

## 9. Not How the World Is, But That It Exists

### Wittgenstein on the Mystical and the Meaningful

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#### Abstract

This essay deals with the relationship between the mystical and meaning in Ludwig Wittgenstein's early philosophical work, especially the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.<sup>1</sup> The interpretation offered here is intended not primarily for professional scholars of Wittgenstein or historians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, but for those broadly interested in connections between mysticism and meaning and in what contributions Wittgenstein's early work might make to the subject. My goal is to explain his conception of the relationship between the mystical and meaning to the interdisciplinary reader not well versed in Wittgenstein's early philosophy or the vast body of scholarship that has grown up around it, without entirely ignoring the insights into other areas of philosophy that have made the *Tractatus* highly respected even by those philosophers who most vigorously and completely disagree with his idiosyncratic views.

#### Mysticism and Meaning in Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Western Philosophy

In Western philosophy, understandings of the relationship between meaning and mysticism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century can be roughly but usefully divided into two broad camps: on the one hand, some philosophers, aware of the long and varied tradition of religious and secular mysticism and wary of the rise of scientism and the consequent crisis of meaning and value in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turned to some version or another of mysticism as a way of preserving the threatened notion that there are means of insight into the human condition not explainable in purely natural-scientific terms. In the other camp, philoso-

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars often divide Wittgenstein's work into "early" and "late" (if not into even more specific periods) to mark important shifts in his thought. Since his remarks concerning the mystical occur primarily in works written before 1920, this essay is limited to that early period.

phers impressed with the power of the new logic of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell or the recent scientific advances in now-independent fields like psychology and sociology operated with an implicit and at times even explicit rejection of the mystical as a genuine field of inquiry, at least as concerned “serious” philosophical questions related to epistemology, the theory of meaning, and logic. On this view, mysticism was fine as an object of study for scholars of religion or those still interested in the broadly speculative or “metaphysical” preoccupations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was no serious topic for the emerging program of philosophy-as-analysis. This division concerning mysticism was in reality not so finely drawn, of course, but it reflects an important reality of two opposed ways of thinking about the topic around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Representative of the first of the camps sketched above is Aldous Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley’s book, an amalgam of mystical and religious citations from a great variety of world religious and philosophical texts, including many Eastern ones, sought to show that “the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing is immemorial and universal.”<sup>2</sup> On Huxley’s view (again, very broadly characterized), the relation between meaning and the mystical is to be conceived in terms of *knowledge*. The mystical functions as a source of secret knowledge, timeless teachings, or eternal truth, which in each case is understood to involve a sort of *meaning*, even if that meaning is conceived in an apophatic context in which it cannot be adequately captured or uttered.

As Huxley notes in the book, the perennial philosophy consists of a sort of knowledge that has rarely been available to professional philosophers: for the most part, it is a knowledge reserved for mystics and other figures of religious and spiritual—and not primarily academic-philosophical—persuasion:

In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets and metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone, as a matter brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and these few have left accounts of the reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

For Huxley, as a matter of *empirical necessity*, the comfortable life of the philosopher and the poet does not provide the conditions for mystical knowledge, which demands experiences of a sort different not only in intensity but in kind from those of ordinary social and professional life. Only this different type of experience can provide the “direct spiritual knowledge,” complete with its own facts, which is said to be different in kind from that of the poet and the philosopher and to constitute the perennial philosophy. Huxley’s vision of mysticism as perennial philosophy thus consists of *hidden knowledge* of a set of *facts* of a special sort.

Some more-academic philosophers were also drawn to such accounts of mystical experience and knowledge, foremost among them William James. James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in its discussion of Christian mystics, for example, sees mystical experiences as revealing a realm of “metaphysical” truth and knowledge distinct from that of the everyday world: “The kinds of truth communicable in mystical ways, whether these be sensible or supersensible, are various. Some of them relate to this world,—visions of the future, the reading of hearts, the sudden understanding of texts, the knowledge of distant events, for example; but the most important revelations are theological and metaphysical.”<sup>4</sup>

In the other camp, the spirit of exact scientific inquiry that marked early programs of logical, conceptual, and linguistic analysis led many philosophers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to approach the question of the relation of the mystical to meaning, if at all, through the analysis of mystical *language* and the examination of claims concerning the ineffability of religious doctrines. Bertrand Russell notes the distinction at the very outset of his essay “Mysticism and Logic,” where he distinguishes “two very different impulses, the one urging men towards mysticism, the other urging them towards science”<sup>5</sup> and questions the common tendency to see the investigation into meaning and the investigation of the mystical as radically distinct. If there is such a thing as “mystical meaning,” it is surely a far cry from meaning in the “exact” sense, as a phenomenon of words, sentences, and propositions.

At the same time, however, Russell maintains that the radical separation of science and mystical thought cannot be maintained. He reserves a place for the mystical, albeit one secondary in status to the more exacting processes of science, through which all inquiry into truth must ultimately pass:

Of the reality or unreality of the mystic’s world I know nothing. I have no wish to deny it, nor even to declare that the insight which reveals it is not a

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<sup>4</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Oxford: World’s Classics, 2012), 313.

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand Russell, “Mysticism and Logic” (in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959 (1917), 1-32), 1.

genuine insight. What I do wish to maintain—and it is here that the scientific attitude becomes imperative—is that insight, untested and unsupported, is an insufficient guarantee of truth, in spite of the fact that much of the most important truth is first suggested by its means.<sup>6</sup>

While mysticism as a form of *intuition* may be useful to the philosopher as a starting point for inquiry, that inquiry, insofar as it is truly philosophical, must then proceed according to the more exacting procedures of science and logic. This primary role in the progress of knowledge is one that cannot be ascribed to something as inexact and nonscientific as mystical insight. Thus for Russell, while a place is reserved for mysticism in the broader spectrum of human wisdom, it “is to be commended as an attitude toward life, not as a creed about the world”;<sup>7</sup> whereas “scientific philosophy comes nearer to objectivity than any other human pursuit, and gives us, therefore, the closest constant and the most intimate relation with the outer world that it is possible to achieve.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Importance and Uniqueness of Wittgenstein’s Account

Wittgenstein’s own philosophical conception of the relationship between meaning and the mystical is highly important in this early 20<sup>th</sup>-century context for several reasons. (In enumerating these, I will also sketch the basic claims and structure of the rest of this essay.) First, his position is unique in its rejection of both sides of the above-noted dichotomy. On my reading, while Wittgenstein did conceive of the mystical as a realm of ethical or axiological values “whereof we cannot speak,” he did not, like the many versions of the mysticism-friendly camp described above, subscribe to the view that the mystical contains discrete hidden truths or deep meanings (irrespective of the question of their effability). As I will argue later, Wittgenstein’s conception of the role of the mystical in meaning is *formal*, and not directly concerned with any particular mystical *content*. At the same time, the status of the mystical is neither rejected outright nor conceived merely as a question of linguistic, conceptual, or logical analysis: the mystical is not something that can be understood simply by more closely examining mystical language or signs.

Indeed, the mystical is of central importance for Wittgenstein’s overall theory of meaning in his early work precisely because it is *not* describable within the province of a system of representation: its role is not that of having specific, linguistically determinable *sense*. Properly speaking, for Wittgenstein, the mystical “itself” has no *meaning* at all. Its involvement in the structure of mean-

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

ing—and thus Wittgenstein’s conception of the relation of the mystical and meaning—is *indirect*. This can be expressed at this point in a preliminary way by saying that for Wittgenstein the mystical is the experience or recognition of the world as *meaningful*. The importance of this insight is supposed by him to be *both logical and ethico-religious*.

This dual concern for the ethical and the logical is a second reason for the importance of Wittgenstein’s account of the mystical and meaning in the context of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Western philosophy, for he stands perhaps uniquely with a foot in both of the camps described above. This position is on par with Wittgenstein’s peculiar status as a figure in the history of Western philosophy more broadly: he is considered to be both a forefather of the philosophy of language and the “analytic” tradition, and yet is also regarded as a sort of quasi-religious mystic who, despite his great talents at logic and analysis, seems to have been at least as interested in writers like Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, and the Christian mystics as he was in the mathematical logic of Russell and Frege.<sup>9</sup> The *Tractatus*, like its author, seems to be driven by two almost incompatible purposes, at once a complex and painstakingly precise treatise on logic, language, and meaning, and a seemingly aphoristic work addressing foundational ethical and religious concerns through abstract gestures to the ineffable and the mystical. And while the character of Wittgenstein’s philosophy was famously much changed in his later work (a topic outside my scope here), this dual concern for the logical and the ethical, and the conviction that they must be understood in relation to each other *both despite and because of their difference*, remained central to Wittgenstein’s thought even in its later stages.

Finally, the convergence of these two points of significance marks yet another: Wittgenstein’s early thought concerning meaning and the mystical embodies the more general philosophical and existential preoccupations of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Continental intellectual life, concerns that linger in our collective consciousness even today. Wittgenstein’s ideas concerning the mystical and meaning are an historical testament to the worries and ambitions of an age of anxiety, what philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich has called “the loss of an

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<sup>9</sup> As Russell wrote in a 1919 letter after spending a week in daily meetings with Wittgenstein going over the propositions of the *Tractatus*: “I came to think even better of it than I had done; I feel sure it is really a great book, though I do not feel sure it is right. . . . I had felt in his book a flavour of mysticism, but was astonished when I found that he has become a complete mystic. He reads people like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius, and he seriously contemplates becoming a monk. It all started from William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and grew (not unnaturally) during the winter he spent alone in Norway before the war, when he was nearly mad. . . . He has penetrated deep into mystical ways of thought and feeling, but I think (though he wouldn’t agree) that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking” (Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore*, edited by G. H. von Wright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 82).

ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings,”<sup>10</sup> a condition of perpetual war and spiritual meaninglessness still confronting “developed” Western societies almost a century later. The final section of this essay accordingly offers some brief remarks on what we might take away from the conception of the mystical in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* beyond the world of technical philosophy, and what implications this quintessentially modernist text might have for a “postmodern” age.

Most approaches to the mystical in Wittgenstein’s early work have emphasized the relationship of the mystical to the ethical. In what follows, I take a slightly different route—as befits an essay for a volume on mysticism and meaning—focusing instead on the mystical’s relation to Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning by way of his conception of logical form. Thus, though the professed ethical orientation of the *Tractatus* is not ignored, I will not assume from the outset that Wittgenstein’s conception of the mystical is proffered in answer to inherently ethical concerns. Avoiding this presupposition and approaching the relationship between the mystical and meaning more directly will allow me to show how Wittgenstein’s conception of the mystical and its ethical implications is not a complementary layer of insight “added to” an essentially logical work, but rather is an essential part of his overall concern, arising directly from a theory of logic and meaning crafted in response to the spiritual crisis of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## God, the Mystical, and the Meaning of Life

Wittgenstein’s interest in what he calls “the mystical” can be traced back at least as far as his 1914–16 notebooks.<sup>11</sup> These notebooks, written largely during his time on the front during the First World War and organized only by date, contain many of the passages that would be reformulated into the numbered propositions of the *Tractatus* (along with much else that never made it into the book). Here, alongside the austere logical preoccupations already evident in his extant prewar writings, we see a newfound focus on questions about God, happiness, good and evil, and the meaning of life: “To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life. To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter. To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.”<sup>12</sup> This connection between what lies beyond the facts and the meaning of life would become, in the *Tractatus*

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 47.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Thomas Baldwin, “Philosophy and the First World War,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 375.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 74.

*tus*, one of the central notions underlying Wittgenstein's conception of the mystical.

This takes us to the heart of the seemingly opposed intentions manifest in Wittgenstein's early work. On the one hand, he wishes to continue the careful scientific work in philosophical and mathematical logic learned from predecessors like Frege and Russell. At the same time, in the notebooks stemming from the war years, we begin to see emerge a portrait of a young man deeply troubled by the crises and destruction of his time, and increasingly concerned with broader existential or "metaphysical" questions that seem to reach beyond the narrow parameters of the then-dominant strains of scientific philosophy. As Wittgenstein explains in the only passage in the notebooks to use the word "mystical," these concerns are not so much contemplated as *felt*: "The urge toward the mystical comes of the non-satisfaction of our wishes by science. We *feel* that even if all *possible* scientific questions are answered *our problem is still not touched at all*." The paradoxical conclusion to this remark is paradigmatic of the idiosyncratic flavor of his early thought: "of course in that case there are no questions any more; and that is the answer."<sup>13</sup> This notion of the inherent limits of scientific thought will be central to the overall project of the *Tractatus*.

Reflecting a conception common in his day, Wittgenstein in the notebooks diagnoses the condition of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century European life as one of crisis. The progress of scientific knowledge had continued seemingly unchecked, and yet among its results was a rapid industrialization that threatened many traditional ways of life and a new efficiency in warfare that made possible the previously unfathomable magnitude of killing in the fields and trenches of the Great War. He was one of a large number of writers—though not so many professional philosophers—sounding the alarm of a "crisis" of intellectual and moral foundations in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe.<sup>14</sup> Wary of a culture increasingly oriented toward scientific or positivistic conceptions of knowledge that limited truth claims to empirically verifiable phenomena observed by the value-neutral scientist and left no room for questions of value, Wittgenstein writes,

At bottom the whole *Weltanschauung* of the moderns involves the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are explanations of natural phenomena. In this way they stop short at laws of nature as at something *impregnable* as men of former times did at God and fate. And both are right and wrong. The older ones are indeed clearer in the sense that they acknowledge a clear terminus, while with the new system it looks as if *everything* had a foundation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> The complicated relationship of Western philosophy to the Great War, and the surprisingly rare treatment of this topic in English-language sources, is discussed in Baldwin, "Philosophy and the First World War."

<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 72, emphasis in original.

The intellectual “crisis” of this modern worldview is thus a crisis of foundations—not of the foundations of scientific inquiry per se but of the broader cultural and intellectual system into which the facts and theorems of the scientist are to fit alongside the strivings and cultural institutions of modern life. These latter, Wittgenstein recognizes, cannot simply be grounded in the research results of the empirical sciences. There are aspects of life that matter—and indeed, as we shall see later, matter very much for Wittgenstein—that lie outside the domain of scientific fact and observation. Meaning, insofar as it involves not only the propositions of scientists but also the everyday significances and values of this wider life, cannot be explained by simple reference to empirical facts. And yet according to the modern scientific worldview of Wittgenstein’s day (which is in many ways still ours today), nothing with the prestige and intellectual weight of science can be established outside that realm of facts in which “it looks as if everything had a foundation.”

Thus the appeals to God, the mystical, and “the question of the meaning of life” in Wittgenstein’s wartime notebooks seem to signal a recognition—a *felt*, spiritual recognition, not a precise scientific observation—of the need to account for the feeling that “the facts of the world are not the end of the matter.” At the same time, Wittgenstein the logician, who held himself to the very highest standards of scientific scholarship and descriptive analysis, saw that it would be hopeless and unconvincing to accomplish such recognition by simply ignoring the questions of logic and meaning to which he had already begun to devote himself before the Great War. Besides, in the fields of philosophical logic and the theory of meaning, he still had much to say.

## The Isomorphic Schema of Fact and Representation

Thus, to fully understand the importance and uniqueness of Wittgenstein’s conception of the mystical, we would do well to begin with his conception of logic and theory of meaning, all the while keeping in mind that we cannot assume that this should be elevated to his “primary” concern or downplayed as secondary. Wittgenstein’s systematic conception of meaning in the *Tractatus* can be schematically represented as a three-tiered structure.<sup>16</sup> Each level in the schema has both an ontological aspect (logical atomic *objects* at the most basic level, the arrangement of those objects into basic *states of affairs* at the interme-

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<sup>16</sup>This interpretation of the basic meaning schema of the *Tractatus* owes much to interpretation of Leonard Goddard and Brenda Judge, in *The Metaphysics of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (Melbourne: Australasian Journal of Philosophy Monograph Series, 1981). While I have drawn on a variety of commentaries throughout this exegesis, the schema presented here was developed on the basis of their text more than any other, although the interpretation is my own, and differs from theirs in several respects, most notably in its not explicitly emphasizing the metaphysical aspects of the work.



diate level, and the combinations of such basic states of affairs into more-complex *facts* at the highest level) and a representational aspect that refers to the correlated ontological entity (*names* that refer to *objects*, *elementary propositions* to basic *states of affairs*, and [nonelementary] *propositions to facts*). Represented in a diagram:

Function in the System	Logical Aspect	Isomorphic “Mirroring”	Representational Aspect
More-complex combinations of basic states of affairs/ elementary propositions	Facts [ <i>Tatsachen</i> ]	↔	Propositions [ <i>Sätze</i> ]
Basic arrangements of objects/ of names <i>showing</i> logical form	States of Affairs [ <i>Sachverhalte</i> ]	↔	Elementary (“atomic”) Propositions [ <i>Elementarsätze</i> ]
Fundamental, “atomic” simples whose arrangement determines logical form	Objects [ <i>Gegenstände</i> ]	↔	Names [ <i>Namen</i> ]

As the diagram indicates, according to Wittgenstein, the symmetry between the ontological and representational aspects of this system is perfect: as with names and objects, there is a direct, one-to-one correspondence between elementary propositions and states of affairs, such that each elementary proposition represents one and only one state of affairs, and each state of affairs is represented by exactly one elementary proposition.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Wittgenstein famously claims that states of affairs are logically independent of one another,<sup>18</sup> that “from the existence or non-existence of one state of affairs it is impossible to infer the existence or non-existence of another,”<sup>19</sup> and, thus, correlative, that “one elementary proposition cannot be deduced from another,”<sup>20</sup> and no elementary proposition can be contradicted by another elemen-

<sup>17</sup> Roger White, *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Continuum, 2006), 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German text with translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 2.061. (All references to the *Tractatus* refer to remark number in lieu of page.)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.062.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.134.

tary proposition.<sup>21</sup> At the top level of the schema, the same perfect mirroring relationship is understood to hold between propositions and facts of the world to which they (uniquely) refer. According to Wittgenstein, the ontological makeup of reality is perfectly represented or “mirrored” at each level of analysis by a representational aspect. Most importantly, this mirroring relation means that any *possible* state of affairs—even one that does not in fact obtain—(for instance, that I *could have* had eggs for breakfast this morning, although I in fact had yogurt instead) is representable in language. If something could be the case, it must be representable in language.

This perfect symmetry is guaranteed by the atomistic structure of the schema, grounded in the objects at the most basic level. These *logical* objects are not to be confused with everyday material entities. They are not physical but theoretical, and they mark the necessary endpoint of logical analysis, the basic building blocks of the system whose combinations *just are* the basic logical states of affairs in the same way that the combinations of the latter *just are* the facts of the world. Because the schema is *logical* in character, these are determinations not of actuality—of what actually is the case—but of possibility, of what could be the case. Thus the total possible combinations of objects determine the totality of possible states of affairs in the world, which in turn determine the totality of possible facts in the world (remember, again, that these terms are to be taken in a purely logical and not in an empirical sense). Because of the perfect mirroring relationship between these logical entities and the representational entities referring to them, we can access the former by means of an analysis of the latter: We analyze propositions into elementary propositions and analyze these latter into names, which names will correspond one-to-one with objects. A logical analysis of the formal possibilities of meaning is thus reached through an analysis of language.

One more element of this schema is of the utmost importance for understanding the relationship between meaning and the mystical: Wittgenstein makes clear from the outset that the *world* to which the propositions of the *Tractatus* refer is very distinctly conceived in logical (not physical or material) terms: The very first proposition of the book states that “the world is the totality of facts, not of things.” Wittgenstein’s project is thus an analysis of the logical structure of reality, not an explanation of its physical makeup or an inventory of the everyday objects or things that exist within the world. In terms of my example above, Wittgenstein is interested not in the eggs or the yogurt but in *the fact* that I indeed had the latter for breakfast and the fact that I could have had the former. It is thus stipulated at the outset that the *Tractatus* will be concerned with an *extremely impoverished* conception of the world, one concerned exclusively with the logical relations between (possible) facts and their repre-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.211.

sentation, an analysis of the totality of “facts, not things.”<sup>22</sup> The tractarian world is devoid of any sort of nonfact (physical things, emotions, values, etc.) that we might wish to include in an account of the contents of everyday human experience.

One of the greatest interpretive difficulties the *Tractatus* presents lies in the question of the intention underlying this impoverished conception of world: Is it Wittgenstein’s goal to illustrate the questionability or even absurdity of limiting proper philosophical inquiry to this strictly formal, logical domain, or does he genuinely believe that only “the totality of facts” and the structures reached by logical analysis matter in our interpretation of the world? The question is whether for Wittgenstein what lies “beyond” the facts (if anything does) really matters, or if only the facts and the propositions referring to them (and their constituents) do. In terms of the book’s famous closing remark, “what we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence,”<sup>23</sup> is that which we cannot speak about meaningful, even if it cannot be put into words, or is it rather the case that “the limits of my language” are also the limits of the meaningful or even of thought itself?

## The Picture Theory and Logical Form

In addition to this complex and multilevel schema, Wittgenstein’s early theory of meaning relies on his famous “picture theory” and an associated conception of logical form. A brief thought experiment can help to illustrate this theory: take a table, on which is set a flower vase to the left and a teacup to the right, and which takes up the whole of my field of vision, to be the complete field of entities, the *facts* concerning which make up my *world* (all terms in italics to be taken in the tractarian technical sense described above). I now wish to represent this *world* in a painting. In one sense, I will do this by simply depicting a table, a vase, and a teacup. But in another important sense, this is not all that I do. For in representing the objects, I also necessarily display something else, namely, the spatial relationship *between* the table, the vase, and the teacup. While this does not consist in painting another *thing* in addition to the three entities, it is nonetheless necessary for the depiction of this *world* as a world of *facts*. If I paint the same three objects, but with the vase to the right and the teacup to the left, even if I have represented all three *things* quite clearly, I have not properly represented the basic *fact* or *state of affairs* that is the case in this *world*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this thought experiment, we are concerned only with this one fact in this world. I therefore ignore the issue of other potentially obtaining facts that might be related to it and thus involved in its depiction.

Nevertheless, in the terms of the *Tractatus*, this incorrect painting is not entirely without sense: it has represented a *state of affairs* different from the actual one (the *fact* of how the three objects actually are arranged in reality) and has thus shown a possibility that does not obtain. But this possibility nonetheless appears as meaningful; it has a *sense* or *meaning* independently of whether the *state of affairs* it “proposes” is found to be true or false. This is a very different scenario than if I were to paint a state of affairs that did not even make sense (say, where the represented spatial relations between the entities somehow defied the physics of three-dimensional space, as in an M. C. Escher drawing). In *that* case, one could judge such a picture to be nonsensical “a priori,” *without* needing to appeal to any experience of the facts supposedly depicted: it is not as if I would need to first observe the picture, then check it against potential matches in my field of vision, and only then decide that it is nonsensical: in Wittgenstein’s terminology, I can know that it is nonsensical from its *logical form alone*.

This is the case, Wittgenstein thinks, because the possibility of the picture making sense is ultimately tied to *logical form*; only on this basis is it possible to recognize the picture as a possible depiction of reality. In line with the emphasis on “facts, not things,” what is important in determining whether the proposed depiction of reality is justified a priori is thus not the specific entities depicted (for human beings are always inventing new and unexpected things with little resemblance to previous familiar objects)<sup>25</sup> but rather the way in which the relation between the entities in my picture, whatever they may be, corresponds or could potentially correspond to the *relation* between the entities in reality, because of shared pictorial (and logical) form: “What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in the way it does, is its pictorial form.”<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein thus distinguishes between the content of the picture, which is *depicted* [*abgebildet*], and the pictorial form, which is displayed [*aufgewiesen*]: “A picture cannot, however, depict its pictorial form: it displays it.”<sup>27</sup>

This account of picturing is then extended, making it clear that Wittgenstein intends the notion to apply to more than mere spatial examples, and that he takes it to show something essential about the very logical form of the *world*:

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<sup>25</sup> For example, in an earlier age, the object that we now know as a cell phone would perhaps have been unimaginable as an object on the table, although the fact that this is now a familiar object shows that it was not *impossible*. But the impossibility of the teacup and the cell phone occupying exactly the *same spot* on the table is deducible independently of cell phones and of teacups, since it is a matter of spatial *form*, independent of the specifics of content. Wittgenstein conceives of logical form (as distinguished from content) as operating in an analogous way.

<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.17.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.172.

“What *any* picture, of *whatever* form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in *any way at all*, is logical form, i.e., the form of reality.”<sup>28</sup> The notion of logical form is then used to explicate the propositional connection between language and reality: “a proposition is a picture of reality: for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it represents,”<sup>29</sup> and “a proposition *shows* its sense. A proposition *shows* how things stand *if* it is true. And it says that they do so stand.”<sup>30</sup>

This explains Wittgenstein’s insistence that if something can be the case (as a fact or state of affairs), it *must* be representable in language, since logical form contains the laws according to which the specific content expressed in a given proposition—either one that corresponds to a fact in the world or one that is meaningful but actually false (such as my having had eggs for breakfast)—corresponds to a (possible) state of affairs. And, importantly, the necessity of this “mirroring” is attributed to the *form* of representation alone, not the specific *content* (eggs or teacups or vases) it expresses.<sup>31</sup> According to Wittgenstein, the proposition thus *shows* (but does not express, does not *say*) its form, while it *says* (linguistically expresses) its specific content.

The full technical details of Wittgenstein’s account of these issues is extremely complex and widely debated in the literature and is beyond the scope of this essay. But a bit of additional explication of the relationship between showing, saying, and logical form will be helpful before I return to the question of the mystical and the meaningful in the following section. To borrow an example from David Key,<sup>32</sup> in the proposition “Seattle is west of Spokane,” which can be expressed in the logical notation used by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* by “sWk,” it is not strictly correct according to Wittgenstein to say that “W” “stands for” the relation “being west of” in the way that “s” stands for “Seattle” and “k” for “Spokane.” The relational term in the proposition, like the directional arrow in the margin of a map, “does not enter into a triadic relation” with the terms in the proposition and thus cannot be named. Asking for the thing that the relational predicate (“W” in our example) represents would

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.18, emphasis in original.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.021.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.022, emphasis in original.

<sup>31</sup> As Wittgenstein puts it, the proposition is a picture that “reaches right out to” reality, and the relation between its elements is not another *thing* that mediates the relation. (See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.1511).

<sup>32</sup> David Key, “Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Language,” *Philosophical Review* 73, no. 4 [1964]: 493-511. Though I begin with Key’s example, the development and interpretation given here is my own. Key’s article is largely a response to specific interpretations of Copi and Anscombe and makes no mention of the relation of the theory of the proposition to the claim that “logic is transcendental,” which is central to my treatment in the following discussion.

be like asking for the element on the map that illustrates that Seattle is west of Spokane. The “element” on the map that demonstrates this relation is not another *element* on the map at all; it is not a road, or another town, or the representation of a specific piece of land, or some symbol standing for “being west of.”<sup>33</sup> What shows that Seattle is west of Spokane is the state of affairs represented by the total situation depicted on the map, which is not some particular element of the map in the way that towns and roads are. In Wittgenstein’s language, the proposition depicting this state of affairs (sWk) thus *shows* something that it does not and cannot *say*.

The form that is *shown* (or “pictured”) by the relation between the names in the elementary proposition, like the relation of cardinal directions in the map example, is a necessary condition for representation and yet for that very reason not something directly representable in the proposition. For Wittgenstein, logical form must be independent of the accidental “happening and being-so” of the world, just as “being west of” is itself independent of Seattle, Spokane, and any other location represented on a map; *that* someplace can be west of someplace else is one of the prior conditions that makes a map a map, because of the isomorphism (the “mirroring”) between geographical relations on the face of the earth and the directional and distance relations<sup>34</sup> on the two-dimensional map. The same applies in the *Tractatus* for the relation of a meaning (sense) to the proposition by means of logical form: though it is not something representable, not some *thing* in the world, logical form is nonetheless a necessary condition for there being meaning in the world, and it is *shown* in every proposition, though it cannot be *said* or expressed like the content of the proposition.

## The Transcendental Role of the Mystical and the Ineffability of Value

With this discussion of logical form in place, we can now return to the topic at hand: Wittgenstein’s account of the mystical. For the mystical and the logical are assigned the same basic status in the *Tractatus*: both are concerned with

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<sup>33</sup> Although the directional arrow in the margin of the map might be said to be such an element, it is ultimately superfluous to the function of the map itself and only really plays a role in reorienting us if, for example, the top of the map is to be read as south and the bottom as north. The fact that this is really only necessary on maps with nonstandard orientation only reinforces the isomorphic relation between the map and the world that makes the representation possible. (Cf. Keyt’s very different discussion of the arrow and the scale in “Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Language,” 510.)

<sup>34</sup> Given a proper “method of projection,” another aspect of Wittgenstein’s conception that exceeds our scope here (cf. *Tractatus* 3.11).

what Wittgenstein calls “the world as a limited whole” or “*sub specie aeterni*.”<sup>35</sup> Insofar as logical form is not derived from specific propositions referring to specific facts (or elementary propositions referring to states of affairs) but is a *condition of possibility* that ontologically precedes them, it cannot be something represented in the “great mirror” that is logic. Rather, like the directionality of the map in our example above, logical form functions as the isomorphic mirroring relation *itself*. Consequently, Wittgenstein claims, “Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror image of the world. Logic is transcendental.”<sup>36</sup>

To understand the significance of this claim, think about our ability to understand propositions that refer to states of affairs that do not obtain. We can understand the meaning of statements about what is not the case (like my having eggs for breakfast). Wittgenstein takes this to imply that our conception of meaning cannot be derived from the facts alone; it goes, as he put it in the notebooks, “beyond the facts.” And we can recognize this even though each of us has experienced only a small subset of the totality of actual facts obtaining in the world (since as spatiotemporally limited beings we cannot be everywhere and at all times). As the above examination of the picture theory showed (think of the discussion of the M. C. Escher drawing), we are able to determine what *makes sense* independently of the direct comparison of that sense with the facts of reality. We thus seem to be capable of recognizing a set of possible meanings wider than the set of meanings pertaining to the actually and presently obtaining facts. How is this possible?

Such recognition relies on our conception of the logical-representational system *as a whole*—in Wittgenstein’s tractarian terms, a conception of the overall logical form wider than what can be provided through the content of the “totality of facts” alone. Otherwise our conception of logical form and thus our logic could not be understood to apply with certainty beyond the individual cases already known to us to be factual. And yet this wider application is precisely what logic is supposed to accomplish: logic is the fixed system of rules according to which we can differentiate between what is contingently not the case but could be (because it accords with logical form and thus is *logically possible*) and what is simply nonsense (contradicts logical form and is thus *logically impossible*). And logic must do this independently of experience; otherwise it is not logic at all but only a “best guess” on the basis of inductive reasoning about whatever facts we happen to know about the world.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6.45.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6.13.

<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein’s insistence on the a priori (experience independent) status of logic stems from his concern, shared with other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century logicians such as Frege and Husserl, to avoid the fallacy of *psychologism*, a position represented in the work of contemporaries such as William James. According to a psychologistic conception of logic, there is no difference in principle between the propositions of logic and empirical generalizations on the basis of

But as soon as we accept this account of the “transcendental” character of logical form as the set of conditions of possibility “beyond” the world of facts, we see that a theory of meaning cannot be limited exclusively by “worldly” empirical constraints: the ultimately determinant conditions of the possibility of meaning cannot be derived from what happens to be the case in the world; the latter instead somehow presupposes the former. This issue is raised by Wittgenstein already in a 1914 notebook entry: “That shadow, which the picture as it were casts upon the world: How exactly should I grasp of it? Here is a deep mystery. It is the mystery of negation: This is not how things are, and yet we can say *how* things are *not*—for the proposition is only the *description* of a situation. (But this is all still only on the surface.)”<sup>38</sup> How is it possible for there to be a constraint on meanings logically prior to their actually obtaining (or not) “on the surface,” in the world?

I believe that it is just this question that Wittgenstein attempts to address with his appeal to *the mystical*. He *addresses* the question: he does not answer it. For, on his conception, the mystical is not a matter of some ineffable truth, but rather that which stands at the limit of any attempt at explanation, and outside the world of facts:

- 6.4312 [...] The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* of space and time. (It is certainly not the solution of any problems of natural science that is required.)
- 6.432 How the world is is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world.<sup>39</sup>
- 6.4321 The facts all contribute to the task, not to the solution.<sup>40</sup>
- 6.44 It is not *how* the world is that is mystical, but rather *that* it is.<sup>41</sup>
- 6.45 The viewing of the world *sub specie aeterni* is its viewing as a whole—a limited whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical.<sup>42</sup>

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experience. Such a position, in the eyes of its many critics, fails to recognize and explain the fact that the propositions of logic are not merely likely or probable but *necessary*. For one clear account of the problem in historical context, cf. Richard R. Brockhaus, *Pulling Up the Ladder: The Metaphysical Roots of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (La Salle, IL: Open Court: 1991), 65-106.

<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 30, emphasis in the original.

<sup>39</sup> Translation modified: “Wie die Welt ist, ist für das Höhere vollkommen gleichgültig. Gott offenbart sich nicht in der Welt.”

<sup>40</sup> Translation modified: “Die Tatsachen gehören alle nur zur Aufgabe, nicht zur Lösung.”

<sup>41</sup> Translation modified: “Nicht wie die Welt ist, ist das Mystische, sondern daß sie ist.”

<sup>42</sup> Translation modified: “Die Anschauung der Welt *sub specie aeterni* ist ihre Anschauung als—begrenztes Ganzes. Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das mystische.”



The “mystery of negation” referred to in the notebooks passage is thus not the question of the particular laws or rules governing the a priori *structure* that allows for such a situation, “*how* things are in the world,” which is something Wittgenstein believes himself to have demonstrated—to the degree any such demonstration is possible—in the logical propositions of the *Tractatus*, but *that* such a structure exists: that only this particular set of actualized possibilities, our world of facts, exists, despite the much broader set of possibilities. The fact that there is *this* contingency, and yet not total contingency, leads to the more general recognition—which Wittgenstein thinks should cause us great wonder and consternation, but which we tend to take as a mere matter of course—that there can be a world of facts that obtain at all only in the broader context of a set of possible meanings, all of which do not and cannot simultaneously obtain. In effect, a world in which every meaningful proposition, every proposition that *could* obtain, *did* obtain, would contain no value at all. And for Wittgenstein, *this itself* is not a fact in the world but something beyond the tractarian world because it is “beyond the facts.” As Wittgenstein commentator and translator Brian McGuinness expresses this point,

Wittgenstein seems to think that any origin or cause would in fact be inside the world and would hence form not a solution but rather part of the problem to be solved. To put it more in his own terms: he holds that if the value of the world resided in the fact that, say, it had been created for a purpose by God, then its creation for a purpose would be one of the facts which there were in the world. Moreover (he appears to think), if it were a mere matter of fact that God had created it, there would still be room for a question why this matter of fact was a matter of fact. It is clear that in this way we reach a demand for an explanation (in a certain sense) of the world that will derive the sense of the world, the reason why there is a world, from some necessary features of all possible worlds.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Tractatus*, the worry about “the question of the meaning of life” in the wartime notebooks—with which I began above—is transformed by way of Wittgenstein’s complex account of logic and language into the very “explanation (in a certain sense)” of the sense of the world, an “explanation” that the *Tractatus* explicitly opposes to the mere contingency of the exclusively factual tractarian world. Because of its transcendental character, that which ultimately determines meaning cannot be on the level of the natural sciences, which are concerned only with the facts in the world and the corresponding “propositions of natural science—i.e., something that has nothing to do with philoso-

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<sup>43</sup>Brian McGuinness, “Mysticism,” in *Approaches to Wittgenstein: Collected Papers* (London: Routledge, 2001), 140-159, here 149.

phy.”<sup>44</sup> The realm of meaning is not dependent upon the wider realm of natural science but rather the reverse. And this means that what ultimately makes our propositions *meaningful* (be they those of natural science, of religion, or simply of the happenings of everyday life)—that which gives them *sense*—is not some further set of facts in the world:

6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. . . .

If there is any value that has value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so [*So-Seins*]. For all happening and being-so is accidental. What makes it nonaccidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.<sup>45</sup>

This “explanation” is called by Wittgenstein “the mystical,” a claim corroborated by Wittgenstein’s friend Paul Engelmann’s understanding of the *Tractatus*, which had the benefit of extended direct explanation from the author:

As Engelmann understood the *Tractatus* and what Wittgenstein explained about it, Wittgenstein and the logical positivists shared a common endeavor in trying to draw “the line between what we can speak about and what we must be silent about.” “The difference is only that they have nothing to be silent about. . . . whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about.” Among Wittgenstein’s “mystical conclusions,” Engelmann thought, are, e. g. that the sense of the world must lie outside the world (*Tractatus* 6.41)—yet, he observed, “he [Wittgenstein] does not doubt that there is such a sense”; that no value exists in the world, yet “that which endows things with the value they have, which they show, is therefore simply not in the world . . . but that cannot be said”; that “There is indeed that which is unutterable. This makes itself manifest, it is the mystical” (cf. *Tractatus* 6.522)—“(but not a ‘bluish haze surrounding things’ and giving them an interesting appearance [as Wittgenstein once said in conversation]).”<sup>46</sup>

While everything that is expressible must follow “the logic of our language,”<sup>47</sup> and this includes the totality of facts in the world, in my view Wittgenstein’s appeal to the mystical amounts to an insistence that there are significant ele-

<sup>44</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.53.

<sup>45</sup> My translation: “Der Sinn der Welt muss ausserhalb ihrer liegen. Wenn es einen Wert gibt, der Wert hat, so muss er ausserhalb alles Geschehens und So-Seins liegen. Denn alles Geschehen und So-Sein ist zufällig. Was es nicht-zufällig macht, kann nicht *in der Welt* liegen, denn sonst wäre dies wieder zufällig. Es muss ausserhalb der Welt liegen.”

<sup>46</sup> Peter Hacker, “Was He Trying to Whistle It?,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (New York: Routledge, 2000), 353-88, here 372-73.

<sup>47</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.003.

ments of human life that do not fit neatly into the predicable structures of our language and cannot be determined *even in principle* by the investigations of natural science. Such elements are not, properly speaking, *meanings*, and they are not *in the world* (are not facts); but they nonetheless are responsible for the *meaningfulness* or sense of the world as a whole, “that it exists,” while themselves remaining outside it. McGuinness’s gloss on this point, using the vocabulary of the *Tractatus*, is again exemplary:

That something is means that there are objects [in the technical sense of the *Tractatus* as discussed above]; that there are objects means that there are possibilities each of which must either be realized or not; that there are such possibilities means that there is a world. Conversely what the mystic finds striking is not that there is the particular world there is—for he is not interested in how the world is—but that there is a world—namely, that some possibilities or other (no matter which) are realized—which is no more than to say there is a set of possibilities some of which (but no determinate set of which) must be realized, which is no more than to say that there are objects. The only difference between the ordinary man and the mystic is that the latter is not content to accept this existence and to operate within it; he is filled with wonder at the thought of it.<sup>48</sup>

We can now see why interpretive debates about the *Tractatus* have centered on the status of that which the book suggests is ineffable and outside the world conceived as consisting exclusively of facts. If Wittgenstein’s real interest in the *Tractatus* is, as he wrote in a famous letter, “that which is not written,”<sup>49</sup> then his account of meaning ultimately rests on an element of the logical system as a whole that concerns not merely the a posteriori world of facts but the much broader and for Wittgenstein more primary question of “the meaning of life.” The mystical is in this sense not subsidiary to the theory of logic and meaning presented in the *Tractatus* but that which lies at its very core.

## The Mystical as Meaningful

If we fail to give adequate weight to Wittgenstein’s conception of “the mystical” and focus only on the directly logical and linguistic schematic of the *Tractatus* (as many commentators have done, especially early in the history of scholarship on the book), we end up with a reading of the *Tractatus* in which the con-

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<sup>48</sup> McGuinness, “Mysticism,” 147.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the letter to von Ficker in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Prototractatus: An Early Version of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German text and facsimile with English translation, ed. B. F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg, and G. H. von Wright, trl. B. F. McGuinness and D. F. Pears (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 15-16.

tours of propositional language and a correspondence theory of truth concerned only with the facts in the world determine everything that matters for the theory of meaning—a reading that ignores the broader spiritual concerns that I have insisted drove Wittgenstein’s early thought around the time of the Great War: the insight according to which, as Wittgenstein wrote in his notebooks, “the facts of the world are not the end of the matter.”<sup>50</sup>

With his account of the mystical in the *Tractatus*, I believe Wittgenstein is attempting to show that, in everyday life, there are myriad *meaningful* aspects of experience that are not and could not in principle be articulated in language, because they are not matters of *fact*. If we fail to recognize this, we may begin to mistake the impoverished tractarian “world” for the actual world of human experience and life, and to think that the *real* world in which we live and act can be reduced—at least insofar as it can be understood by human beings—to the meanings prescribed by the language in which we talk about it or the scientific propositions that attempt to explain it. As discussed above, this latter view is of a piece with the increasingly scientific worldview that Wittgenstein and others felt had led to the “crisis” of humanity so turbulently affecting Western spiritual life around the time of the Great War.

Thus Wittgenstein’s conception of the mystical functions as a necessary and fundamental component of his overall account of meaning, even though the mystical plays no role in contributing specific, linguistic *meanings*. As outside the tractarian world *qua* “totality of facts,” the mystical is not a realm of “secret meanings” but the condition of *meaningfulness* or *significance* as such: a characteristic awe directed not at how the world is, but at the feeling of wonder *that* a meaningful world exists at all. What is most important for Wittgenstein is precisely that which, according to the *Tractatus*, cannot be represented in language though it may be shown; a condition of the possibility of the impoverished tractarian world and thus something that also exceeds its factual, representational limits.

Thus my insistence above that Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* does not advocate “mysticism” or contain any “ineffable” or secret doctrine (the first position characterized in the first section with reference to Huxley and James). Wittgenstein is not claiming that that which is outside the tractarian world is some set of ineffable *facts*, deep *truths*, or hidden *knowledge*. To say that the sense of the world lies outside the world cannot be to say that it exists as a separate and prior realm of facts, since the totality of facts must be *within*, or, more precisely, must *be* the tractarian world.<sup>51</sup> Nor is it to say that there are ineffable “truths,” in any standard sense, since truth occurs only in the world, at the level of facts and propositions. Nor is it to say that the mystical is a fixed set of ineffable

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<sup>50</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 1.1.

*meanings*, since meanings for Wittgenstein are expressed in propositions and thus are always effable, even if not the case.

It is rather to say that that which is a condition of the very possibility of truth and propositional meaning is neither itself a truth nor interpretable as a discrete set of truths or of hidden “meanings.” It is not a matter of a question to which there is some deeply hidden answer or of a sort of potential truth claim: as I put it above, the mystical functions as a way of *addressing* the question at the root of the theory of meaning, without constituting a fixed *answer* to it. The mystical thus ultimately functions as a sort of unexplained explainer: the root of what Wittgenstein understood to be the sense of wonder we feel when we contemplate the existence of the meaningful world as a whole: “not how the world is, but *that* it exists.” The final simplicity of this claim with regard to everyday human life against the background of the complex logical theory in which it is developed is a testament to the insight and elegance of Wittgenstein’s deeply human thought.

## Wittgenstein’s Lessons Learned

As I have argued at the outset of this interpretation, it is difficult to grasp the import of Wittgenstein’s conception of the role of the mystical in meaning unless we keep in mind the broader sociocultural milieu in which he wrote, and especially the sense of “crisis” that pervaded European culture during and immediately after the First World War. With that broader context in view, however, the *prima facie* oddity of a book that claims at once, through its careful logical and linguistic analyses, to have “found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems” and at the same time to have shown “how little is achieved when these problems are solved” becomes less puzzling.<sup>52</sup> In the Great War, Wittgenstein found himself confronted with a world being torn apart, a world in which the advancements made possible through scientific precision no longer complemented the values and conceptions of everyday human life; a world in which the orienting concepts and godheads of previous generations had been displaced, but nothing new had been allowed to take their place, too few had bothered to ask whether a replacement might be necessary, and too many had assumed the task undesirable or impossible. In such a world, what was perhaps most needed was a justification for finding value—any source of value at all—in life: a reason for the continuation of living by guaranteeing that it is “possible for one so to live that life stops being problematic.”<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the Great War in the midst of which the *Tractatus* was forged was all too quickly eclipsed by another one, and the crisis of modernity so

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5 (these quotes are from the [in]famous last line of Wittgenstein’s preface).

<sup>53</sup> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 74.

pressing already in Wittgenstein's youth was once again neither solved by international conflict nor assuaged through scientific or technological advancement. As Paul Tillich would write in 1952, in his own diagnosis of the spiritual crisis of modern Western life, "The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of an ultimate concern, of a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings. This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence."<sup>54</sup>

Wittgenstein's remarks concerning the mystical are, I have argued, an attempt to persuade us of the persistence—even if merely indirect or symbolic—of such ultimate value and meaning. And he recognized, like few others before or since, that such a guarantee could not be made in ignorance of logic, language, and the facts of the world, but only by looking first through and then *beyond* them to find what is greater. Whereas for Russell mystical intuition represented an important but ultimately secondary concern, a mere precursor to the exact analyses of science, for Wittgenstein the scientific world of facts must ultimately rest on the more primordial and meaning-giving aspects of a world whose value lies "beyond the facts." This is the ethical message of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, one that we would do well to heed today.

In a contemporary world in which it is too commonly believed that what matters is either already explained and decided or soon to be taken care of by cashing in the promissory notes of science, technology, and global affairs, we might do well to recognize the crises of Wittgenstein's age in our own, and to heed—or at least to consider—his unique response to those problems. For the "answer," the "explanation" of meaning offered by means of the mystical in the *Tractatus* functions in an unexpected manner. The solution we arrive at is neither a specific answer, nor a prescription, nor a fixed meaning. It is not something *said* but something *shown*, something we must recognize as already before our eyes, "in the vanishing of the problem. (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense? There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are the mystical)."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Tillich, *Courage to Be*, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.521-6.522 (translation slightly modified).