

Introduction

It was with hesitation that I undertook an exposition of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and, after two years of effort, I find with a grim satisfaction that my presentiments are well substantiated. The *Tractatus* still remains for me in some details a closed book; and, while I have a more or less definite opinion of the fundamentals of Wittgenstein's view, I do not feel confident enough to assert that my interpretation of the *Tractatus* does represent accurately and faithfully Wittgenstein's own point of view. I do feel, however, that in essentials I have caught the spirit of the book.

The most formidable obstacle to understanding the *Tractatus* lies, as can be seen even from its first few sentences, in the obscure style of Wittgenstein's presentation. Although the *Tractatus* has a peculiar poetic charm, its terse, cryptic, aphoristic pronouncements are not conducive to clear understanding. My book might well serve as an outline of Wittgenstein's view for those who have already been initiated into it, but it can hardly be considered as a satisfactory exposition for the novice. Wittgenstein's own statement in his Preface, that 'This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it', although probably intended to refer to the intrinsic difficulties of the subject, is really a good, even

if not intended, comment on its style. The difficulty in understanding the *Tractatus* probably lies deeper than merely its style of presentation. It may be due to an unresolved philosophical conflict in Wittgenstein at the time he was jotting down his ideas during his service with the Austrian Army in World War I. On the flyleaf of Moritz Schlick's copy of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein wrote, 'Jeder dieser Sätze ist der Ausdruck einer Krankheit' ('Every one of these propositions is the expression of an illness'). My guess is that this *Krankheit* was due, at least on the philosophic level, to the conflict between Wittgenstein's growing positivistic convictions and his metaphysical tendencies. In the background of his pithy pronouncements one hears not only the clear voices of Frege and Russell but the muffled voices of Kant, Schopenhauer, Plato, and even St. Augustine. And this conflict is reflected even in Wittgenstein's vocabulary.

But whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the *Tractatus* is in many of its passages so obscure that it would be impossible, I believe, to gather the fundamentals of Wittgenstein's view without some help from people who have been initiated into it directly by the author himself. Unfortunately, not much has been written on Wittgenstein by people well acquainted with him. My main sources of information here were Bertrand Russell, F. P. Ramsey, and Moritz Schlick.

Among the philosophical writings I used in connection with this essay, Russell's works naturally play a predominant part. Wittgenstein was a pupil of Russell's, and Russell's influence on Wittgenstein, we may conclude, must have been very great; externally this is substantiated by the fact that Russell is alluded to in the *Tractatus* (unfortunately mostly without specific references) more often than anyone else. In fact, except for a few references to Frege, Russell's is the only name that appears in the *Tractatus* with any frequency. The obvious dependence on Russell did not, however, prevent Wittgenstein from severely criticizing his teacher, as will be

seen in my third chapter. Since Russell has influenced me more than any other contemporary philosopher, my interpretation of the *Tractatus* has probably been more affected by Russell than I am consciously aware of, though I frequently disagree with him. F. P. Ramsey's writings were of help in clearing up some details of the *Tractatus*. Many details of my exposition of the *Tractatus* are derived from the lectures of and discussions with Professor Schlick, and I have been generally strongly influenced by Schlick's logical positivism or, as he himself prefers to call it, consistent empiricism. Yet I differ considerably from Schlick in my basic interpretation of the philosophy underlying the *Tractatus*. I believe that the *Tractatus* is much more metaphysical than Schlick considers it to be.

In current philosophic literature references to Wittgenstein are frequent but incidental. The only articles so far [1933] published in English on Wittgenstein which are worth mentioning in this connection are: Professor Schlick's article in the *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy*, and his articles in the *College of the Pacific Publications in Philosophy*; and 'Logical Positivism' by A. E. Blumberg and H. Feigl in the *Journal of Philosophy*, May 21, 1931. Wittgenstein himself since the appearance of the *Tractatus* has published only one short article, 'Some Remarks on Logical Form', in the *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume IX*, 1929. The promised book on Wittgenstein by Friedrich Waismann is long overdue.

Though I have used Russell, Ramsey, and Schlick extensively, I do not attempt to draw explicit connections between their views and those of Wittgenstein, except occasionally in the case of Russell. Since my purpose in writing this book is merely to make a sensible and, so far as I can, consistent interpretation of the *Tractatus*, I have adopted Wittgenstein's attitude: 'How far my efforts agree with those of other philosophers I will not decide. Indeed what I have

here written makes no claim to novelty in points of detail; and therefore I give no sources, because it is indifferent to me whether what I have thought has already been thought before me by another' (*Tractatus*, Preface). It would, of course, be possible to show some parallels and many contrasts between the views of Wittgenstein and those of many other philosophers, but I have usually avoided doing this. Whenever I quote from or refer to other philosophers I do so merely as a device of exposition, namely, to bring out some vague feature of the topic under discussion by appealing to the familiar views of well-known philosophers. I do not intend to impute to Wittgenstein the views of the authors quoted, but I use the quotations merely as rhetorical illuminations unless, of course, I have otherwise indicated. My main purpose here is to understand Wittgenstein, and I find that to be a sufficiently difficult task without lengthy comparisons with other philosophers.

I am making a rather free interpretation of the *Tractatus*, and I do not attempt to separate sharply the strictly expository part of my work from the interpretational and even the commentatorial. I am merely trying to make intelligible what I feel to be important in the views embodied in the *Tractatus*. I do not always follow the order of the *Tractatus* or give the same relative weight to the topics as in Wittgenstein's own presentation. Some important topics of the book I merely touch upon, and I have almost entirely omitted some of the most important topics, such as the foundations of mathematics. The *Tractatus* is so condensed that to give an adequate treatment to all the subjects it deals with would require volumes, and more thorough acquaintance with Wittgenstein's view than I can claim. On the whole what I try to do in my book is this: Out of the enigmatic text I have attempted to construct a reasonable account of the philosophical essentials of Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus*; in places I criticize and even reject some details of his view as I understand it.

It is, of course, quite likely that in my criticism I am often fighting a straw man, and that my final interpretation would not suit the author of the *Tractatus*.

The obscure style of the *Tractatus* opens possibilities for numerous interpretations. In the original process of trying to understand the *Tractatus*, I made several starts but found none of them entirely satisfactory. Sooner or later a chosen line of approach led into what seemed to be a blind alley, and I had to start anew. My final choice is not entirely satisfactory, for it leaves some parts of the book still unintelligible or self-contradictory. But the view I present in this essay is the best of the alternatives I have been able to find so far. I feel that finding the right initial approach to the *Tractatus* is the most important and difficult task of my whole enterprise. It cannot be attained merely by an orderly process of analyzing the book in detail, but must be arrived at by something like an intuitive grasp of the underlying motive of the author. I feel that, if one could only, to use a metaphor, strike the right key from the beginning and give the proper meanings to Wittgenstein's essential terms, such as atomic fact, object, and form, one could go on without much trouble into the rest of this syncopated philosophical composition. To use another metaphor (Wittgenstein himself was very fond of metaphors), the *Tractatus* at first approach is like a picture puzzle, which presents the problem of finding the point of view from which hidden figures can be seen in the chaotic conglomeration of shapes and colors. Perhaps by my efforts at solving the puzzle I have discovered figures not intended by the author himself! But metaphors apart, after several trials, and taking the cue from Russell's Introduction to the *Tractatus*, I have chosen to interpret the book as an inquiry into the formal aspects of the means of knowledge, that is, into language or symbolism in general. But I have expanded the meaning and scope of language as universal symbolism so that in my interpretation of the *Tractatus* the basic phi-

losophy underlying it has become a kind of Kantian phenomenalism, with the forms of language playing a role similar to Kant's transcendental apparatus. Language in this interpretation is not only an instrument of thought and communication but also an all-pervading factor in organizing our cognitive experience. Here my interpretation goes beyond the limits of logical positivism, even though generally in dealing with the *Tractatus* I have tried to keep as much as possible within the logico-positivistic frame. The essentials of my consequent understanding of the philosophy of Wittgenstein are as follows.

Language is the activity in which we use some parts of our experience—spoken words, written words, images, and so on—to represent other parts of it and to connect them into a system of interrelating facts within the world in such a way that certain facts used as symbols express certain other facts. Until so interpreted and interrelated, our experience is chaotic and is not an organized world. Thus, we cannot actually separate organized and communicable experience of our world from the language by means of which we know it; and we can discuss the language separately only in abstraction. Language and thought are inseparable, and an investigation of the formal structure of language thus becomes thought's self-clarification.

Philosophy is not merely a passive love of wisdom but, more importantly, the active search for it. Its aim is a part of our aim to understand the world; but in our striving toward that end philosophy plays a special role: it clarifies our thought or language, which necessarily precedes the activity of ascertaining the truth or falsity of our thought. Philosophy itself is not concerned with the empirical finding of the truths about the world; that is the business of everyday practical activity and of its refined extension, science. Neither does philosophy consist of sets or systems of propositions about the world already established as true. The peculiar contri-

bution of philosophy to our wisdom lies in the activity of the formal clarification of our thought or language. The separation of the functions of scientist and philosopher is theoretically clear and complete, though in actual life it is not hard and fast because the two functions are often performed by the same person, and are two aspects of one and the same search for wisdom. The philosopher looks for clarity and validity of thought, the scientist for its truth, but, since both these activities tend to relieve the feeling of intellectual discomfort, even if in different ways, the result is that very often the two functions are not only actually fused in the same person but also become confused. Traditional philosophy is, according to Wittgenstein, full of this confusion, and the *Tractatus* is essentially a philosophical discussion of the formal prerequisites of all valid thought, that is, of all symbolism, designed to eliminate this confusion.

The main thesis of the *Tractatus* is summarized in the profound triviality: 'What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent'. In other words, in any discussion worthy of the name we must confine ourselves to talking sense. The *Tractatus* itself is largely an attempt to analyze the formal aspects of the medium of making sense, that is, of language or symbolism in general, and to show what is essential to any symbolism in order that it be significant and not merely a series of noises and marks. More precisely, the main problem of the *Tractatus* is to show the necessary prerequisites of an ideal symbolism, to which all our actual languages must conform as far as practically possible in order to serve their fundamental purpose of being a medium of knowledge. With the aesthetic and affective aspects of symbolism Wittgenstein is not concerned. Neither does he investigate empirically the existent natural languages; philological study is far from his purpose. He restricts his investigation to the formal or logical prerequisites of any possible language, of all possible symbolisms.

The discussion of the formal or logical prerequisites of all symbolism is not intended to be taken as saying anything about the actual state of affairs in the world: 'What lies in its application logic cannot anticipate' (5.557). Of course, all our knowledge about the world comes through the medium of language, and therefore the formal structure of the world (the world we know—we cannot talk about any other) is inseparable from the language we use: '*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*' (5.6). But formal aspects of language do not determine anything about the actual content of the world; we cannot infer existence from logic. The formal prerequisites of our language and therefore of the world would be just as valid if the state of affairs in the world were different from what it actually is, or even if there were no world at all: 'Everything we can describe at all could also be otherwise' (5.634). That the world, if there be any world, must be such that we could think about it is merely a tautology and gives us no more information about the actual state of affairs than such a pseudo-proposition as '*A is A*'.

Strictly speaking, the formal prerequisites of our language or thought cannot even be discussed. They permeate all our language, and in order to *say* something factual *about* them, we would have to put ourselves outside language, that is, to say something while remaining silent, which is an impossibility. The final clarification of our thought, the realization of its formal conditions, is a matter for philosophic activity and not for significant propositions. The discussion of the *Tractatus* is, then, but a verbal elucidation, an attempt to bring the reader to the realization of what he himself already knows, of that 'which cannot be said', but which nevertheless, is essential to all significant saying, and which 'shows itself' in every discourse. This is our logocentric predicament, and on Wittgenstein's view it includes the egocentric as well.

Besides discussing the formal prerequisites of language

and the limits of cognition as determined by these prerequisites, the *Tractatus* also comes to a positive conclusion of great moment, namely, that our life experience is, after all, not limited to the sphere of symbolic cognition. Our cognition cannot exhaust reality, and outside the knowable there is also the realm of the *mystical*, which cannot be a subject of any discourse. Any attempt to discuss the mystical leads to talking nonsense; and many traditional philosophers make the serious error of attempting to discuss this undiscussable in their pretension of talking from an angelic point of view.

The chapters of my book do not follow the divisions of the *Tractatus*. Roughly, my first chapter corresponds in essentials to the first and the second chapters of the *Tractatus*; my second chapter deals primarily with the third chapter of the *Tractatus*; my third chapter deals with some of the more technical aspects of Wittgenstein's view in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6 of the *Tractatus*; and my last chapter is a presentation of his views on philosophy. Although I group my chapters around some fundamental notions of the chapters of the *Tractatus*, in my discussion of these topics I do not limit myself to the material offered in only the corresponding chapters of the *Tractatus*, but draw my information freely from any part of the book I find useful for the purpose at hand. I usually indicate this by special references in parentheses to the numbered paragraphs of the *Tractatus*. Most of my original contributions are in the first two chapters of my book.

My first chapter is grouped around the fundamental notions of object and atomic fact. Here I discuss primarily the general principles underlying Wittgenstein's view on language or symbolism.

My second chapter is primarily a continuation of the discussion of the first chapter on language, but it is narrowed down to more specific topics, namely, the nature of symbol and sign. In order to elucidate the important opening paragraphs of the third chapter of the *Tractatus*, I insert at the

beginning of my second chapter a short discussion on thought and logic.

The central theme of my third chapter is Wittgenstein's view of molecular propositions as truth functions of atomic propositions, and around this I group the kindred topics of logical propositions and inference. I close the chapter with a discussion of Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica* in the light of Wittgenstein's view on logic. This chapter is the least original part of my study. A reader not interested in logical technicalities can omit this chapter without missing the basic ideas of my interpretation of Wittgenstein.

In my fourth and last chapter I present Wittgenstein's view of the nature and role of philosophy, and I give some space to his solipsism and mysticism. Wittgenstein's solipsism throws light on his central theme, the role of language. His mysticism supplements his positivism, and thus provides for experiences outside the limits imposed by language.

My grasp of the subject is not sufficiently secure to allow as yet of a crystallized vocabulary. My occasional vagueness in language reflects the uncertainty and amorphousness of my view at present; and thus, the very shortcomings in my essay seem to substantiate, in a rather negative fashion, the view defended here that thought and language are inseparable. I am also aware of a certain choppiness in my presentation of the subject. Slightly paraphrasing Bradley, I might say that if I saw clearer I should be shorter and more orderly and precise in my presentation. I can express my feelings here in no better way than by quoting verbatim another remark of Bradley's: 'It means that on all questions, if you push me far enough, at present I end in doubts and perplexities'.

My attempt at presenting Wittgenstein's view does not pretend, I repeat, to be either complete or entirely correct. I can only hope that it is in accord with the essentials of Wittgenstein's original view at least in spirit, and that my criticisms of the *Tractatus* are in the direction of Wittgenstein's

own changes after he wrote the book. In spite of Wittgenstein's later neglect and even disparagement of the *Tractatus*, I still believe it to be a great book, and my hope is that this essay will make a contribution to the understanding of the man who has been considered by many of his very competent peers to be one of the greatest contemporary philosophers.

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