

## Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)

### Preface

Paragraphs 2-4: Philosophical problems are based on a misunderstanding of language.  
(4.003) The point of the book vs. the meaning of the book: Props. 4.116 and 7. “draw a limit to thinking” so that what lies on the other side is “simply nonsense.”

### Part I: Logical Atomism (§§1-2.063)

Russell’s reaction to Bradley. J.O. Urmson: “The shortest account of Logical Atomism that can be given is that the world has the structure of Russell’s mathematical logic.”

The world consists of facts most fundamentally, even though the facts have atoms as parts. Yet a group of atoms is insufficient to individuate the world, since atoms can bear a variety of relations to each other.

### Part II: The Picture Theory of Meaning (§§2.1-3.05)

Language semantically relates mind to world, thanks to an *isomorphism* between its structure and the atomistic structure of the world. (See e.g., 2.17, 2.18)

Pictures represent possible states-of-affairs; a picture is true if what it depicts is an actual state-of-affairs.

The logical structure of all languages is, at root, identical. So all languages, at root, are logically perfect. (Russell’s misunderstanding.) And *thought* shares this logical structure since what can be said is precisely what can be thought.

### Part III: The General Theory of Propositions and Logical Form (§§3.1-5.5423)

A proposition = a thought (a kind of sense) expressed by a perceptible sign.

(A sense + its sign = a symbol/expression).

A proposition is a “method of projection” of the sign. Not: ‘aRb’ says that *a* bears R to *b*. Rather: *That* ‘a’ stands to ‘b’ in a certain relation says *that* aRb. (A Proposition as a fact.)

3.317: The syntax of an expression defines the ways it combines with other expressions. (These other expressions are the “values of the propositional variable”) But in this “it is only a description of symbols and asserts nothing about what is symbolized”

Grayling & Weiss: “Notice the interdependence: a proposition has its meaning determined compositionally by its constituents, but any sub-propositional expression (symbol) has meaning only in the context of a proposition and, in fact, ‘presupposes the forms of all the propositions in which it can occur’ (3.311)” Parallel to his “colorless” objects whose essence consists in their possibilities of combinations

3.323-3.324: The same sign belongs to different symbols: “Thus there easily arise the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full). Philosophical propositions as senseless (4.003).

4.0312: The “fundamental thought.” Logical structure does not represent; the logical structure of facts cannot be represented. Understanding  $p$  is sufficient to understand  $\sim p$ ; hence ‘ $\sim$ ’ is not a name for anything; there is nothing in the world that corresponds to ‘ $\sim$ ’. Rather, it is a manner or form of representation that a picture can have. But as such, logical form is not part of what’s pictured, though it can be “shown”. (Consider logical expressions: ‘ $x$ ’ and ‘ $f(x)$ ’. They do not say anything but show the form of objects and a relation, respectively.)

*Metaphilosophy: §§4.111-4.116*

Since ordinary language “disguises” logical form, philosophy consists in revealing it.

Elementary propositions picture atomic facts; they are a structured sequence of *names* that directly “map onto” the world ( $\neq$  Russell). (No examples given, no interpretation of the names.) Each elementary proposition is logically independent of the others. But all “molecular” propositions are truth-functions of the elementary ones (4.53, 5.3)

To have a sense is to picture a possible state-of-affairs. To understand a proposition is to know which possible state-of-affairs it pictures, i.e., what would make it true or false. The *possibility* of being true and of being false is a prerequisite of having sense at all: Hence, tautologies and contradictions do not have a sense, in that it does not represent any (one) possible state-of-affairs. But they are not “nonsensical” since they are part of the symbolism.

On the Frege Puzzle: 4.241, 4.242; Substitution puzzle: 5.541-5.5421

The invention of truth-tables: 4.31

The general form of a proposition 5.471, 5.4711, 6 is a generalized compositional rule. Get rid of ‘=’, 5.5301-5.534. Application to mathematics: 6.2

#### **Part IV: Philosophy, Value, and the Unsayable (§§5.55-7)**

5.6-5.61: limits of language = limits of world

5.6331: Analogy w field of vision

A picture does not represent *itself* in a picturing-relation to the world; it does not even picture *that it is a picture*. Thus, there is no way to capture the word-world relations in what is sayable (though it can be *shown*).

Because the logical form is *necessarily* imbedded in propositions, speaking of the logical form in propositions becomes unintelligible. In other words, we cannot conceive of the conditions which would falsify the proposition “Propositions have a logical form.” Moreover, as a metaphysical statement, the assertion of the logical form does not allow for the possibility of its negation. Lacking “bipolarity” in both cases, speaking of the logical form of propositions becomes unintelligible.

6.41: The value of the world. Ethical matters: 6.4-6.43. Mysticism.

Implying that we could speak these unspeakable senses contradicts the entire thrust of the *Tractatus*. Although less earth-shattering, a more consistent conclusion might have stated “We can only speak of what we can speak of.” (Yet, ideally, Wittgenstein would have dismissed this as tautological nonsense as well.) The *Tractatus* is a piece of metaphysics which is elucidating because it *shows* something.

6.53: Inspiration for Positivism. Yet W. did not intend to denigrate metaphysics, or other “unsayable” domains such as religion, art, or ethics. These were matters of the utmost importance. But any attempt to state metaphysical, religious, aesthetic, or moral facts fails to say anything at all.