Seminar 1: Wittgenstein's Linguistic Turn

This seminar continues the story of the early years of the analytic tradition in which Frege, Moore, and Russell established a philosophical paradigm based on conceptual and logical analysis. As I explained in the previous course in 2015, their methods were new, but their aim was to solve traditional problems of ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. In this course I will continue the story, starting with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* which was more radical. I will then turn to the assimilation of Russell and Wittgenstein, along with other philosophical and scientific currents, that led to a view in which logical and linguistic analysis ceased to be a mere tool and came to be regarded as philosophy itself. Under the leadership of Morritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap the goal of logical empiricism was not to advance philosophical worldviews, which they believed would inevitably exceed the limits of intelligibility, but to systematize, and unify science. This course will evaluate their most important views.

The *Tractatus* begins with an abbreviated modal metaphysics of *facts*, consisting of metaphysically simple objects standing in relations to one another, which are the truthmakers for atomic propositions. For Wittgenstein, reality is nothing more than the totality of these facts. His goal in the *Tractatus* is to explain how thought, which finds its expression in language, represents this reality. In doing so, he sought to replace the Frege-Russell-Moore conception of propositions with a new analysis of meaningful, representational language. In the *Notebooks* he kept when producing the work, he says:

> My whole task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. (p. 39)

> The problem of negation, of conjunction, of true and false, are only reflections of the one great problem in the variously placed great and small mirrors of philosophy. (p. 40)

> Don't get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole of the *single* great problem. (p. 23)

To explain propositions, was, he thought, to identify the essence of representational thought and language. Doing this would, he believed, allow him to construct a criterion of intelligibility allowing him to survey and categorize all possible thought. This, he was convinced, was philosophy's only task.

Unlike Frege and early Russell, Wittgenstein didn't take propositions to be sentence meanings. Instead, he denied that there were any such things as *the meanings* of meaningful sentences. For him sentences are *linguistic facts* consisting of expressions standing in syntactic relations. For them to be meaningful is for them to be governed by conventions. E.g., the sentence 'PUCP is south of USC' consists in the two names standing in a syntactic relation R – which involves *the first name being followed by the phrase 'is south of' which is followed by the second name.* The sentence is the fact that the two names stand in that relation. The conventions governing it stipulate that the names are used to designate this university and my home university, and that structures in which two names stand in R are used *to represent* the referent of the first as being south of the referent of the second. One who uses the sentence in this way represents PUCP as being south of USC, from which its truth conditions follow.

Wittgenstein distinguishes the sentence, or propositional sign, from the proposition associated with it. The sentence "PUCP is south of USC" *is* governed by the conventions I mentioned, but it didn't have to be. Had it been governed by other conventions, it would have meant something different, and had different truth conditions.   However, *the proposition that PUCP is south of USC* has its truth conditions essentially. Thus tractarian propositions are not tractarian propositional signs.

What are they? Perhaps the tractarian proposition that PUCP is south of USC is *a use* of the propositional sign in accord with those conventions. Since to use S is to do something, *a use of S* is a cognitive doing, an act or operation. It is the act of using the two names to designate the two universities, while using the relation R to represent the referent of the first name as being south of the referent of the second. This *repeatable act type* represents PUCP as being south of USC because for an agent to perform it is for the agent to represent them that way. Since PUCP *is* south of USC, this use of the sentence is true. In short, uses of sentences are representational cognitive act types; for them to be true is for those who perform them to represent things as they really are.

Unfortunately, this elegant picture of propositions as cognitive act types isn't exactly what Wittgenstein had in mind. Uses of sentences do, as he says, *picture*, reality. But his pictures are supposed to be *facts,* not *acts*.

2.14 The picture consists in the fact that its elements are combined with one another in a definite way.

2.141 The picture is a fact.

2.21 The picture agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false.

So both truth bearers and propositional signs are facts. Still, he distinguishes the two.

3.11 *We use the perceptible sign of a proposition (spoken or written, etc.) as a projection of a possible situation*.

  The method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition.

3.12 The sign through which we express the thought I call the propositional sign. And the proposition is the propositional sign in its projective relation to the world.

3.13 *A proposition includes all that the projection includes, but not what is projected.*

Therefore, though what is projected is not itself included, its possibility is.

A proposition, therefore, does not actually contain its sense, but does contain the possibility of expressing it.

3.14 The propositional sign consists in the fact that its elements, the words, are combined in it in a definite way. The propositional sign is a fact.

Propositional signs are facts, but they aren't propositions. They are combinations of words which, though meaningful, aren't individuated by what they mean. It is tempting to say that the *sense of a proposition* is a possible fact that consists of the objects designated by its names being combined in the way they are represented as combining. If that were so, then the sense of the proposition would the possible fact that would make it true, were that fact actual. But for Wittgenstein, no fact is merely possible. He registers this by saying that propositions don't *contain* their senses. They can't because there are no facts for false propositions to contain, and because we must grasp the sense of a proposition before we know whether it is true or false.

Recall his words. "The method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition." The proposition we cognitively entertain represents the objects that are projections of the names in the propositional sign. The proposition represents them as standing in the relation that is the projection of the relation R that unites the names in the propositional sign. The proposition *"includes all that the projection includes, but not what is projected."* This last item, *what is projected,* is the sense of the proposition--the possible fact. It isn't "included" in the proposition. The same is true of the objects and relations that are projections of the constituents of the propositional sign. They are also not included. But the rest of the

projection is included. The proposition includes whatever is responsible for determining what the names and the syntactic relation R project. These items are the conventions governing the names and the relation. These are the things that determine what fact would have to exist if the proposition were to be true. These conventions *aren't* included in the propositional sign, but they *are* somehow included in the proposition as what one must know to understand its content.

How are they included? Although he isn't explicit, Wittgenstein does say that the proposition is *the propositional sign S in its projective relation to the world.* But this remark is problematic. The problem arises because the phrase *the propositional sign S in its projective relation to the world* doesn't pick out an entity other than S -- any more than the phrases *Scott-in-his-relation-to-USC, Scott-in-his-relation-to-his-wife,* or *Scott-in-his-relation-to-PUCP* pick out entities other than me of which I am a part. There aren't several Scotts, or Scott-complexes, just misleading ways of talking about the fact that I teach at USC, live with my wife, and visit PUCP. The same is true of Wittgenstein's propositional signs *in their projective relations to the world*.

This confused terminology parallels current talk of *interpreted* versus *uninterpreted* sentences. When speaking of English, these phrases don't designate two kinds of sentences; they are two ways of talking about the same sentences. Any English sentence is a syntactic structure *uses* of which are governed by linguistic conventions. These *uses* have their truth conditions essentially. To say S is meaningful is to say that the contingent conventions governing its use endow uses of it with representational content. It is these uses -- i.e., these cognitive acts -- that are propositions. Wittgenstein rightly denied that propositions are propositional signs, while wrongly trying to identify them with *sentences-as-used-in-accord-with-the-conventions*. The remedy is to reject those pseudo entities and to slightly amend the *Tractatus* by taking propositions to be uses of sentences.

In doing this we remain true to Wittgenstein's idea that although propositions aren't sentences, talk of propositions is talk about sentences. But the idea needs further correction. It is essential to thought that agents represent things as being certain ways. It is not essential to thought which particular artifacts, if any, they use to do this. *What use of which sentence is identical with the proposition that PUCP is south of USC?* There is no more reason to identify it with a use of an English sentence than there is to identify it with a use of a Spanish sentence, or with a use of a sentence of another language. The proposition we want is something common to all representationally identical uses of these sentences. Consider the representational act of using *some sentence or other* to represent PUCP as south of USC. One who uses any particular sentence in this way also performs a *general* representational act that one can perform without using that that particular sentence. Thus, if acts of using particular sentences are propositions, then this general representational act should is also a proposition. It is one that everyone using any individual sentence to predicate *being south of USC* of PUCP thereby entertains.

What about the act of predicating the property *being south of USC* of PUCP – i.e., cognizing the two as so-related *by any means whatsoever.* Surely, it is the best candidate for being the proposition that PUCP is south of USC. If it's *not* possible to perform this most general act without using a sentence, then it's identical with the act of using some sentence or other to do so. If it is possible to perform the general act without using any symbolic intermediary, then it alone is the proposition we seek. Of course, it's not really *the proposition* that PUCP is south of USC. There are many proposition with precisely that representational content.

Suppose then that atomic propositions are acts of representing objects as being certain ways, sometimes or always using sentences to do so. What are truth-functionally compound propositions? Shouldn't they also be acts of representing objects as being various ways?

There are two ways of achieving this result. One way associates any proposition that represents things as being *so-and-so* with the property *being such that things are so-and-so.* For this we need a cognitive operation that converts a proposition p into a one-place property, *being such that p*, that is guaranteed to apply either to everything or to nothing. Starting from the propositions *that a is F* and *that b is G,* we *derive* the properties *being such that a is F* and *being such that b is G.* Next we disjoin the properties, generating *being such that a is F or being such that b is G.* The disjunctive proposition *that a is F or b is G* is then the proposition that predicates this property of a and b. A different way of generating truth-functionally compound propositions posits a cognitive act of operating on the propositions *that a is F* and *that b is G* to directly produce *a proposition*, not a property, that represents the pair a,b as standing in the relation that consists of the first's *being F* or the second's *being G.* Whichever method is chosen can be applied to other truth functions as well.

Either way, truth-functionally compound propositions don't predicate truth or falsity of their propositional constituents. This is important. According to the *Tractatus,* nothing can be intelligibly *stated* about the representational relationship between propositions and the world. Since truth for propositions is defined as representational accuracy, predicating truth of a proposition violates this dogma. Partly for this reason, Wittgenstein denied that the predicate 'is true' expresses a property. In the *Notebooks* he says there is no difference between p and the claim that p is true. He even calls the latter a pseudo-proposition that attempts to say what can only be shown. In fact, no proposition predicates anything of propositions. The *Tractatus,* which says so much about propositions, says there are no propositions about propositions. There is, of course, no way to exclude propositions that predicate truth of other propositions from uses of sentences of the tractarian *metalanguage,* i.e. the language in which the *Tractatus* is written. Because of this, I will continue to say that negations are true whenever the negated propositions aren't true, and so on. But we must not take uses of sentences of *the ideal object language of thought* posited by the *Tractatus* as predicating anything of propositions. Since that language *must* include truth functions of atomic sentences, we can't take uses of any of them to predicate truth or falsity of propositions.

The only consistent alternative that I know of to this reconstruction of the tractarian theory of propositions -- which might have been what Wittgenstein had in mind -- is mysterious. It says that the disjunction of p and q is *the unique proposition* that must be true iff p is true or q is true – *without explaining what that proposition is, what it represents as being what ways,* or *how it can have truth conditions at all.* Since this view leads to numerous difficulties, I will put it aside, except for noting that it makes necessarily equivalent propositions identical.

Next consider general propositions, which Wittgenstein expresses using a joint denial operator *N* that takes indefinitely many propositions as arguments. Using it, we can formulate the proposition *that all Fs are Gs* using the tractarian sentence *Nx[N(NFx, Gx)].* To do this we adopt the convention that variables can be used to designate any object. The class of all such uses contains, for each object o, the proposition *N(NFo, Go)* that o is both F and ~G. Jointly denying all these propositions – which the proposition *Nx[N(NFx, Gx)]* does--can then be seen as predicating *not being F unless it is G* of everything. The idea is a generalization of what happens with Fregean definite descriptions. The Fregean proposition *that the F is G* predicates *determining something that is G* of the individual concept associated with 'the F', which in turn is an indirect way of predicting *being G* of the object determined by that concept. Similarly to predicate *not being F unless it is G* of everything is really to predicate *determining items that are not F unless they are G* of a general concept that determines each thing -- thereby indirectly predicating *not being F unless it is G* of each object. Although this idea isn't explicitly tractarian, it preserves the key tractarian insight

that turned the Frege/Russell view of propositions on its head. Instead of attributing the ability of agents to represent things as *being so and so* to their bearing a mysterious *entertainment* relation to an equally mysterious abstract object that primitively represents things as being so and so, he took the representational features of propositions to be derived from the cognitions of agents. Focusing on pictures, models, and sentences, he saw that *our use of them* to represent objects as bearing properties was crucial to understanding propositions. Although he failed to turn his insight into a real solution to the problem of the proposition, he gave us the materials for such a solution.

Think again about a use of a sentence to predicate a property of objects. That use is true at a world-state w iff were the universe in state w things would be as the use represents them. What that use represents is what any possible agent who used the sentence *in that way* would thereby represent. Since this doesn't change from world-state to world-state, *uses of sentences* have their truth conditions, essentially (even though the sentences themselves don't). This theory recognizes 3 types of propositions. Type 1 are acts of using *a specific sentence* to predicate a property of objects. Type 2 are acts of using *some sentence or other* to perform the predication. Type 3 are acts of performing the predication *whether or not one uses any sentence to do so*. Each type includes atomic and non-atomic propositions. Truth at the same world-states is never sufficient for propositions to be identical. Representing the same objects as bearing the same properties is always necessary and sufficient for the propositions to be *representationally identical*. If all that mattered was representational identity, genuine propositions could be limited to type 3. If, more plausibly, fine-grained propositions are needed to deal with the full range of Frege's puzzle, then all three types should be propositions.

This analysis captures the insights behind the tractarian account of atomic propositions while avoiding its problems with non-atomic propositions. It also avoids identifying necessarily equivalent propositions, which was a barrier to the breakthrough that Wittgenstein's account of propositions might otherwise have been. However, he himself would not have agreed. Without the identification of necessarily equivalent propositions, the *Tractatus* would *not* have had the far-reaching consequences that led him to take the problem of the proposition to be "the single great problem" of philosophy. Had he correctly conceived, and then solved, that problem, he would have seen that its solution, though important to philosophy, linguistics, and psychology, would not have been the world-changing event he dreamed of.

The Tractarian Test of Intelligibility

According to the *Tractatus*, every intelligible proposition P falls into one of two categories: either (i) P is contingent (true at some world-states and false at others), in which case P is a truth-function of atomic propositions and knowable to be true, or false, only by empirical investigation, or (ii) P is a tautology or contradiction that can be known to be so by formal calculations. For Wittgenstein, tautologies and contradictions aren't used to state anything, or to give any information about the world, but their truth or falsity can be calculated, which reveals something about our symbol system. Since many uses of language don't fit into either category, they are meaningless. This is the intelligibility test. However, there are difficulties applying it. Since Wittgenstein claimed it was impossible to identify atomic propositions, it is hard to determine which propositions are truth functions of them. Since he doesn't give logical forms of natural-language sentences, one has trouble applying it to sentences like (1a), which seems necessary, even though its potential logical forms, (1b) or (1c), aren't tautologies.

1a.   If a thing is red (all over), then it isn't green (all over).

1b. $\forall x\, (Rx \supset \sim Gx)$
1c. $N(x[N(N(Rx), N(Gx))])$

Wittgenstein worried about this.

6.3751   For two colors, e.g. to be at one place in the visual field is impossible, logically impossible, for it is excluded by the logical structure of color.

Let us consider how this contradiction presents itself in physics. Somewhat as follows: that a particle cannot at the same time have two velocities; i.e. that at the same time it cannot be in two places; i.e. that particles that are in different places at the same time cannot be identical.

(It is clear that the logical product of two elementary propositions can neither be a tautology nor a contradiction. The assertion that a point in the visual field has two different colors at the same time, is a contradiction.)

Wittgenstein seems to have taken (1a) to be meaningful and necessary, and so not to have taken *that o is red* and *that o is green* to be atomic propositions, or (1b)/(1c) to be its logical form. He doesn't give the logical form, and his example from physics doesn't help. Even if color incompatibility could be assimilated to the physical impossibility of (2a), the apparent logical form (2b) of (2a) isn't a formal contradiction, so the problem remains.

2a.   o is at place p at time t and o is also at another place p' at time t.
2b.   Lxpt & Lxp't

Example (3) poses a different problem.

3.   John believes (says/ hopes / has proved) that the earth is round.

The sentence *the earth is round* occurs in (3). In the *Tractatus*, the only way for R to occur in a sentence S of the ideal tractarian object-language is for S to be a truth function of R, or R plus other sentences. (3) poses a threat to this doctrine. If (3) is meaningful and if the logical form of the proposition it expresses is one to which 'the earth is round' contributes the proposition *that the earth is round* as a constituent, then that proposition must be among the bases of the truth-functional operations used in constructing the proposition (3) expresses. That can be so only if replacing 'the earth is round' in (3) with any other true sentence preserves truth. Since truth preservation is not guaranteed, tractarian doctrines tell us that either (3) is nonsense, or it is meaningful, but its logical form is one to which 'the earth is round' *doesn't* contribute the proposition *that the earth is round*. Since it is hard to envision what that logical form might be, it appears that Wittgenstein must say that (3) fails to express a proposition.

5.541   At first sight it looks as if it were also possible for one proposition to occur in another in a different way.

Particularly with certain forms of proposition in psychology, such as 'A believes that p is the case' and 'A has the thought p', etc.

For if these are considered superficially, it looks as if the proposition p stood in some kind of relation to an object A.

5.542   It is clear, however, that 'A believes that p', 'A has the thought p', and 'A says p' are of the form '"p" says p': and this does not involve a correlation of a fact with an object, but rather the correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects.

Wittgenstein claims that the real logical form of (3) is something along the lines of *"p" says (that) p*, which presumably means that the logical form of (3) is (4).

4.   "the earth is round" says (that) the earth is round

Wittgenstein was probably thinking that when one believes something, one constructs a mental picture of a possible state of affairs – a representation of it. The representation is a fact and the state of affairs represented is a possible fact. Since one represents the other, the elements in the two facts are correlated. The expressions in the representing fact are

correlated with things in the world that make up the non-linguistic fact, the earth's being round.

But it is hard to accept the claim that (4) is the logical form of (3). Since (3) specifies an agent, John, and an attitude, belief, while (4) doesn't, at best (4) gives us *part* of the content of (3), which tells us that *John accepts a representation that says that the earth is round.* However, we still have a problem. 'The earth is round' has an unquoted occurrence in (4) that doesn't make a truth-functional contribution to the proposition expressed by a use of (4). If it did, replacing that occurrence with an occurrence of any other true sentence, wouldn't change truth value. But, as (5) shows, it does.

5.   'The earth is round' says (that) 3 + 3 = 6.

Thus (4) poses the same trouble for tractarian doctrines that (3) does.

Perhaps the idea is that (3) and (4) aren't meaningful and don't express propositions, because they try to *state* something about how language and the world relate that can only be shown.

4.12   Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.

4.212   Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it.

4.1211   Thus one proposition 'Fa' shows that the object a occurs in its sense, two propositions 'Fa' and 'Ga' show that the same object is mentioned in both of them.

4.1212   What can be shown, cannot be said.

The *Tractatus* has no room for statements about the relationship between language and the world. But why should we accept that? To understand language one must grasp the relation between language and the world that gives words their meanings. One might argue that once one grasps that relationship, there is nothing left to state. But that isn't convincing. All that is shown is that one who doesn't know a language couldn't *learn* language by being *told* what the relation between language and the world is. One couldn't learn language that way because one couldn't understand the instructions. It is like saying you can't learn to read by reading a book that tells you how to read. That doesn't stop psychologists discovering the elements of reading and publishing them for others to read. The point applies language in general.

For example, (6) is meaningful and can be used to state a true proposition, even though its use says something about the relation between language and the world.

6.   'Firenze' names Florence.

If I use (7) to tell you about a man's height, I use the convention that the word 'Bill' names Bill to say something about him.

7.   Bill is tall

My use of (7) *shows* this without stating it. One might add that no use of a sentence, states every fact about its own relation to the world that allows it to say what it does. But it doesn't follow that no sentence can be used to state *any* of facts about the relations between its expressions and the world that allow it to say what it does. Nor does it follow that no use of one sentence can state a fact about the relationship between some expression and the world that allows the use of *another* to say what it does. One can use (8) to state a fact about the relationship between language and the world that allows uses of (7) and (8) to say what they do.

8.   'Bill' refers to Bill.

The Limits of Intelligibility: Value, the Meaning of Life, and Philosophy

Wittgenstein denies that sentences about what is good, bad, or beautiful state facts.

6.4 *All propositions are of equal value.*

6.41 *The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists – and if it did exist, it would have no value.*

   If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

   What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.
   It must lie outside the world.

It is hard to imagine foundational statements of value – that happiness alone is good, that all other things being equal lying is wrong – are true at some possible world-states and false at others. It is also hard to imagine empirical observations being needed to find out whether they are true. These judgments also appear *not* to be tautologies or contradictions. Value judgments play a roles guiding our actions that tautologies (contradictions) don't. Also, if value judgments were tautologies (contradictions), then, according to the *Tractatus,* their truth (or falsity) would discoverable by calculation alone, which seems impossible. So, according to the *Tractatus,* sentences containing evaluative words don't express propositions.

6.42 *So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics.*

So there are no moral problems. Clarifying language doesn't *solve* moral problems, it *dissolves* them; it allows us to see that there aren't any.

It might seem that one who characterizes ethics and aesthetics as meaningless would take values to be unworthy of attention. Not Wittgenstein. Although he thought of evaluative claims as lacking sense, he thought of them as important. What was important, he thought, was how one lived one's life, what attitude one took towards things, and how one acted – even though it is impossible to say, or even to think, anything sensible about these matters. For Wittgenstein, the happy person and the unhappy person might not differ in what they know or believe. Both might know everything about any discipline that studies the world. They might believe the same things. Still, one is happy and one isn't. The happy one wakes up in the morning with anticipation and a sense of well being, delighting in the day's activities, and in other people. The unhappy one feels and behaves in the opposite way. The difference between them has nothing to do with what they think, or believe.

This picture conflicts with one traditional conception of philosophy. Philosophy has sometimes been taken to be a discipline that shares the highest aspirations of science and religion. As highest science, its task has been taken to be the discovery of the most fundamental truths about reality, and the place of human beings in it. As deepest religion, its task has been taken to be the discovery of what excellence and happiness in human life consist in, and how they can be achieved. These goals – describing reality and learning how to live – have been thought to be mutually reinforcing. The idea has been that excellence in the art of living is the result of knowing important truths about reality and ourselves. Wittgenstein challenged that. For him, the truth about how to live was *not* a deep and difficult mystery for the philosopher, or anyone else, to discover; it was also not a simple matter we somehow know in advance. Excellence in living is not a matter of truth or knowledge at all. It is a matter of one's attitude to life.

For Wittgenstein, ethics, religion, and talk about the meaning of life is relegated to the unthinkable and the unsayable. The same is true of all philosophy. There are no meaningful philosophical propositions, no genuine philosophical questions, and no philosophical problems to solve. According to Wittgenstein, all the disputes in philosophy are due to confusion about how language works. The job of philosophy is to strip away the linguistic disguise that, in ordinary language, conceals the true logical forms of our thoughts. This was the beginning of was later called *the linguistic turn in philosophy*.

>   4.11   The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science.

>   4.111   Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.

>   4.112.   Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts.
>   Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.
>   A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.
>   Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions.
>   Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries.

It was always obvious that in writing the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein didn't follow his own advice. Rather, he practiced the kind of philosophy that the *Tractatus* condemns as nonsensical. As he realized, his use of language in the *Tractatus* nonsense by his own criteria.

>   6.53   The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – this method would be the only strictly correct one.

>   6.54   My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

>   7.   What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

There are three ways of viewing this position. On one way, the *Tractatus* is self-defeating, despite its illuminating insights. Thus, we should strive to find ways of preserving its insights while avoiding its inadequacies.

On the second view, the *Tractatus* is acceptable as it stands. In it, Wittgenstein deliberately violates the rules of language in order to *show* us what those rules are and to reveal what the most basic knowledge of reality is. To get us to *see* what the rules of intelligible thought and language are, he had to break them. To make the most significant knowledge of reality available to us, he had to communicate the reality that can only be shown, not by any individual proposition, but by our entire system of propositions.

A third view has come into its own among some interpreters of Wittgenstein in recent decades. On this view, Wittgenstein deliberately set out to produce a compelling but clearly incoherent philosophical work -- not to reveal any showable but unstateable truths, but to demonstrate the impossibility of philosophy. I don't think that this interpretation withstands scrutiny. The idea that an intentional descent into incoherence should have been expected to convince others that it was the upper limit of philosophical achievement strains credulity. I don't see how one who has worked through the many problems with the tractarian view of representational thought and language could find such a view compelling.   The most challenging problems are *not* meaningless doctrines that seem meaningful.   The main

problems are ones in which good ideas that point in promising directions veer off into falsehood. This is lost in an interpretation that posits intentional but universal nonsense.

Such an interpretation obliterates the advances in the *Tractatus*. The rejection of non-linguistic Frege-Russell propositions, the embryonic conception of propositions as uses of sentences to represent things as standing in relations to one another, the embryonic theory of propositional truth as consisting in objects being the ways that true propositions represent them to be, the theory of truth-functional operators as operations rather than names of logical objects or constituents of facts, the "semantic" analysis of the tautologies of the propositional calculus (according to which they are all on a par) as opposed to axiomatic or other proof-theoretic accounts (according to which some truths of logic are more basic than others), and the attempt to extend this semantic account to logic as a whole, were steps in the right direction. We read the *Tractatus* not only to understand its historical impact, but also to learn from and perfect its insights. All of this is obliterated in an interpretation that posits intentional self-refutation.

The correct view is that the *Tractatus* is locally illuminating – both for its insights and its errors – despite being globally self-refuting. In addition to containing valuable insights, it is an object lesson in the absurdity of identifying five distinct types of truth -- *necessary truth, apriori truth, truth in virtue of meaning, logical truth, logically provable truth.* Nothing was more significant in leading Wittgenstein down this disastrous path than his pre-Gödelian, pre-Tarskian conception of logic as the study, not of *sentences* of formal languages, but of *propositions* expressed in both formal and natural languages. It is the latter, not the former, that are the objects of knowledge and necessity. It is the structurally simplest *sentences* of the former, not the latter, that must be logically (but not necessarily or conceptually) independent, and that provide the basis for understanding and evaluating *logically* complex sentences.

It is a melancholy fact that the relationship between sentences and propositions is difficult, complex, and still insufficiently understood. But enough progress has been made to allow us to identify aspects of Wittgenstein's the picture-theory and his incipient analysis of propositions as *uses of sentences* as seminal breakthroughs. These breakthroughs were not wholly lost; they continued to play modest roles in Wittgenstein's later philosophy and in the "ordinary language" school of philosophy he helped to inspire. But his most important tractarian insights were, until very recently, all but lost -- and indeed eclipsed by the unfortunate tractarian identification of necessarily equivalent propositions. Fortunately, this is no longer so.

Wittgenstein's Attack on Identity in the *Tractatus*

In addition to redoing quantification in the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein sought to redo identity, which he couldn't take to be a relation on objects.

(i)   If it were, then for each o, there would be a fact consisting of o's being combined with o in the requisite way. But if we try to think of such a fact, all we end up thinking of is o itself, which, it would seem, is an object, not a fact.

(ii)   If identity were a relation on objects and there were a convention to use '=' to represent objects as standing in that relation, then there would be elementary propositions expressed by uses of 'a = b', 'b = c', and 'a = c'. But these propositions are not logically independent of each other. Hence, there can be no such propositions.

There is also deeper worry (iiia), which is exacerbated in (iiib).

(iiia)   If identity were a relation on objects, then to say of o that it is identical with o would be to say something trivial and uninformative, while to say of some distinct o* that it is identical with o would be say something too obviously false to ever say.

(iiib)   If identity were a relation on objects, then to say of o that it is identical with o would be to assert a necessary a priori truth, with no cognitive significance, while to say of two different objects that they are identical would be to assert a necessary a priori falsehood, which, in the *Tractatus*, is a senseless contradiction.

Although one can understand Wittgenstein's concern over (i) and (ii), they need not trouble those who don't subscribe to tractarian doctrines about atomic facts and elementary propositions. But (iiia), which is a version of Frege's puzzle, is genuinely problematic. Nor is (iiib) easily dismissible, even if one rejects Wittgenstein's attempt to reduce both metaphysical and epistemic modalities to logical modalities. Since the proposition *that o is identical to o* is both necessary and knowable a priori, it is natural to think that when o isn't identical to o* *the proposition that o ≠ o** is also both necessary and knowable a priori, in which case the truth or falsity of every elementary proposition involving identity is knowable apriori. If that were so, one might question whether such propositions were ever worth asserting or denying.

Things become more puzzling when one notices that many thoughts we express using the '=' seem perfectly significant. Are there really no such significant thoughts? Are they all really nonsense, or are they genuine thoughts that need expressing in some other way?

5.53   Identity of the object I express by identity of the sign and not by means of a sign of identity. Difference of the objects by difference of the signs.

5.5301 That identity is not a relation between objects is obvious.

5.5303 Roughly speaking: to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing.

5.531   I write therefore not "F(a,b) & a = b", but "F(a,a)" (or "F(b,b)"). And not "F(a,b) & ~(a=b)", but "F(a,b)".

5.532 And analogously: not "(∃x,y) [F(x,y) & x = y]", but "(∃x) F(x,x)"; and not "(∃x,y) [F(x,y) & ~(x = y)]", but "(∃x,y) F(x,y)".

5.5321   Instead of "∀x (Fx → x = a)" we therefore write e.g. "[(∃x) Fx → (Fa & ~(∃x,y) (Fx & Fy))]". And the proposition "*only* one x satisfies F( )" reads: "[(∃x) Fx & ~(∃x,y) (Fx & Fy)]".

5.533   The identity sign is therefore not an essential constituent of logical notation.

5.534 And we see that apparent propositions like: "a = a", "(a = b & b = c) → a = c", "∀x (x=x)", "∃x (x = a)", etc. cannot be written in a correct logical notation at all.

5.535   So all problems disappear which are connected with such pseudo-propositions.

The ideas are a mixture of the unremarkable and the astounding. 5.53, 5.531, 5.532, 5.5321 illustrate a notational proposal for expressing propositions without the identity sign that are truth-conditionally equivalent to propositions normally expressed with it. 5.5301, 5.5303, 5.534, and 5.535 provide a general statement of Wittgenstein's proposal and explain why it is philosophically required. But this is truly puzzling. The articulation of the proposal in 5.53 and the statement of the rationale for in in the next two passages use the very notion they repudiate. But if identity makes no sense, how are we supposed to understand Wittgenstein's proposal, or to know how to implement it?

5.53 tells us that *for all objects o_1 and o_2 Wittgenstein will express the claim that o_1 is identical with o_1 by using a single name, and he will express the claim that o_1 is not identical with o_2 by using non-identical names*. But if the claim that *that a is, or isn't, identical with b* is a mere pseudo-proposition, then the claim announcing Wittgenstein's proposal is also a pseudo-proposition. How can it be informative, if the notion required to understand it makes no sense? The same point can be made about attempts to implement the proposal. To do so we must know, for various expressions e_1 and e_2, whether or not e_1 is identical with e_2, while also knowing, of the objects o_1 and o_2 named by a pair of expressions, whether or not they are identical. So, if, as we are told, identity makes no sense, then Wittgenstein hasn't introduced any alternative; if, on the other hand, identity does make sense, then we have no need for his notational alternative, even though we can understand and evaluate whether we would lose anything by adopting it.

Since we can't give up identity, we must address the puzzles that led Wittgenstein to reject it. The key passage is 5.5303, which combines (iiia) and (iiib). The former is Frege's puzzle for Millianism about names—the doctrine that the meaning of a name is its referent—and the corollary that if n and m are two names of o, then the proposition expressed by a use of ⌈n = m⌉ is the trivial proposition that o is identical with o. This puzzle is challenging because that proposition is necessary, knowable a priori, and, seemingly, uninformative. The classical Fregean response denies that the proposition expressed by ⌈n = m⌉ is the proposition that o = o. Instead, Frege takes it to be an abstract combination of the different meanings of n, m, and of '=' (whatever they may be). Wittgenstein rejects this mysterious entity. Not seeing an alternative, he was led to the present impasse.

There is an alternative implicit in the *Tractatus*-inspired analysis of propositions. The analysis identifies some propositions with *uses of sentences* to represent things as bearing various properties and relations, while identifying other propositions as similar acts of representation, abstracting away from which, if any, sentences are used.

P1.   The cognitive act of using n to pick out o, m to pick out o, and ⌈n = m⌉ to represent the objects so named as being identical.

P2.   The cognitive act of using n to pick out o and ⌈n = n⌉ to represent o as being identical with o.

P3.   The act of representing o as being identical with o, however o is picked out and whatever

sentence, if any, is used.

Since one can perform the first of these acts without performing the second, proposition P1 is different from proposition P2. Since anyone who performs either of these acts thereby performs the third, but not conversely, P3 is different from both P1 and P2. It will then follow that anyone who entertains, asserts, believes, or knows either P1 or P2 thereby entertains, asserts, believes, or knows P3—but not conversely.

Next we take advantage of the fact that one can use each member of a pair of different names to designate the same object without knowing that the names designate the same thing. With this, we get the result that entertaining, asserting, believing, or knowing P2 and P3 is not sufficient for entertaining, asserting, believing, or knowing P1. So, whereas, P2 and P3 are knowable a priori (because there are ways of entertaining them for which no empirical knowledge is needed to determine their truth), P1 isn't knowable a priori. Since P1 is informative in ways that P2 and P3 are not, to assert P1 is not to say something too obvious to be worth saying. Nor, if n* and n designate different objects, is the assertion made using $\lceil n^* = n \rceil$ epistemically equivalent to the assertion of a contradiction, or to the assertion of any other obvious falsehood. In this way one may dispose of the objection (iiia) to the identity predicate. To do so, one must disregard Wittgenstein's denial of the assumption that one can't understand two codesignative names without knowing them to be codesignative. His adoption of that assumption was one reason he was led to his impasse about identity.

What about (iiib). Let o_1 and o_2 be distinct objects, let n and m be two names for o_1, let r name o_2, and let P1–P3 be as above. Finally, let P1~ and P3~ be as follows.

P1~   The cognitive act of using n to pick out o_1, r to pick out o_2, and $\lceil n \neq r \rceil$ to represent the objects so named as *not* being identical.

P3~   The cognitive act of representing o_1 as *not* being identical with o_2, however the two objects are picked out and whatever sentence, if any, is used.

Then, all five propositions are necessary truths, but only P2 and P3 are knowable a priori. P1 and P1~ are not knowable a priori because knowing them to be true requires empirical information about what the names refer to. P3~ fails to be knowable a priori because there is *no way* of entertaining it for which empirical evidence isn't required to determine its truth.[1] All of this would, of course, have been foreign to Wittgenstein, telling as it does against his collapsing of epistemic and metaphysical modalities. But it does help us more fully understand how and why his discussion of identity ended up in a *cul-de-sac*.

Having reinstated identity, we can evaluate his notational proposal, understood not as a way of eliminating a problematic notion, but as an alternative way of securing the benefits of a useful one. So understood, it is easy to see its shortcomings. Suppose Wittgenstein's suggestion is correct: for every truth that can be expressed using '=', there is a truth-conditionally equivalent proposition expressed without '=' in which different names always designate different objects (and similarly for uses of different variables). This is not sufficient to vindicate Wittgenstein's proposal. *What must be shown is that for every sentence $S_=$ containing '=' which an agent A knows he or she could use to express a proposition p, there is an alternative sentence S_W without '=' that A knows that he or she could use in accord with Wittgenstein's notational rule to*

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1 See pp. 375–76 of Soames (2003a).

express a proposition q that is truth-conditionally equivalent to p. This can't be shown, because it isn't true.

Suppose I don't know whether the names 'm' and 'n' (rigidly) designate the same object, but I do know I can use (1) to express a true proposition p.

1.   Fn & Gm & (~(n = m) → Rnm)

I know that p is necessarily equivalent to the tractarian proposition $p_=$ I could assert using (2a) *if 'm' and 'n' are codesignative*, while also knowing that p is necessarily equivalent to the proposition $p_{\neq}$ I could use (2b) to assert *if 'm' and 'n' designate different things.*

2a. Fn & Gn
 b. Fn & Gm & Rnm

But I don't use either sentence to assert $p_=$ or $p_{\neq}$ because I don't know whether or not the names designate the same thing. Since I don't know whether or not 'm' and 'n' designate different things, I don't know whether I can use (2b) in accord with tractarian conventions. Thus, I don't know how to express in tractarian notation the knowledge I know I can express using (1). I do, of course, know I can express that knowledge without employing '=' *by using (3) in accord with the ordinary, non-tractarian, notational convention.*

3.   (Fn & Gn) ∨ (Fn & Gm & Rnm)

But I don't know that I can use (3) in accord with tractarian conventions, because to know that I would have to know that 'n' and 'm' designate different objects, which I don't. Hence, the tractarian proposal leaves no way of knowing how to express the knowledge I wish to express.