

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus*

**1.
Historical Background**

1872: Bertrand Russell born in Ravenscroft, Wales.

1889: Ludwig Wittgenstein born in Vienna, Austria.

1908: Wittgenstein begins studies in aeronautical engineering at Manchester University. Study philosophy of mathematics leads him to the work of Frege.

1911-1913: Wittgenstein studies with Russell at Cambridge.

1914: Russell delivers *Our Knowledge of the External World* as lectures at Harvard.

1914-1918: Wittgenstein spends World War I in the Austrian army. He writes the notes for *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* while serving.

1918: Russell publishes *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*.

1921: Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* published in German.

1922: Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* translated into English.

1929: Wittgenstein returns to Cambridge after exposure to discussions of the Vienna Circle.

(Books: *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Philosophical Grammar*)

1930-1940s: Wittgenstein delivers lectures at Cambridge.

1951: Wittgenstein dies. Last words: "Tell them I've had a wonderful life".

1970: Russell dies.

**2.
Facts**

1 The world is everything that is the case.

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

What is Wittgenstein saying here? Well, he is *not* denying that there are things (as we shall be reminded of subsequently). Rather, what he is saying is that the totality of facts is something over and above the totality of things, and that a complete characterization of the world can be given in terms of the totality of facts.

Facts? Facts are what make statements/sentences true or false. Consider the sentence 'Socrates is wise', and suppose that it is true. Socrates himself (the object) does not make this sentence true. Rather, a certain fact makes the sentence true. Facts are truths. According to Wittgenstein, facts are as equally real as objects.

Promissory note: we will say some more about facts in section 3 of the handout.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.

1.12 For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also that is not the case.

1.13 The facts in logical space are the world.

Here, Wittgenstein claims further that the world consists of facts—and nothing but facts. Facts will comprise what is the case (the truths) and also determine what is not the case (the falsities).

**3.
Facts, states of affairs and objects**

Some more about facts:

2 What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts.

Atomic facts? Wittgenstein tells us that:

2.01 An atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things).

This sounds different than Russell. According to Russell, an atomic fact consists of at least one simple object (sense datum) and at least one universal. Here, Wittgenstein claims that atomic facts consist of objects. There is no mention of properties (universals). At the fundamental level, it would seem, we have just objects—no properties.

What are objects, then? At this point, Wittgenstein tells us:

2.0122 The thing is independent, in so far as it can occur in all *possible* circumstances, but this form of independence is a form of connexion with the atomic fact, a form of dependence.

Here it seems that what Wittgenstein is saying is that objects have the possibility of occurring in a number of atomic facts. But they must occur in *some* atomic fact. Consider what he says here by way of (what seems to be) a comparison:

2.131 A speck in a visual field need not be red, but it must have a colour.... A tone must have a pitch, the object of the sense of touch a hardness, etc.

4.

Objects as simples

Wittgenstein then turns to what objects are like. He tells us:

2.02 The object is simple.

What does it mean to say that an object is simple? One thing he seems to mean is that such an object cannot be analysed into further complexes of other objects. Simple objects are not ‘made up of’ other objects:

2.201 Every statement about complexes can be analysed into a statement about their constituent parts, and into those propositions which completely describe the complexes.

Why might we think that there are simple objects? Wittgenstein appears to provide an argument for their existence in what follows. The interpretation of this argument is controversial—indeed, it is controversial whether what he gives us is an argument at all. But, we’ll take a shot at it. He tells us:

2.021 Objects form the substance of the world. Therefore they cannot be compound.

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

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

The argument seems to go like this:

1. Without the existence of simple objects, it would be impossible to represent the world (“picture the world” in thought).
2. But we do represent the world.
- C. So, there must be simple objects.

But, we have to ask: Why should we believe that premise 1 is true?

5.

Objects as simple?

Remember the argument for this claim:

2.021 Objects form the substance of the world. Therefore they cannot be compound.

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

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

The argument seems to go like this:

3. Without the existence of simple objects, it would be impossible to represent the world (“picture the world” in thought).
4. But we do represent the world.
- D. So, there must be simple objects.

Why should we accept 1? That is, why does the possibility of representation require the existence of simple objects?

In order to see why we must accept (1), we need to understand two things about 2.021-2.0212:

- (i) Why would the absence of simple objects make whether a proposition has sense depend on whether another proposition is true?
- (ii) Why would this situation mean that we could not form a picture of the world? (i.e. how do we get from 2.011 to 2.012?)

Regarding (i):

- (1) Suppose that every object was complex.
- (2) Then every name would stand for a complex object.
- (3) "The name means the object. The object is its meaning." (3.203)
- (4) So, a name is meaningful only if the object it purports to refer to exists.
- (5) So, a proposition containing the name will be meaningful only if the object the name purports to refer to exists.
- (6) The existence of a complex object depends on its parts being arranged in a certain way.
- (7) Its parts will be arranged in that way only if some proposition, according to which they are arranged in that way, is true.
- (C1) Therefore, if every object was complex, then whether a proposition was meaningful would depend on whether another proposition was true.

Regarding (ii):

- (8) We can picture the world only if we can understand the meanings of propositions (or of the propositions expressed by sentences or contained in thought).
- (9) We can't understand the meanings of propositions.
- (C2) Therefore, we can't picture the world.

The regress argument for (9):

- (9i) A sentence S is meaningful if and only if there is some other sentence S^* which is true. (principle from C1)
 - (9ii) A sentence S can be true only if it is meaningful. (principle)
 - (9iii) Consider the sentence S_1 .
 - (9iv) S_1 is meaningful if and only if there is some sentence S_2 which is true. (from 9i)
 - (9v) S_2 is true only if it is meaningful. (from 9ii)
 - (9vi) S_2 is meaningful if and only if there is some other sentence S_3 which is true. (from 9i)
 - (9vii) S_3 can be true only if it is meaningful. (from 9ii)
- And so on ad infinitum....*

6. Objects and change

Remember that, at 2.021, Wittgenstein tells us that objects are the substance of the world. He then goes on to tell us:

2.024 Substance is what exists independently of what is the case.

And several lines later:

2.0271 The object is the fixed, the existent; the configuration is the changing, the variable.

Objects are substance. Objects, then, exist independently of what is the case. What does this mean? Objects do not change; rather, they underlie and explain change. Change is a matter of state of affairs coming into, or going out of, existence. States of affairs (i.e. atomic facts) are constituted by configurations of objects:

2.0272 The configuration of the objects forms the atomic fact.

So far we seem to have Wittgenstein claiming that objects underlie change, here, in this world. But, it would seem that there are two ways that Wittgenstein sees objects underlying change. But objects are also what are in common between the actual world and possible worlds:

2.022 It is clear that however different from the real one an imagined world may be, it must have something—a form—in common with the real world.

2.023 The fixed form consists of the objects.

That is, objects underlie 'modal change': the difference in possible states of affairs, 'world-to-world change'.