an explicitable relation between a proposition and something else in reality, it would be incorrect to say that we make to ourselves pictures of possible facts in compliance with our own design, i.e., regardless of how things are in reality. If, on the other hand, a proposition were a mirror (as opposed to a picture), we would have to say that representation was an explicitable relation between a proposition and something else in reality. The relation of a mirror to what it mirrors is to be explicated in terms of the laws of optics. Hence the metaphor of "mirroring" is incompatible with the denial of explicitability.

That we use language in compliance with our own design, rather than mirroring language-independent reality is Wittgenstein's intention in TLP 2.1: 'We make to ourselves pictures of facts'. TLP 2.1 is not a fancy way of saying that we represent (what we represent) by our language. That would hardly be worth saying, since it conveys no useful information. To understand 2.1 properly, we need to pay attention to the words Wittgenstein chooses. The key word of TLP 2.1, of course, is 'picture'. We have seen that a picture is to be contrasted with a

mirror. This contrast is implicit in TLP 2.22: 'The picture represents what it represents it represents, independently of its truth or falsehood, through the form of representation.' From a picture, unlike a mirror, one cannot infer that what it represents exists.

Yet another formulation of this conception of language as a picture, as opposed to a mirror, is found in the middle Wittgenstein:

> Reality seems inherently able either to agree with a proposition or not to agree with it. A proposition seems to challenge reality to compare itself to it.

This powerful image of a proposition challenging reality to compare itself to it can be found even in the *Tractatus*. At TLP 2.0212 Wittgenstein says that if the world had no substance, 'it would then be impossible to <u>form a picture of the world (true or false)</u>'. As in the case of TLP 2.1, some do not let Wittgenstein's words (underlined above) free them from the grip of the mirror-oriented conception. They take TLP 2.0212 to say merely that our representation by language is sometime true and sometime false. Once again, this reduces Wittgenstein to saying something empty, hardly worth stating. Like TLP 2.1, 2.0212 is a clearly formulated assertion, and to understand it we have to attend to the words Wittgenstein uses in its formulation. But here, the translation does not get the original German right: *Es wäre dann unmöglich, ein Bild der Welt (wahr oder falsch) zu entwerfen*. We can get a clue for the connotation of the German verb '*entwerfen*' from the following passage by Heidegger:

> We shall now attempt to clarify the structure of the understanding that is constitutive of existence. To understand [the analogue in Wittgenstein's system of entertaining a picture in its depicting relation to the world] means […] *to project* [*entwerfen*] *oneself upon a possibility*, in this *projection* to keep oneself at all times in a possibility. A can-be, a possibility *as* possibility, *is there* only in projection, in projecting oneself upon that can-be.

For Heidegger, we do not project [*entwerfen*] ourselves upon a possibility given in advance. To the contrary, a can-be is there only in projecting oneself upon it. When we project [*entwerfen*]

ourselves upon a possibility, we challenge reality to compare itself to our projection rather than vice versa. Hence I suggest translating TLP 2.0212 into: 'In that case, we could not project a picture of the world (true or false), without worrying about how things actually are out there.'

We cannot reconstruct language in action out of non-representing entities or any complex thereof. Any alleged account of how our language represents what it represents involves circularity. A seemingly successful account of linguistic representation already involves the *explicandum*. If one believes otherwise, it will be only because one surreptitiously smuggles the *explicandum* into his alleged *explicans*. In Chapter Two, I extract from the writings of the middle Wittgenstein powerful arguments against two prominent families of reductive accounts of representation, mentalist and naturalist semantics.

Despite exaggerated differences between mentalism and naturalism, they are as alike as two eggs. From Wittgenstein's perspective, both of them are false attempts to reduce intentionality to something else, instead of regarding it as a basic given. For Wittgenstein, the fact is that we cannot interpose anything, mental or causal, between language and reality with a view to explicating how the former reproduces the latter intentionally. The middle Wittgenstein could best be regarded as fleshing out the reasons for a position already present in the *Tractatus*; that language in its representing relation to the world is a nonexplicitable, primitive phenomenon. Furthermore, I argue that this *Tractarian* theme is what the later Wittgenstein's rule-following discussion is ultimately directed toward. Thereby I imply that the common public/private framework for understanding the rule-following considerations doesn't hit the mark.

These conclusions have implications for ontology as well as semantics. They imply that language does not have the reality that non-representing entities or complexes of such

entities have. Language in action is not *in* the world, in the reductive sense of 'in'. On the contrary, language is *itself* another distinct world. This recognition pushes us towards a fundamental ontological question. At first, we seem to have at least two kinds of reality before us; the world and language. On the other hand, we have the inchoate notion that there is something common to these kinds of reality. Thus, we confront the question: What is *that* which is common to all possible kinds of reality, including the kind of reality that language has? I interpret Wittgenstein as turning the history of ontology on its head in his answer to that fundamental ontological question. In his view, language is the very womb of reality. For example, he understands the existence of physical reality as the existence of a *language* in which we speak of physical objects intelligibly, *viz*. with understanding. And there are many other intelligible languages, such as the language in which we speak of psychological objects like pain or grief. For Wittgenstein, physical reality is neither more nor less real than any other kind of reality. In general, there are as many kinds of reality as there are reductively distinct languages. In Chapter Three, I support this new reading of the *Tractatus* through a careful analysis of Wittgenstein's talk of *objects* as elements of *facts* in TLP 2ff., and of *names* as elements of *propositions* in TLP 3ff. I provide new and fruitful interpretations of such crucial passages as the so-called 'context principle' of TLP 3.3, and the notion of "elucidation" of TLP 3.262 and TLP 3.263. I also provide as a case study of his treatment of relatively distinct languages, an account of his philosophy of mathematics as expounded in TLP 6.2ff.

I call 'the perspective of being (*Sein*)' the idea that one can only apprehend a given existent or entity through the medium of its being (*Sein*). Wittgenstein identifies the necessary medium of being (*Sein*) as the language that speaks of the existent or entity. I therefore

understand TLP 3.3 as formulating this perspective of being (*Sein*): 'Only the proposition [by extension, language] has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning.' I also interpret the opening remarks of the *Tractatus* as expressing this perspective of being. The book begins with TLP 1: 'The world is all that is the case.' TLP 1.1 elaborates this: 'The world is the totality of facts, not of things.' A fact is located in logical space (cf. TLP 1.13), which, in turn, is given by the *a priori* logical grammar of the language that represents the fact. By determining the world as the totality of facts in logical space, I suggest that Wittgenstein intends to counterbalance the perspective of mere existents that blinds one to the real logic of a given existent: the idea that one apprehends a given existent, a thing, immediately, without connection to its being (*Sein*), its occurrence in facts in logical space.

Logical space is *a priori*. The aprioricity in question does not belong to the world, as opposed to language. The world does not have its being – as opposed to its existence – in advance, *viz.* independently of language. Where beings are encountered, being (*Sein*) has already been projected beforehand. Consider here TLP 2.0123:

> If I know an object, then I also know all the possibilities of its occurrence in atomic facts. (Every such possibility must lie in the nature of the object.) A new possibility cannot subsequently be found.

Wittgenstein's intention in TLP 2.0123 is completely lost in the prevailing realist interpretation of Wittgenstein's intention in speaking of 'objects'. They are not the custodian of an order *a priori* in the world in the realist sense that *behind* our signs there are objects which determine their combinatorial possibilities. To the contrary, *we* project *a priori* or beforehand the combinatorial *possibilities* of our signs. That is to say that the being (*Sein*) of a given existent is not itself apprehended object-ively, but is indicated by the logical grammar of the language that speaks of it. TLP 2.0123 could be continued: I know all the possibilities of the occurrence of a

given object in atomic facts, precisely by knowing the logical grammar of the language that speaks of it. This is also what the middle Wittgenstein means when he says that grammar in general is arbitrary in the sense that it is not accountable to the so-called reality.

> Grammar is not accountable to any reality: the rules of grammar determine (constitute) meaning, and therefore they are not answerable to any meaning [given independently by reality] and are in this respect arbitrary.

That does not mean, however, that there is a separate set of propositions that represent the logic of the world, on top of ordinary true-false propositions. The material properties of the world – or the external properties of objects in Wittgenstein's terminology – are represented by true-false propositions containing names as the linguistic correlates of objects. Such propositions are all that there is to language. The formal properties of the world – or the internal properties of objects in Wittgenstein's terminology – are 'elucidated' (as in TLP 3.263) by true-false propositions. Elucidatory propositions are not a new kind of linguistic undertaking, in addition to true-false propositions. Elucidation is rather a special office of these same propositions.

The resulting account of Wittgenstein's ontology has interesting consequences for his well-known rejection of the relation of numerical identity in TLP 5.53ff. In Chapter Four, I show that this is not merely a matter of his introducing an alternative linguistic convention, as it is commonly understood, but is based on important and fundamental arguments. In setting out these arguments I also develop the proper reading of the so-called 'argument for simples' of TLP 2.02ff., and explain in what sense objects are both the *form* and the *matter* of the world. I show that Wittgenstein's rejection of the relation of numerical identity reflects this role of objects and the parallel role of names as forming the elements out of which language develops, and as therefore part of the preparation for language rather than its application in making true or false propositions.

Names constitute a symbolic space in which any possible true-false proposition is to be formed. More specifically, names constitutes a symbolic space that has no need to look outside itself for grounding or justification, because that which it has within itself as its possession suffices for it. Another way of putting this is to say that a language as a space can subsist or cannot subsist while everything else remains the same. This is what I take to be the gist of TLP 1.21: 'Any one can either be the case or not be the case, and everything else remain the same.' One might say that like a Leibnizian 'monad', a given language has no window; it is not essentially in relation to anything else.

This idea of the self-sufficiency of language demands a special name: we suggest 'linguistico-solipsism'. Taking linguistico-solipsism for granted, we see how objects secure the autonomy of linguistic representation. Names constitute a symbolic space in which any possible true-false proposition is to be formed, but which has no need to look outside itself for grounding. In this way, we have provided an interpretation of TLP 2.0211 and TLP 2.0212:

> If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition has sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. (TLP 2.0211) It would then be impossible to form a picture of the world (true or false). (TLP 2.0212)

These propositions tell us that objects secure the autonomy of linguistic representation.

The notion of objects as the *substance* of the world, as mentioned in TLP 2.0211 and TLP 2.0212, is tantamount to the notion of a solipsistic *space*. On the linguistic side, names make up a solipsistic symbolic space for meaningful-situations-relative-to-it, a space that has within itself everything needed for it. Now a true-false proposition is by essence articulated and in that sense complex. The phenomenon of complexity, which Wittgenstein ascribes to propositions, is a function of names. Therefore, names cannot themselves exhibit the phenomenon of complexity. This is how I interpret TLP 2.021: 'Objects form the substance of the world. Therefore they

cannot be compound.' This gives us a sense in which objects are simple, i.e., not compound. I interpret Wittgenstein as meaning that and only that in TLP 2.02: 'The object is simple'.

Wittgenstein's rejection of numerical identity is often taken to depend on an interesting, but hardly compulsory linguistic convention (exclusive interpretation of variables). I show to the contrary that Wittgenstein has a formidable argument against the so-called problem of numerical identity. For Wittgenstein, a symbolism is a function of names: they are primitive signs out of which every possible complex sign construction in it is to be built. In that sense, names are to a symbolic space what the fundamental coordinates are to a geometric space. They can be compared also with the elements of the decimal numeral system. Two *elements* of the *decimal* numeral system are the numeral 4 and the numeral 5 – henceforth referred to as E_4^d and E_5^d (decimal <u>E</u>lements 4 and 5), respectively. In the decimal numeral system we use simple numerals E_4^d and E_5^d to represent complex numerical signs such as 45, 54, 455, etc. Now, on the one hand, we cannot raise the question whether $E_4^d = E_5^d$, as long as we hold on to the decimal numeral system. Likewise, we cannot raise the question whether $n_1 = n_2$, where n_1 and n_2 are both names, as long as we hold to the correlate symbolism. This is how I read TLP 4.243:

> Can we understand two names without knowing whether they signify the same thing or two different things? Can we understand a proposition in which two names occur, without knowing if they mean the same or different things? […]

On the other hand, we know that the decimal numeral system is not the only way of representing numbers; for example, we know that $5 = 101_2$ (in binary notation). In this equation, however, the sign '5' is not *used* as a name (or as E_5^d) in the sense that it is used in representing for example, the number 45. Rather it is *mentioned* as a part of the old language we want to replace by a new one in which the names (or elements) are E_0^b and E_1^b (<u>b</u>inary <u>E</u>lements 0 and 1). In neither of these cases do we have occasion to *use two* names to represent 'numerical identity' as a relation

between objects. If, as in the language of arithmetic, we are clear about what names our language is equipped with and how complex sign constructions are build out of them, we cannot raise the problem whether $n_1 = n_2$. To do so would be to betray that we do not even know what kind of language we are preparing for. On the other hand, we may be doubtful about whether our language, as it stands now, has the kind of perspicuous structure that the language of arithmetic enjoys. In that case, we surely can raise the question whether $n_1 = n_2$. But such a question will not be about reality. It will be about our language; we will be asking, in effect, whether one of these two apparent names can be analyzed away in terms of genuine names or whether they are two (irreducible) genuine names. We can only answer that question by getting clearer about the logical make-up of our language, rather than by getting outside our language to see how things are out there. In neither case do we have the problem of identity as a relation between objects.

I develop my own interpretation of Wittgenstein's rejection of numerical identity as a relation between objects in the light of his affirmation of a "truth in solipsism" in TLP 5.62. Here Wittgenstein adds an interesting twist to his investigation on the nature of our language. In my Conclusion, I sketch the consequences of this twist, which I will develop fully in future work. For Wittgenstein, two reductively distinct languages are solipsistically distinct; like Leibnizian monads, they are sealed off from one another, because each language is self sufficient. If we define our language to be the totality of solipsistic sub-languages, this totality is itself solipsistic and self-sufficient. For Wittgenstein, our (solipsistic) language forms a logical space, which is incapable of expressing a thought lying outside that space without making it into something else. Define the world as what can be expressed in our (solipsistic) language and its possible extensions. The conclusion to be drawn is then that the metaphysical – or God, if you prefer – cannot belong to the world.

Before entering into the metaphysical, it is necessary to leave our language behind. That is what Wittgenstein has in mind in declaring: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'. (TLP 7) This should not be regarded as flat-out rejection of the higher. Wittgenstein's intention is rather to bring about a certain healthy (Augustinian) recognition of the higher.

A solipsistic symbolic space is a function of 'names'; they are to the correlate symbolic space what the fundamental co-ordinates are to the correlate geometrical space. Consider the situation in which an item alien to a given language is imported into it. The alien item cannot be analyzed by any definition out of 'names'; for otherwise it will not be truly alien. For example, consider importing $\sqrt{2}$ into the system of the rational numbers. When something ($\sqrt{2}$) seems to lie outside a given solipsistic space (the previous system of rational numbers), *either* one can justifiably dismiss it as a chimera *or* the apparently outlandish thing in fact belongs to yet another solipsistic space. In neither case can a given thing lie outside our language, where our language is defined as the possible extension of the totality of solipsistic sub-languages. To put it otherwise, *either* any given thing is nothing *or* it belongs to our language. According to linguistico-solipsism, our language does not have anything outside it that it should but cannot orient itself toward intentionally. To the contrary, any given language orients itself toward nothing but itself intentionally. When it comes to intentionality, our language does not have anything yet inaccessible to it. Hence, linguistico-solipsism provides for a sense in which our language is *the world* in an intuitive, pre-analytic sense, i.e., the all-encompassing domain. You cannot import an alien item into a solipsistic language without making it into another thing. Let us call this 'solipsistic unity'. Now that we have equated our language with the world, we can

ascribe solipsistic unity to the world, with the result that you cannot import an alien item into the world without making it into another thing. That is actually Wittgenstein's view:

> The sense of the world ['the metaphysical', 'the higher', 'the mystical' or 'God' in Wittgenstein's terminology] must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value. […] <u>What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *in* the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental</u>. It must lie outside the world. (TLP 6.41)

In the underlined proposition Wittgenstein implies that one cannot import the higher – God, if you prefer - into the world without making it into another thing.

In the concluding chapter, I argue that linguistico-solipsism is a corollary of the thesis that language in its representing relation to the world is a nonexplicitable, primitive phenomenon. Since linguistico-solipsism is the catalyst for the metaphysics of silence, we could say that the *Tractatus* as a whole is an attempt to make logic (as the study of the nature of language) again into philosophy (or metaphysics). This making of *logic* again into *philosophy* explains (in part) why Wittgenstein titles his work: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.