

Winnowing Wittgenstein: What's Worth Salvaging from the Wreck of the *Tractatus*

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Abstract

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* still harbours valuable lessons for contemporary philosophy, but which ones? Wittgenstein's long list of things we cannot speak about is set aside, but his insistence that the logical constants do not represent is retained, as is the absolute distinction between names and sentences. We preserve his atomism of elementary sentences but discard the atomism of simple objects in states of affairs. The fundamental harmony between language and the world is rejected: it is the source of much that is wrong in the *Tractatus*. What remains is a clarified role for items in making elementary sentences true.

1 Introduction

Kevin Mulligan has maintained throughout his philosophical career a keen and judicious appreciation of the chief figures of that great philosophical explosion centred on Austria in the 19th and early 20th century. Of these figures, the best-known and most widely influential is Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹ Kevin has maintained, quite rightly, that it is impossible to appreciate the extent to which Wittgenstein's contributions to philosophy are as original as his many admirers contend without a great deal more knowledge of the Central European milieu from which Wittgenstein emerged than the majority of these admirers care to or are prepared to investigate. In this respect the more diffuse and ample later philosophy presents a much greater challenge than the early work which culminated in the *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*.² The modest extent of the *Tractatus* and its more limited period of genesis, as well as its relatively crisper form and content, render it a more manageable and ultimately less controversial work than the post-Tractarian writings, whose thrust is even today occasionally obscure, despite more than a half century of frenzied exegesis. The originality of much of the *Tractatus* is hardly in doubt,³ for even though Wittgenstein disdained the

¹ Though not the best: that accolade has to go to the great Bernard Bolzano.

² On the *österreichische Umgebung* of the *Tractatus* see Mulligan 1985, 1991, 2009.

³ Despite the provocative as well as amusing Goldstein 1999, which suggests that Wittgenstein knowingly plagiarized from Bolzano. While it is theoretically possible, as Jan Sebestik has claimed (Sebestik 1989), that Bolzano's influence could have been carried to Wittgenstein by the school textbook Zimmermann 1853, there is, despite various convergences, unfortunately no direct evidence that Wittgenstein ever read either Bolzano or Zimmermann, though given Wittgenstein's savant-like ability to absorb influences while forgetting their sources, it is hard to rule anything out. All the same, Goldstein is quite correct that whereas Wittgenstein's snooty and cavalier attitude to his sources, as evinced in the Preface to the *Tractatus*, might be all right for a literary publication, it certainly falls well short of the standards of scholarship expected of a doctoral thesis anywhere, and he should have been told by Moore and Russell to provide references and a bibliography before being allowed to pass. One can imagine the indignant explosion this would have caused. But rules is rules: genius or not, original or not, the *Tractatus* is sloppy and did not as it stands merit a Ph.D. Goldstein continues his discussion in more serious vein in his 2002.

usual apparatus of indicating his sources,⁴ the directness with which he confronts the theories of Frege and Russell and the novelty of several of his solutions render it very likely that a good portion of the ideas in the *Tractatus* are his own, whatever subliminal sources may have been at work as he compiled them.⁵

While several of the lessons of the later Wittgenstein have become so absorbed into contemporary philosophy that they pass almost without mention, the *Tractatus* is widely, and correctly, perceived as a partly inspired and partly flawed work. For the most part, once the Viennese phase of fanatical enthusiasm had passed, the critical opinion has tended to prevail. This is due in no small part to Wittgenstein himself, who from 1929 onwards frequently took issue with his earlier views and criticised them, usually effectively, though often sloppily and inaccurately.⁶ After the later philosophy had begun to be received and absorbed in the 1950s, a more distanced, accurate, sympathetic and balanced assessment of the doctrines of the *Tractatus* began to emerge, so that its content and message, once considered obscure, is now fairly straightforwardly accessible.⁷ There are exceptions of course,⁸ but for the most part I shall avail of this work to evaluate rather than elucidate the doctrines of the *Tractatus*.

So why should we still be interested in what Wittgenstein has to say in the *Tractatus*? Why does this work deserve more than just an historical appraisal? It is, I think, because it still has lessons to teach us, some of which are still insufficiently appreciated. Therefore it merits some work to try to disentangle those theses of the *Tractatus* that are worthy of being retained and further applied, from those which we may consign to the dustbin of philosophy.⁹

2 The Centre of Gravity of the *Tractatus* is the Philosophy of Logic

Wittgenstein began his philosophical career by taking issue with aspects of the logics of Russell and of Frege. Since he was in closer and more regular contact with Russell, it is the dialogue with the

⁴ In the text Wittgenstein mentions by name not just Frege and Russell but also Darwin, Hertz, Kant, Mauthner, Moore, Newton, Ockham, Socrates and Whitehead. Of these only the references to Hertz are significant. In later writings (Wittgenstein 1977, 43) he cites Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler and Sraffa as influences. These of course are not the only ones.

⁵ This is apparent from the very beginning, in the 'Notes on Logic', about which see Potter 2009.

⁶ On the inaccuracy of Wittgenstein's rendering of his own earlier ideas, see Kenny 1974.

⁷ In this connection we should mention especially Anscombe 1959, Stenius 1960, Griffin 1964, Black 1964, Copi and Beard 1966, Dietrich 1973 and Fogelin 1976. Among more recent works one should add Frascolla 2000 and White 2006.

⁸ I exclude the writings of those who expound the (now no longer so) "new" Wittgenstein, a philosopher whose resemblance to the original is too partial to be of use, except for the purposes of exciting polemic.

⁹ A matter of Mancunian autobiography: when I started studying philosophy in 1971, as a postgraduate, the works I first read intensively and under supervision were: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and his *Philosophical Investigations*. After those, nearly all sailing was plain. Of these, the only one I still regularly consult and consider useful for my own philosophy is the *Tractatus*. When Kevin arrived in Manchester we discussed Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and they too have continued to positively influence us both.

latter that occupies the foreground. The ‘Notes on Logic’ are concerned with issues Wittgenstein and Russell had discussed in Cambridge. So too in the *Tractatus*, although Frege’s “great works” are lauded conspicuously more emphatically than “the writings of my friend Bertrand Russell” (Preface), more space is spent on dealing with the ideas of Russell than with those of Frege. It is the philosophy of Russell’s logic rather than its technical details which draws Wittgenstein’s attention and criticism.

Although the *Tractatus* begins dramatically with a staccato series of trenchant ontological statements, and ends in a series of statements about diverse topics including knowledge, science, the world as a whole, mysticism, the self, solipsism, value, metaphysics, and, most famously, silence, the major part of the book is explicitly concerned with matters of the proper understanding of logic. The ontological preliminaries can be understood, in view of Wittgenstein’s principle of harmony (see below), as corollaries of the discussion of logic, placed first for dramatic effect rather than because of their key status. So indeed can some parts (but not all) of the final remarks. But a mere page-tally tells its story. Out of the 134 pages of the English *Tractatus*, some 116, or 88%, deal with logic and its philosophy, a mere 16 pages or 12% deal with the final miscellany. The *Tractatus* is first and foremost a work of the philosophy of logic. Note: it is not a work *of logic*. Wittgenstein does not trouble himself to actually formulate or execute a logic along the lines he sketches and advocates. Such under-labouring is left to lesser mortals.

Of course the final pages, and in particular the negative injunction(s) concerning what cannot be said, are also very important. Wittgenstein treated them as of equal status in some respects and of greater status in some, including his delphic remark to Ludwig von Ficker that the more important part of the *Tractatus* is the unwritten part.¹⁰ But however important Wittgenstein considered them, they would have hung freely without even the sketchy justification the *Tractatus* gives them had they not been preceded by a more or less detailed account of how language works when it works properly. And since I reject Wittgenstein’s negative metaconsiderations, it is only from the positive part that I shall endeavour to rescue material which can be used hereafter.

3 The Key Theses of the *Tractatus*

Frege complained bitterly to Wittgenstein¹¹ of being unable to clearly separate in the *Tractatus* basic propositions (axioms, unargued assumptions) from definitions, and both axioms and definitions from supported propositions (conclusions, theorems, if one will). And though he was an unsympathetic reader, Frege was right so to complain. Not that such pedantic differences mattered

¹⁰ Letter to Ficker, printed in Engelmann, ed. 1967, 143 f.

¹¹ Frege 1989.

to the artist Wittgenstein. Since in the end all the apparent statements in the *Tractatus* were going to turn out as equally illegitimate,¹² there was no point for Wittgenstein in separating them out into quasi-axioms, quasi-definitions, and quasi-theorems. But of course if Wittgenstein was wrong about the status of his Tractarian propositions (as, with Russell, Frege and others, I think he was wrong), then Frege's criticisms hit the nail on the head. Since it takes some additional work to tease out how these three statuses might be disentangled if we accept Frege's view,¹³ I shall content myself with considering all propositions in the *Tractatus* simply as "theses".

However, the theses of the *Tractatus* form not an egalitarian democracy but an Orwellian democracy: some are more equal than others. The most salient evidence of this is the numeration of the theses. Wittgenstein explains this as follows (footnote to 1):

The decimal numbers assigned to the individual propositions indicate the logical importance of the propositions, the stress laid on them in in my exposition. The propositions *n.1*, *n.2*, *n.3*, etc., are comments on proposition no. *n*; the propositions *n.m1*, *n.m2*, etc. are comments on proposition no. *n.m*; and so on.

Wittgenstein is not to be taken fully at his word here, because there are theses with the numbers 4.001, 4.01 and 4.1, all of which must be considered as comments on or elaborations of thesis 4. Roughly speaking, the logical importance of a thesis is measured by how few significant digits follow the decimal point. By this account, the theses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are the most important. And there is much in this. But it is not the whole story, and we have Wittgenstein himself to thank for alerting us to it. For in the Preface to the work, he says,

The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence.

The second half of this double thesis is the famous cardinal proposition 7:

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

The first half occurs however in a much less salient place and with the relatively lowly number 4.116:

Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly.

Call these two theses the *Principle of Silence* and the *Principle of Clarity* respectively. The Principle of Clarity is connected intimately to Wittgenstein's logical atomism: in his conception they go hand in hand. Because some aspects of language are ineliminably vague, there is reason to reject the Principle of Clarity while retaining a form of logical atomism, so some other tenet of the *Tractatus* will have to go.

¹² For this status at least the New Wittgensteinians have the *imprimatur* of the Master: 6.54.

¹³ As attempted in Simons 1993.

The other key proposition of the *Tractatus* is tucked away with a number (4.0312) making it seem insignificant. But it is not:

My fundamental idea is that the ‘logical constants’ do not represent; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts.

The “fundamental idea” and its name (*mein Grundgedanke*) come from a *Notebooks* entry of 25 December 1914, but the idea goes back to Wittgenstein’s earliest thinking, and is the key that unlocked his own conception of logic.¹⁴ Russell and Frege had both in their different ways considered the logical constants, including the familiar connectives and quantifiers, but also numerical terms, to stand for certain items: logical functions and logical objects. Wittgenstein’s insight was that this is not how they function at all. The constant where this emerges the most clearly is negation. Frege treated it as a function, taking the True to the False and every other object to the True. Wittgenstein’s whole idea of propositions is that, unlike names, they do not simply stand for a thing as the name ‘Napoleon Bonaparte’ stands for the French emperor. Rather propositions are two-ended or *bipolar*: they can be true or false, and with the exception of tautologies and contradictions, any proposition could be either the one or the other, depending on how things are in the world. Much of Wittgenstein’s early work on logic stresses this bipolarity, and it is only with the introduction of the easily misunderstood truth-tabular notation for the logical constants in the *Tractatus* that its importance is slightly masked. Negation is not a function name like the square function in arithmetic: the notational similarity between $\sim()$ and $()^2$ is misleading. Rather negation *toggles* a proposition’s polarity, so its truth-conditions are exactly the opposite of its operand. Double negation returns the polarity to its original without trace except notationally, and this impressed Wittgenstein: he wrote that

[n]othing in reality corresponds to the sign ‘ \sim ’. ... ($\sim\sim p = p$). The propositions ‘ p ’ and ‘ $\sim p$ ’ have opposite sense, but there corresponds to them one and the same reality. (4.0261)

Negation so impressed Wittgenstein that he made the joint negation $N(P)$ of any set of propositions P his sole undefined logical operator.

This different understanding of negation, which when generalized to other logical constants results in Wittgenstein’s new understanding of the nature of logic, turns on his rejection of Frege’s view that propositions (sentences, *Sätze*) stand for truth-values and so are a special sort of name, and simultaneously the rejection of Russell’s view that they stand for complexes. They don’t stand for *anything* in the way names stand for individuals, they are true or false. This was so important to Wittgenstein that he originally thought of calling his nascent work on logic *Der Satz*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Potter 2009, 49 ff.

¹⁵ The meaning of the word ‘*Satz*’ sits uncomfortably between the meanings of the English ‘sentence’, ‘proposition’ and ‘statement’. It is usually translated as ‘proposition’ but for many purposes and in many places ‘sentence’ is a better choice, and I will use either term. Wittgenstein never believed in propositions in the sense of Russell and Moore or

While it is not our chief aim here to go on and apply Wittgenstein's insight, it is worth recording that Wittgenstein's view has regrettably remained largely uninfluential among logicians. The idea that a sentence can be assigned one of the truth-values **T** and **F** as its extension or semantic value, that the logical connectives stand for truth-functions (functions from truth-values or tuples thereof to truth-values), and that other logical constants can likewise be assigned various functions as their extensions, all trek directly away from Wittgenstein and back to Frege. The subsequent developments of modal and other intensional logics, of which the *Tractatus* would have none, have only compounded the error. Logicians have voted with their feet to reject the Tractarian *Grundgedanke*, and philosophically, that, in my view, is a big mistake.

4 The Harmony Principle

The *Tractatus* is famous for something called "the Picture Theory of Meaning". As such, it is wrongly famous. At no point does Wittgenstein account for meaning *per se* as depicting, or through a picture theory. There is a relatively unproblematic notion of depiction at work in the *Tractatus*, but it applies *only* to elementary (atomic) propositions. The names in an elementary proposition stand for objects, the way in which they stand to one another represents the form of the state of affairs that the atomic proposition as a whole thereby depicts. If that state of affairs exist (obtains, *besteht*), the elementary proposition is true: if it does not, the elementary proposition is false (4.25). The names in a false elementary proposition still name objects, but they do not in reality stand to one another as the proposition represents them as standing. How they *do* stand is not something that their *not* so standing can inform us, because all elementary propositions are logically independent.¹⁶

Generalizing from the atomic case, a compound proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions, and it is true or false depending on two things: which of the elementary propositions are true and which are false; and what its logical form is, i.e. how it is compounded logically from its constituent elementary propositions. Since this is always a completely determinate matter (the Principle of Clarity), every compound proposition leaves a determinate set of ways in which it can be true and in which it can be false to be fixed by which of those elementary propositions are true and which are false, i.e. which of the ultimately depicted states of affairs exist and which do not. In this extended sense, a compound proposition can be said to "depict" reality. But it is an extended and strained sense, since in general a compound proposition can be true in many ways and false in many ways. For example if *p*, *q* and *r* are elementary propositions, the

Gedanken in the sense of Frege. That modern German has taken to calling these things '*Propositionen*' only underlines the point.

¹⁶ According to the *Tractatus*, that is. This logical independence was the first thing to be discarded when Wittgenstein reconsidered his position in 1929, and quite rightly so, as there is no reasonable way to uphold such independence.

compound proposition $p \& (q \vee r)$ can be true in three ways and false in five ways.¹⁷ So the compound proposition does not limit reality to just one way it can be, and the idea of a picture is severely strained. What can be said however is that there is no vagueness about the delimitation of the precise ways in which the proposition can be true from those in which it can be false, and that is again the Principle of Clarity.

However there is an underlying and deeper principle behind Wittgenstein's idea of the way language relates to the world. I call it the Principle of Harmony. It is a general attitude to the relationship between language and the world, roughly, that they are in a deep and ultimately unsayable harmony. It encompasses the view that the fundamental grammatical categories line up perfectly with the fundamental ontological categories, as follows:

<i>Linguistic Category</i>	<i>Ontological Category</i>
Name	Object
Difference of Names (shown)	Difference of Objects (shown)
Sentence	Situation
Elementary Sentence	State of Affairs
True Sentence	Fact
Form of Elementary Sentence (shown)	Form of State of Affairs (shown)
True Elementary Sentence	Atomic Fact (positive)
True Negation of Elementary Sentence	Negative Fact
Selection of Elementary Sentences (as if true)	Possible World
Totality of True Sentences	The World (totality of facts)
Totality of Objects	The Substance of the World

A situation is a general way the world could be, for example the way making p true and one or both of q and r true as well. Further, the form (possible configuration) of the names in an elementary proposition perfectly corresponds to the form (possible structure) of the state of affairs it depicts:

2.161 There must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all.

¹⁷ This is not counting all the things that are irrelevant to the states of affairs depicted by these elementary propositions, i.e., the number of ways in which all the other elementary propositions can be true or false, which is 2^{N-3} for N elementary propositions overall. Taking these into account there are $3 \cdot 2^{N-3}$ ways for our proposition to be true and $5 \cdot 2^{N-3}$ ways for it to be false. So we should more accurately say there are three salient *kinds* of ways for it to be true and five kinds of ways for it to be false.

This exact correlation or harmony is carried so far that since Wittgenstein conceives of names as logically unarticulated or without parts, he concludes that objects must themselves be ontologically unarticulated or without parts:

2.02 Objects are simple.

2.0201 Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into those propositions that describe the complexes completely.

Now the Principle of Harmony is by no means Wittgenstein's invention or sole property. In their different ways, both Frege and Russell subscribe to it. Indeed the *Grundgedanke* is a step away from it, since there is no item in the world corresponding to any item in a sentence which expresses a logical constant. But Wittgenstein expresses the Harmony Principle in a particularly explicit form and draws out its consequences radically: for example in conjunction with his view about the reduction of sentences about complexes to sentences about simples it has the bizarre effect of enabling him to argue from his armchair that the world must be made up of objects without parts. It is also the Harmony Principle that underlies Wittgenstein's emphasis on showing versus saying, since he cannot accept that some things (such as logical form) which can be shown cannot also be said (4.1212): if it could be said (put in a word), it would have to correspond to something, but since it can be shown, it is not something a word can stand for. Likewise the Principle of Harmony is behind Wittgenstein's logically inconvenient and linguistically hopelessly impractical refusal to accept a sign of identity, since having two different names for the same individual is contrary to the Harmony Principle. It is behind his refusal to accept a metalanguage, his view that the limits of my language are the limits of my world, and much more.

In short, the Harmony Principle is at the root of most of the evils of the *Tractatus*, and while Wittgenstein's rhetoric in support of it may bemuse the unwary, it did not faze his more astute commentators such as Russell, Ramsey and Carnap. Indeed it is precisely where Wittgenstein appears to let up on the principle, as in the *Grundgedanke*, that we have some of his more interesting insights. However even here Wittgenstein strives mightily (and ultimately of course, unsuccessfully) for a logical notation which would eliminate the need for signs expressing logical constants.

5 Two Kinds of Atomism

Russell called the philosophy that he and Wittgenstein developed in the years 1911–1914 'logical atomism'. The designation in fact predated his involvement with Wittgenstein, being first aired in his French paper "Le réalisme analytique" of 1911, where he writes "cette philosophie est un

atomisme logique”.¹⁸ But it applies in full to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. There are in fact two layers of levels of atomism in the *Tractatus* (as indeed, in Russell). The first is the atomism of propositions. All propositions, according to this view, are logical complications of elementary or atomic propositions, and in the extensional logic of the *Tractatus* this means they are all truth-functions of elementary propositions. Then there is the atomism of objects to be found when we dig inside propositions to their non-propositional parts. This ends with the view that the objects whose interconnections form states of affairs are without parts, by the reduction we looked at earlier. While Wittgenstein did worry about this kind of atomism in the *Notebooks*,¹⁹ in the end he convinced himself that an atomism of objects was the only way to secure the Clarity Principle:

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a sentence had sense or not would depend on whether another sentence was true.

2.0212 It would then be impossible to develop a picture of the world (true or false).

Both forms of atomism have been widely rejected. The second is certainly insufficiently justified by Wittgenstein’s arguments. In the extreme form that links mereological simplicity of referent with grammatical simplicity of expression, the Harmony Principle is simply unbelievable and I shall not argue the case. But an atomism of propositions is a more interesting prospect, and as I shall argue below, in a form modified from Wittgenstein’s, is acceptable and arguably correct.

6 The Norms of Silence

One of the most dramatic aspects of the *Tractatus* is its injunction to silence: *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen* (7). This must be one of German sentences best known among non-native speakers. Like much else in the *Tractatus*, it derives from the Harmony Principle. It does not follow from it directly, because one could uphold harmony and still allow that we talk about the harmony. Harmony shows itself in the correlations between linguistic and ontological features, but we could also talk about it. But Wittgenstein insists that “What *can* be shown *cannot* be said.” (4.1212) So there is nothing left but to keep quiet about the things that show themselves, on pain of talking nonsense.

Wittgenstein retained throughout his philosophical career an extreme aversion to what he called “gassing” (*Geschwätz*), in which people talk about things that in his view can and should not be talked about, whether philosophical or not. In some cases we can sympathize with him: part of the chat that accompanies matters aesthetic, from art to wine, is mere pretentious verbiage. Wittgenstein was also in general fairly tight-lipped about his life decisions, such as choosing to volunteer in World War I, give away his fortune, work as a schoolteacher, take hospital work in

¹⁸ Russell 1992, 412, 135.

¹⁹ *Notebooks* 48–71 *passim*.

World War II, or buy his sisters out of the Holocaust. He also apparently found it difficult to put his feelings about music into words. But the *Sprechverbote* extend very widely, and notably include attempts to talk about the relationship between language and the world, as distinct from just talking about the world. Since Wittgenstein's own enterprise in the *Tractatus* is all about the relationship between language and the world, that means by his own lights the book is nonsense (6.54).

Inordinately much ink has been spilt about this paradox, and by some commentators it is seen as the magic key to interpreting Wittgenstein from A to Z. How seriously it is taken depends on how correct the injunctions to silence are taken to be. My own view has always been that expressed by Russell in his introduction to the *Tractatus*:

What causes hesitation [sc. about the injunctions to silence] is the fact that, after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit. (xxi)

No one was more familiar than Russell with the perils of self-reference and other dangers of unrestricted and unprotected uses of language. This lends his gentle rejection of Wittgenstein's injunction a certain authority. His throwaway hint about language hierarchies not only anticipates Tarski, it also safeguards a place for linguistics, semantics, and other modern meta-disciplines, much of which Wittgenstein would condemn in advance to silence. While the bounds of the sayable are by no means evident, they are incomparably wider than Wittgenstein sets them. To adapt a not unrelated slogan of Hilbert's: *Wir müssen reden – wir werden reden!*

7 Atomism and Truth-Making

The *Tractatus* got several important things dead right, things that were not, are not and have not been commonplace in philosophy since its publication. We already mentioned the *Grundgedanke* and the utter distinctness of sentences from names, both of which are widely ignored in the logical community.

Then there is the atomism of sentences, which is also widely rejected. We are not interested in trying to show that all sentences are ultimately about simples. It is the first level of atomism only that warrants retention. Here we have to be careful, as Wittgenstein was, though in a different way from his. Sometimes sentences look simple but are not. Following Ramsey and Davidson, it is held that a grammatically simple sentence like *John kissed Mary* harbours an implicit quantification: its "logical form" is more perspicuously represented as *For some x, x is a kissing of Mary by John*. Such an idea was not alien to Wittgenstein: he writes, obviously with the theory of descriptions in mind, "It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one." (4.0031) If the meaning of a sentence is given by its truth-

conditions, then the meaning of *John kissed Mary* must be the meaning of an existential sentence quantifying over kissing events. But that is not all there is to it. The sentence is in the simple past tense, which means its truth-conditions concern kissing events only before the time of its utterance, whereas the form *For some x, x is a kissing of Mary by John* does not contain this limitation. This would be true if some kissing of Mary by John took place after the utterance and none did before. But now we come up against a problem. If the *sentence* has truth-conditions, these vary according to the time of utterance. So the sentence *per se* does not have a fixed set of truth-conditions at all. Perhaps a given utterance of it does, but Wittgenstein does not talk of utterances.

Traditionally, it is *propositions* that have fixed truth-conditions. If so, then the proposition is not determined by the sentence. Nor does the proposition have anything to do with times of utterance, since it is sentences that are uttered. Rather, in uttering a sentence, a speaker expresses a proposition, one jointly determined by the sentence and the context of its utterance, in ways now familiar, but not well known when Wittgenstein was writing. If we wish to determine the proposition independently of the context of utterance, the time before which such kissing is meant to have taken place must be built into the proposition as in the fashion of *For some x, x is a kissing of Mary by John before T*. To specify the truth-conditions in a non-contextual way all the indexical elements have to be replaced by explicit specifications.

There is a way to cut through this decontextualization issue while retaining Wittgenstein's basic insight about atomism. It is to consider not meaning but *truth-making*. Any event of John's kissing Mary, occurring before an utterance, referring to those two people, of 'John kissed Mary', suffices to make that utterance true. Because *any* event satisfying the description and being in the right time-range will do, the *truth-conditions* for the utterance are indeed those of a temporally constrained existential quantification over events of John's kissing Mary. The sentence, and the utterance, need not be ascribed a hidden or disguised form: "All *Sätze* of our everyday language are in fact, just as they are, in perfect logical order." (5.5563)

Wittgenstein ascribes the truth-making role to states of affairs:

4.21 The simplest kind of proposition, an elementary proposition, asserts the existence of a state of affairs.

and

4.25 If the elementary proposition is true, the state of affairs exists; if the elementary proposition is false, the state of affairs does not exist.

And, he might have added, vice versa, which would have made it perfectly clear that states of affairs are truth-makers for elementary propositions, and further, that when the state of affairs in question fails to exist, *nothing further* is required for the elementary sentence to be false, and therefore of course for its negation to be true. The true negation of a false elementary sentence

precisely has no truth-maker, for if it had one, it would have to be the one state of affairs correlated with both poles of the elementary sentence, and then the elementary sentence would be true, not false. The way in which more logically complex sentences get to be true or false likewise depends on which states of affairs exist, and this is something that according to the extensional account of truth-conditions and the general form of propositions given in the *Tractatus* means that there is no universal recipe for how a true proposition stands to truth-makers, but there is a general scheme for how the complications ramify, provided by the truth-tabular analysis of compound propositions, and thereby underlining the *Grundgedanke*.

If now we retain the idea of some sentences being true simply because of something existing, but dispense with states of affairs as that which those somethings have to be, we arrive at the idea of any entity whatever as a potential truth-maker, if only for a sentence to the effect that *it*, that entity, exists. If we embrace propositions, every entity will perforce be a truth-maker for its own personal existential proposition. Which entities, and perhaps indeed what kind of entities the truth-makers are, will not be a matter for logic to decide. And perhaps surprisingly, Wittgenstein sensibly (and correctly) agrees at least with the first part of this:

5.557 The *application* of logic decides what elementary propositions there are. What belongs to its application, logic cannot anticipate.

Freed of the requirement to rest truth on simples and their concatenation as in Wittgenstein, we can allow untensed existential sentences about any item whatsoever to have the object in question as truth-maker. Whether such existential propositions are all the atomic propositions there are is a more difficult point, but it is worth entertaining as a speculative hypothesis. We can then add existential sentences about several things' existing, as in *Russell and Whitehead exist*, as positive but not atomic. Indeed it seems plausible to *define* positive sentences as those which are true if and only if certain things exist. We can further divide these into *positive specific*, where the things in question are named or otherwise univocally specified, and *positive generic*, where their kind, or a description under which they fall, is given. So singular and plural existentials like

Napoleon Bonaparte exists

John, Paul, George and Ringo exist

are positive specific, while "standard" existentials like

Tame tigers exist

Black holes exist

are positive generic. There will also be hybrids, as in

Julius Caesar and the soldiers of Legio XIII Gemina exist.

Hence

There is a kissing of Mary by John before T

is also a positive generic proposition: it is, using Barry Smith's felicitous term, "truth-maker hungry": it needs a truth-maker for it to exist in order to be true. Many grammatically simple sentences fall into this camp.

The negations of positive sentences are negative, though we have to be careful about the negations of complex positive sentences like *Russell and Whitehead exist*, since such a negation would be true if only one of the dynamic duo failed to exist. And the truth-functional compounds of elementary propositions compound in the usual way, so they in general are neither positive nor negative.

An interesting question arises as to whether atomic propositions may require the existence of more than one object. In Wittgenstein they do, though this is not apparent on the surface, because Wittgenstein's focus is on the state of affairs as sole truth-maker. But a state of affairs is a combination (*Verbindung*, 2.01) of objects just as an elementary sentence is a nexus or concatenation (*Zusammenhang*, *Verkettung*, 4.22) of names. So the state of affairs cannot exist unless its constituent objects exist. But of course these objects exist whether the state of affairs exists or not (2.024), or indeed whether any states of affairs involving them exist or not, so by Wittgenstein's lights we are allowed to say neither that the objects in question exist nor that they must exist if the state of affairs exists. We have already rejected these injunctions to silence. So, ignoring them, if *abc* is an atomic sentence about the objects *a*, *b* and *c*, the following are true:

Necessarily, '*abc*' is true if and only if the state of affairs that *abc* exists

Necessarily, the state of affairs that *abc* exists only if *a* exists and *b* exists and *c* exists
whence it follows, by simple modal propositional logic, that

Necessarily, '*abc*' is true if and only if *a* exists and *b* exists and *c* exists and the state of affairs that *abc* exists

That we do not *need* to mention *a*, *b* and *c* as truth-makers for '*abc*' comes about because the state of affairs that *abc* suffices to make '*abc*' true: the constituent objects *a*, *b* and *c* come along as part of the package. In non-Wittgensteinian parlance, the state of affairs is *existentially dependent* on its constituent objects. Precisely this existential dependence is what led Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith and myself to canvass existentially dependent moments ("tropes") as truth-makers for many everyday truths.²⁰ There can be no kiss without a kisser and a kissee, so any of John's kisses of Mary suffices to make it tenselessly true along Davidsonian lines that John kisseth Mary (ignoring tense for simplicity and expressing the tenseless verb by an obvious device). John and Mary can be dragged in as part of the story, but since the existence of any such kiss entails the existence of both of them, they can go without being mentioned as truth-makers, as can Wittgenstein's objects, even though the truth of the proposition that John kisseth Mary entails their existence (and indeed, by the

²⁰ Mulligan, Simons and Smith 1984.

nature of kissing, their simultaneous existence at the time of any such J-to-M kissing). And unlike Wittgenstein's objects, John and Mary signally fail to exist necessarily. So our moments or tropes are the truth-making counterparts in many cases of Wittgenstein's states of affairs.

Wittgenstein's extensionalism means he has to propose reductionist, deflationist or eliminativist accounts of modality, intentionality and other purportedly extensionality-busting propositions. The post-Tractarian consensus has been that such accounts will not work, and that such propositions should be taken variously as primitively distinct, or as requiring an analysis going far beyond the resources Wittgenstein has available. I shall shamelessly duck such issues in this essay: they take us too far afield and would require much more discussion.

The *Tractatus* starts and finishes with the world. 'Welt' is the second word of the numbered text as well as the eleventh-last. Given our rejection of facts and states of affairs, if we allow the term 'world' at all, it has to be the totality of things (objects), understanding this term not in Wittgenstein's restricted way but in the Austrian way as meaning any item, any *etwas* whatsoever:
so

Die Welt ist alles, was existiert.

Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Gegenstände.

The world is all that exists.

The world is the totality of objects.

The serious questions hanging over this are whether we are entitled to use the terms 'Gegenstand', 'existieren', 'Gesamtheit' (object, exist, totality) in a way which spans not just simples or substances or individuals, but anything whatever, even allowing that there might be infinitely many types of objects, as envisaged by Russell, and yet so that the notion of the totality of all of them is meaningful. Even with his restricted notion of object, Wittgenstein rejected the possibility, and always did so. The possibility of genuinely universal quantification over a single domain has been subject to much scrutiny.²¹ I think it is acceptable,²² but it requires us to be much more sophisticated about names and nominalization than Wittgenstein was in the *Tractatus*. As with so much of the work, and in complete contradiction of its gung-ho Preface, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* opened up questions, of logic, ontology, and their relationship, whose resolution is still outstanding.

²¹ Cf. Rayo and Uzquiano, eds., 2006.

²² Simons 2003.

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Note: References in the running text to the *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung / Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are by *Satznummer*, except for the Introduction and Preface, which are to pages in Wittgenstein 1961.

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