

Chapter 3

THE SECOND STATION: SOPHISTICATED METAPHYSICS (AND MEANING AS USE)

One keeps forgetting to go right down to the foundations. One doesn't put the question marks deep enough down. (*Culture and Value* 62)

How can a book that starts with the words “The world is all that is the case” be construed as an anti-metaphysical book? Yes, it tells us that the traditional metaphysics of centuries-old philosophical theories were nonsense. Yes, it calls upon us to keep silent on matters that cannot be spoken of. Yes, it limits, and then talks about the limits, of our language – purporting to leave outside language talk which is seemingly metaphysical. And yes, it constrains meaningful talk by giving the exact criteria for meaningfulness – as a picturing of facts in the world.

But reading through the *Tractatus*, not only through those first parts that outline the ontological make-up of the world as facts and objects – “The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts” (*TLP* 1.11); “The world divides into facts” (*TLP* 1.2); “An atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things)” (*TLP* 2.01) – but also the intricate and sometimes convoluted misgivings it exhibits all along concerning that make-up, one cannot rid oneself of a terribly metaphysical aura, sometimes abetted by epistemological musings. How is one to make *anti*-metaphysical sense of statements, honestly iterated, like – “A spatial object must lie in infinite space” (*TLP* 2.0131); “The object is simple” (*TLP* 2.02); “The substance of the world *can* only determine a form and not any material properties” (*TLP* 2.0231); “We make to ourselves pictures of facts” (*TLP* 2.1); “The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world” (*TLP* 3.01)? (Not to mention – “The world is independent of my will” (*TLP* 6.373); “Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through. If by eternity is understood not endless temporal

duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present” (TLP 6.4311); “God does not reveal himself *in* the world” (TLP 6.432).)

We have seen that the interpreters of the first station, the almost absolutely logico-linguistic and pertinently anti-metaphysical station, virtually ignored these statements that, although numerically small, do not carry a label of automatic insignificance in Wittgenstein’s edifice. They are not said as asides to the main text, they do not surface inexplicably as obvious non-sequiturs, they are not put in brackets;¹ rather, they start off the book with aplomb (“...the *truth* of the thoughts communicated here seems to me unassailable and definitive. I am, therefore, of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved.” TLP Preface) and bring it up to its final climax (“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” TLP 7) in a natural development, thereby presenting the reader with a myriad of interpretive problems. It is by dealing with these problems in a sophisticated manner, that is to say, by relating to the definite and specific content of these metaphysical sections and interpretively grasping their tensions and questions, that an interpreter becomes a player in our second station of interpretation. This station is peopled with several astute interpreters and, chronologically, follows closely upon the Vienna Circle, beginning in the 1930s, but escapes the narrowness of a time-frame by extending right up to current readings. It is, therefore, one of the inevitable mainstays of this second station that its interpreters – by and large – deal not only with the *Tractatus* and the early Wittgenstein, but also with the *Philosophical Investigations*, the later Wittgenstein, and the connections and relationships between the two.

Justice cannot be done to all the actors who engage in sophisticated readings of Wittgenstein – sophisticated in breadth and depth, relating to the early and the later, and encompassing both logic-linguistic and metaphysical issues. Our exposition will, therefore, take the shape of an investigation into the issues themselves, rather than a listing of those who deal in them. We will see what interpreters have had to say, and how they argued, about facts and atomic facts, about the simple objects of the *Tractatus*, about the picture theory, about negation – all in the service of our hypothesis that this bunch of interpretations delivers a more sophisticated, and less straightforward, look at the troubled cross-roads between language and world, or philosophy of language and metaphysics. This more complex look at the early Wittgenstein will then, however, be seen to present, still, a relatively straightforward appraisal of the later Wittgenstein and of the clear differences between the two.

FACTS AND OBJECTS

We begin with the vagaries of translation, rather than interpretation.² The first translation of the *Tractatus* into English from German was effected by C.K. Ogden in 1922, the second, considered by some the better translation, by David Pears and Brian McGuinness in 1961. In a book which was consensually judged to be one of the “hardest to understand” volumes of the philosophical canon it was clear that the point of a second translation was to clarify and better explain, by translation first, some of the stupefying remarks of the original text. And those enigmatic remarks appeared, as we have seen, at the very beginning of the text. After the opening bombast of “The world is everything that is the case” (*TLP* 1), which might, and did, seem to many the first of all enigmas, Wittgenstein introduces facts – in German “Tatsachen” – by saying that “the world is the totality of facts, not of things” (*TLP* 1.1). A few lines later these facts get analyzed further: “What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts” (*TLP* 2), the German separating facts and atomic facts into *Tatsachen* and *Sachverhalten*. Translating “Sachverhalten” to “atomic facts” was based, in Ogden’s case, on the complexity of facts vs. the simplicity of atomic facts, and it was this translation that pushed interpreters further into the quagmire of the relations between facts and atomic facts, the question of the move from atomicity to complexity, and the (hard to explain) existence of atomic facts as opposed to only the possibility of facts. Enter Pears and McGuinness who translated, like Ogden, “Tatsachen” to “facts” but did away with the emphasis on atomicity (which will have to be investigated later, when propositions enter the arena) and chose to focus on the actuality of those elements which make up the world – “states of affairs.” Accordingly, Proposition 2 of the *Tractatus* becomes, in their hands, “What is the case, the fact, is the existence of states of affairs.” Not surprisingly, then, those first players in the Tractarian metaphysics – facts and their underlings, be they atomic facts or states of affairs – need an interpretation all of their own, and the interpretive game then begins, with questions posed concerning the actuality and possibility, that is, the modality, of states of affairs vs. facts; the atomicity and independence of states of affairs (redundantly called atomic facts);³ the difference, if there is one, and if Wittgenstein meant there to be one, between reality and the world.⁴

Now, in spite of the bravura accompanying this new metaphysics, having to do with the explicit denial of the world as being made up of objects, as philosophers were wont to claim traditionally, and the novel introduction of facts as the existents of this world, objects come up quite early in the game as something to be ingested in this fact-oriented ontology. For as soon as facts and atomic facts (or states of affairs) have been presented Wittgenstein



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