Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus - Irfan Ajvazi

The logical problem of describing only physics in any positive way while never coming down hard on absolute statements -- like the way we only hypothesize that the sun will come up tomorrow -- eventually curled around itself in very strange ways, like the problem of including your own description in with the description itself.

It keeps adding to the problem of description, mathematically, until the recursion explodes your head or makes you divide by zero. (Same difference, really.)

It presages, at least in part, Goedel's Incompleteness Theorem. Also, P=NP. As in, is it possible to include the index to your library in with the library itself, or do you need to make a brand new card catalog system every time to include the original index? The time it takes to prove a thing is disproportionately large (or impossible) compared to the FACT OF THE SOLUTION.

This goes beyond logical fallacy. It's a real thing we still deal with. And yet, Wittgenstein throws out the baby with the bathwater at the very end. He makes a beautiful house of cards and claps his hands, making us wake up after the long novel with a classic, \"and it was only a dream.\"

Wittgenstein's project is twofold: first, he wants to develop his logical theory and, second, he wants to explain how this conception of logic relates to the world of facts. That is, the work deals with two theories, one logical the other epistemological. And the conclusions Wittgenstein draws from them are extraordinary.

As he states in his opening sentence, the world is the totality of facts – each fact is divided from each other fact. Whether this division is finite and infinite isn't clear to me (I guess it doesn't really matter for Wittgenstein's theory anyway). We perceive these facts in the sense that we picture them in our thoughts, where the logical-pictorial form of each picture corresponds to the fact it represents. That is, the logical structure of our thoughts corresponds with the logical structure of the facts in the world. In short: at its foundation the world consists of indivisible, independent facts and each corresponds to a single indivisible, independent logical element.

When we think, our thoughts are translated (so to speak) in propositions. Or rather: our propositions are expressions of our thoughts, which are themselves, ultimately, pictures of facts. These propositions are either elemental (i.e. they are the most simple, undividable units of thoughts) or they are composites of elemental propositions (i.e. they are complexes). Wittgenstein applies the (then) new method of symbolic logic to unearth the fundamental logical structure underneath (and common to) all these linguistic expressions of our thoughts. He digs up the general form of a proposition – or rather truth function – which collects different elemental propositions containing variables into one complex and generates a truth value for the whole depending on the specific value of the variables.

But here there arises a fundamental issue. Logical propositions are either true or false, depending on the particular input (the values of the variables). The particular input of a variable isn't really all that interesting to the logician – what he or she discovers is a general, lawlike structure which is tautological in the sense that, through the propositional relations, the input rigidly determines the output. These logical propositions are thus necessary, while the particular input in the formulae, since it consists of variables, is accidental. That is, all particular facts (the facts of the world) are accidental. This leads Wittgenstein to conclude that logic is the exploration of all that's lawlike,

while everything outside logic – the world of facts – is accidental.

After developing his logical theory, he applies his apparatus to physic and psychology (i.e. scientific propositions):

"[Physics] is an attempt to construct according to a single plan all the true propositions that we need for a description of the world." (pp. 82-83)

"The laws of physics, with all their logical apparatus, still speak, however indirectly, about the objects of the world." (p. 83)

This is a radical stance: causality manifests itself in the world but isn't part of physics. All laws are logical necessities and are about the relations between facts, not about the particular facts (their descriptions) themselves. The key point is that we can experience and talk about the particular facts in the world but can never transcend them. The world has no sense, or rather: it cannot be discovered within the world. According to Wittgenstein all propositions (and thus our thoughts about the world) are of equal value. That is, of no value. There is no value in the world – all questions about religion, ethics, aesthetics, etc. are transcendental. Since words apply only to the phenomenal world of experience, we cannot talk about the subjects of religion, ethics, aesthetics, etc. That is, we cannot ask any questions about them in the first place.

Wittgenstein concludes in one of his final paragraphs:

"We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the questions of life remain completely untouched. Of course, there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer." (p. 88)

"The solution of the problems of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem." (pp. 88-89)
"There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is called mystical." (p. 89)

And he ends his work with the infamous words:

"What we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence." (p. 89)

It is very easy to read these final pages and accept his claims at face value. But there is more depth to these words than a superficial reader notices. In fact, Wittgenstein has ended up in a very eccentric position: along the way he has built a self-contained and tautological logical apparatus which is entirely separated from the world, the totality of facts, which we experience in life. This apparatus is subsequently used to destroy all claims of logical necessity in physics and psychology and reduce these sciences to the status of collections of statements about particular facts in the world. Finally the apparatus is used to show how only facts in the world can be put into words and everything else transcends this world and thus the possibility of speaking about them. That is, all things outside the world (including the world itself) lack sense, are nonsense. And since the logical apparatus itself is cut off from the world of facts, the final act of Wittgenstein is to throw away his tool and end up with the only thing real: the mystical. He says:

"My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions and then he will see the world aright." (p. 89)

As he himself points out in the preface, after solving all the philosophical questions – by pointing out they are (literally) nonsense – there is not much achieved. He has cleared up all the human, all too human, pretence of thinking ourselves able to talk about the world in scientific and logical terms – all that rests is our living in the world. It is not surprising that after writing his Tractatus, Wittgenstein decided he had solved (or dissolved?) philosophy once and for all: all that remained was living a life that was in accord with the mystical. He was a man who was throughout his life obsessed with religion and ethics, and so he decided to work as a gardener in a monastery (he was rejected), as a school teacher (he was dismissed due to his loose hands), as a proletarian in Soviet Russia (he was rejected and offered a position as professor of philosopher in Kiev – which he rejected). Basically all his attempts at living like a saint failed miserable, and in 1929 he decided to return to Britain to return as a professor of philosophy in Cambridge. There he radically altered his views on his former philosophy and developed a whole new philosophy which was as radical and influential as the first one.

Wittgenstein was a very remarkable man, but also a very problematic character. This shows in the Tractatus: it is as unconventional, extreme and original as no philosopher since Plato. Perhaps it helped that he wasn't trained as a philosopher but as an engineer in aeronautics – coming from a mathematical background and stepping into philosophy at a very late point in his education he was free from all the common prejudices and restrictions which education tends to foster. For example, some academic colleagues remarked that he never read Aristotle, which perhaps is rather a compliment than a dismissal. Being intellectually free he was able to invent two highly original philosophies which are more spectacular and ground-breaking than the works of most other twentieth century philosophers.

Born to privilege, he renounced his family for modest accommodations in Cambridge and eventually volunteered for service in the First World War. In the trenches, he composed the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1919), revolutionizing philosophy overnight. Convinced that he had solved all of the problems of the field, he then left academia for more mundane pursuits, becoming first a schoolteacher then a gardener. Then, believing himself to have been mistaken, he returned to Cambridge a decade later and revolutionized philosophy for a second time, this time with the ordinary language approach captured in the posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

Wittgenstein's personal ethic was one of meticulous exactness and his aesthetic one of unadorned minimalism. And while you wouldn't know it from reading most of what has been written his work, both sensibilities are everywhere apparent in the *Tractatus*. Sparse, enigmatic, and rigorously precise, it proceeds in a series of numbered propositions, guiding the reader through single-mindedly stark doctrines about ontology, logic, and language, and ending with a rapturous climax that has captured the imaginations of students of philosophy, literature, and the arts for nearly a century:

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

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

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

The *Tractatus* is ostensibly a book about the relation between language and the world. Wittgenstein writes in his short preface that he seeks, by making this relation explicit, to draw *limits* to what can be said:

The aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts ... It will ... only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.

This drawing of limits follows clearly from the tractarian doctrines about language and logic. The book notoriously advances a "picture theory" of language: A proposition is a picture and depicts a possible combination of states of affairs into a situation. By a state of affairs, (*Sachverhalt*) Wittgenstein means a combination of simple objects, i.e., of fundamental constituents of reality that cannot be further subdivided. By situation (*Sachlage*), he means a combination of such states of affairs. Insofar as it depicts a situation that may or may not obtain, a proposition is bivalent: if the situation it depicts does obtain—i.e., if it is a fact—then the proposition is true. If not, then it is false.

According to Wittgenstein, the structure of language reflects that of the world. Just as a situation is a combination of states of affairs and a state of affairs is a combination of objects standing in a determinate relation to one another, so a meaningful proposition is a combination of elementary propositions and an elementary proposition is a combination of names standing in a determinate relation to one another. This shared structure common both to language and the world accounts for the possibility of the one representing or depicting the other. Names correspond to objects, and the logical operators show the relations in which these objects stand.

The "limits" of meaningful language as Wittgenstein understands them are tautologies and contradictions. These are not nonsensical (*unsinnig*), but merely senseless (*sinloss*). They do not say or depict anything in particular: a tautology is always true—it is compatible with *any* picture—whereas a contradiction is always false, i.e., is compatible with *no* pictures. However, tautologies and contradictions (which include all of the "propositions" of logic and mathematics) are legitimate constituents of any formal system of representation; they *show* the structure of

the system of representation, and so of the world it represents. Anything that does not conform to this structure or that tries to cross the limits of language—the propositions of theology, metaphysics, and ethics, and even those of the *Tractatus* itself—is *nonsensical*. It can neither be said nor thought.

Adding to the considerable mystique surrounding the book is Wittgenstein's enigmatic comment, in a 1919 letter to Ludwig von Ficker, which qualifies the limit-drawing project expressed in the preface and suggests that the book is, in some unorthodox sense, a work of ethical philosophy:

The point of the book is ethical... My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the ONLY rigorous way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where many others today are just gassing, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly in place by being silent about it.

What is this ethical point? Well, in drawing the limits of thought, Wittgenstein seeks at the same time to draw the limits of reason and therefore of science. As such, his is best understood in opposition to G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903), which sought to found a \"science of ethics\" using the tools of logical analysis. There can be no doubt that certain ways of life, certain courses of action, and certain experiences appear to us to be self-evidently valuable in themselves or \"absolutely valuable,\" to use the language of Wittgenstein's 1929 *Lecture of Ethics*. But despite Western philosophy's best efforts to justify various ethical doctrines for the past 2500 years, no *reasons* can be adduced in support of these convictions and no science can deduce them.

The meaning of life—what is good, what is right, what is valuable—is not to be discovered by subtle distinction and clever deduction for the simple reason that there is nothing there to discover. Instead, it must be lived. This is the ethical point that was so dear to Wittgenstein and by which he hoped to put an end to the \"babbling\" of his contemporaries about ethics—a goal which his most fervent admirers are now doing their very best to subvert, as [recent scholarship](#) will attest. Against these commentators, Wittgenstein would no doubt cite the words of Kierkegaard, whom Wittgenstein admired, and whose words so succinctly capture the \"ethical point\" of the *Tractatus*:

The highest and most beautiful things in life are not to be heard about, nor read about, nor seen but, if one will, are to be lived.

Wittgenstein is like some Zen asshat who makes us hold a stress position for 72 hours on a tree stump in the pouring rain to instill chastened humility before an ungraspable cosmic order. Led through the inspection-tunnels and antechambers of a vast self-annihilating hall of mirrors, we arrive at the shattered terminus of epistemological overthrow that punked Bertrand Russell so hard his pipe whirligigged in his mouth like Popeye's.

Those who've dragged the lake of metaphysics know how exasperating this type of writing can be: the rectilinear sight-lines of definition, thesis, and axiom springing the trap of an illusory cyborg's-eye view of atomic reality, the circuitous maze of tautology and self-reference which seems to lead everywhere and nowhere. Maddeningly, Wittgenstein never provides a clear definition of \"object,\" and so the elucidatory nucleus of the *Tractatus* itself becomes a sucking vortex of fathomless unknowing, pulling everything into thin air like John Lithgow shooting through the glass at that goblin tearing up the wing.

A gnomic breviary for androids, prequel to the immeasurably richer *Philosophical Investigations*(1929-1951), it exemplifies the positivist mania Wittgenstein largely discarded like a cicada moulting its exoskeleton. As enchanting as a circuitboard schematic (for hardware that doesn't function), the *Tractatus* is a victim of its own tense certitudes. For the \"picture theory\" of realism, presuming to mirror the deep structure of the logical universe through recourse to atomic \"simples,\" is no mere coding error, but rather the grand boffo Mega Blooper at the perplexed heart of 3000 years of philosophic tail-chasing. The burning bridge to the post-*Tractatus* Wittgenstein -- cognitive-therapist of language-games high and low -- appears in proposition 4.112: \"Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.\" We inoculate against disease by introducing antigens into our bio-chem to produce antibodies. We study the history of philosophy to keep from contaminating ourselves with the well-meaning-but-poo-brained fallacies of our noble precursors. (Fallacies most of us would embrace on faith sans the contingency of being wised-up latecomers to the game. Which is another way of saying that contemporary fallacies, which no doubt exist, are largely invisible to us. Fish cannot grasp the concept of water. Fallacious cognition fuels our motivational self-esteem just as caloric intake fuels our body systems.)

Wittgenstein starts his project in not such a different fashion as did Descartes in the Meditations On First Philosophy- by asking himself what he truly knows. What he knows is that he has an understanding of the world that he expresses to himself through language. He has a picture of the world that he can describe with words. The picture is an idea about reality that may or may not be correct but that is understood as having the potential to correctly capture reality, and that captive reality can then be conveyed with language. The picture, however, cannot depict itself. Knowledge cannot exceed itself. It cannot say what it is, because that would be knowledge picturing itself, that is stepping outside its own limit (itself) and seeing itself in a larger context.

We cannot think illogically because logic is the \"shape\" of thought. We can only logically acknowledge that we understand our own thoughts (our pictures of the world) and that we understand our conveyence of these pictures in language. To doubt one's understanding of the world, or to doubt that the world exists, (skepticism) is to attempt to depict one's own understanding of the world, it is to attempt to think beyond thought itself, which is non-sense. Thought can only depict its own understanding, not its non-understanding of what it has no access to at any rate.

Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein feels the Cartesian tradition is a misguided attempt to think beyond the world that the subject is already a part of. For Heidegger, the subject is already in the world that the Cartesian thinker doubts, giving shape to the world by embracing his own actions within it. For Wittgenstein, the subject has already acknowledged the world simply by having an impression of it that he can convey through language. The otherness of the world is a logical proposition that we can only acknowledge we understand.

I have always loved reading Heidegger but I had a troubling thought recently while reading Michel Lowy's interpretive work on Walter Benjamin's \"On the Concept of History,\" entitled Fire Alarm. If Heidegger's being-in-the-world cannot doubt the light of being that shines upon him, how was the clearing through which the sun reaches him created and shaped? Was the clearing of cultural being not cut by what Benjamin referred to as the tyranical victors of history? Was the clearing that shapes being's experience not built through the toil of slaves? Is it, then, that Heidegger's being-in-the-world cannot doubt the right-ness of the dominator in rejoicing in the sun of life? For he frolics in the architecture of the tyrant, which only poses as the \"nature\" of the forest.

Similarly, in Wittgensteinian language, if the other is a proposition that consciousness cannot deny it understands, can consciousness doubt its own intentions for the other. Does it not understand the other perfectly, and thereby know that it understands what is \"best\" for the other?

Is it possible that Heidegger and Wittgenstein managed to negate skepticism only to deepen for philosophy the primary ethical criticism of the Cartesian tradition: that if consciousness properly understands the Other it does not have to question its own (exploitative) designs on the otherness of the world?

All language can say is what is in that woodpile. Anything outside of the woodpile is nonsense. Any part of that woodpile is logically based on the elementary propositions at its base. There are limits to how high one can build the woodpile. That's all we can know, stacked up in a neat pile of wood.

The best known consequence of this philosophical system is that some areas of discourse are nonsense, including philosophy, religion, morality, aesthetics, etc. The traditional topics of philosophy are out of bounds. We can not talk about the world as a whole, the relation of knowledge to the world, the nature of the self and so forth, because they are not part of our woodpile and we cannot get outside of our woodpile to do so.

An elegant and beautiful system, and theory of language. I will refrain from whining because I can't, within this system, do any philosophy, As Wittgenstein concludes, \"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence. \" I admire the beauty and integrity with which Wittgenstein articulates his vision, so that it becomes like a Zen koan.

One quibble before I shut up. The facts in the world that propositions are supposed to mirror, seem to me to be metaphysical projections. They strangely resemble propositions, yet they are supposed to be in the world. If I look out my window, I see trees and houses, but I don't see facts. Wittgenstein says many things about facts, enough to make me unsure if I am making a valid point. He says, for example, that they are the logical structure which propositions and the world have in common. He also says that one cannot speak of this logical structure, because to do so, one would have to be outside the woodpile. So I will stew in silence.

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, hierarchically presented with simple and literary statements, is divided into seven main propositions.

"In a certain sense, we cannot make mistakes in logic."
"Logic is not a theory but a reflection of the world"
The author defends that logic and facts should be delivered simply and concisely. Ironically speaking, he had to use a harsh and raw text to prove that.

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world"
Occasionally we have a certain thought or feeling that we can't describe. This means that we are under the language radar, which is too limited for the total perceptions of the world.
Aldous Huxley, on his work "The Doors of perception", managed to explain how he perceived the world under the effect of psychedelics. According to Huxley's experience, his notion of language got neutralized and his perception of the world increased dramatically. Objects lost their grammatical connotation and gained an intrinsical meaning that can't be explained through language.
In some experiences, words are not enough to express certain feelings and perceptions.

"We make to ourselves pictures of the facts"
"The Picture has the logical form of representation in common with what it pictures"
Words can have different meanings and different pictures. Since pictures are models of reality, those models can be quite tricky during our lives. For instance, when we tell a specific story that had happened, the image of that same story will be different from the person we are communicating. The same happens with innuendo jokes about specific topics. Moreover, it also happens when certain discourses perceive different emotional connotations.
Music, for instance, is just an arrangement of sounds with certain features. But, its symbolic value is given independently of its value in reality. Whether music is an arrangement of sounds or not, its intrinsical value is provided by society and by ourselves (in a personal and subjective way).
One can describe the characteristics of a certain song but that same description is not the song in a real sense. So, the only way to perceive that song is by showing it, because that specific song has a language of its own ("Thus we cannot say that there is a correspondence between language and reality, but the correspondence itself can only be shown since our language is not capable of describing its own logical structure.").

"The world is independent of my will".
This is one of the most interesting statements of the book. It's one of the thoughts that I've presumed beforehand. This observation states that no matter how hard I wish something, it won't have any impact on the real world unless that thought turns into action. Accordingly, Wittgenstein condemned superstition and other folkloric myths. ("Even if everything we wished were to happen, this would only be, so to speak, a favour of fate, for there is no logical connexion between will and world, which would guarantee this, and the assumed physical connexion itself we could not again will.")

Thinking too much can lead to unsolved problems, making us therefore trapped under constant thought. There are more things we don't know than those we know. The Universe works in mysterious ways that we can't even explain. In some circumstances, language can be a big obstacle for the way we experience our surroundings. Meditation, for instance, is an incredible example that puts in connection with ourselves and with the world.
Wittgenstein presents an unbelievable work with several mind-blowing statements. Throughout our history, numerous unsolved questions about the world have been made. On top of that, those questions, most of the time, haven't lead us nowhere. For that reason, if we have the world ahead of us, we should start to live more and find our meanings during our paths.

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Revisiting this with formal logic and knowledge of Frege and Russell under my belt changed the experience tremendously. It reveals a work as strange and idiosyncratic in approach as it is insightful. For example universal generality, a very basic operator (i.e. -all- men are moral), is something Witt provides good reasons for being skeptical of, though the point presses more on what we assume when we use them rather than their use, and I feel you first have to take ($\forall$x) for granted before finding these points useful.

Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries" - a laudable goal. Which made me feel dumb for not seeing the clarity in something like "There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation" - I thought the use of "entirely" here was problematic, and wasn't on the whole convinced by the conclusion (this would fall under the (2) category).

Wittgenstein was on par -- that is -- he was interested in the same topics they were. While Badiou and Wittgenstein appear quite similar in many regards -- both approach the presentation of sense as an order of logic -- Deleuze's relationship with Wittgenstein seems strained. After finishing *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, however, it's clear that Wittgenstein advocates stepping out of the circular logic of presentation inherent within his propositional language solely to be silent about the very thing language is meant to speak of, and for that, Wittgenstein fails. When you see that this *Elan Vital* is central to Deleuze's work, that as Badiou rightly states, is in a sense, what Deleuze's philosophy can always be reduced to as this concept is so central to Deleuze, you understand that Wittgenstein only formally approaches Deleuze: The two veer off in inseparable difference due to aesthetic reasons (inherent to Wittgenstein's desire for a crystaline purity of logic).

Nonetheless, the two are nearly ontop one another. You could almost read *Logic of Sense* as a broader version of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. But even further still, when you recognize that Wittgenstein considered this book to be a failure, that at the very end he ends up discarding the very Spinozian-like formality of his Euclidean presentation, of top down truth that dribbles into particular branches only to lead nowhere, you'll understand that if Wittgenstein was given a longer life with broader exposure to issues, perhaps avoiding Bertrand Russell's poisonous influence, he might have been able to gleam the larger subliminal essence language has to offer... the very essence that he eliminated through the very rigid formality of his approach.

We all know that language can't be reduced to logic. This is true, because language can be used to present any number of inherently contradictory hypothesises. Language has to be ambiguous in this way because if it was not, if it was 1:1 as a method of designation, we'd have to invent whole new languages each time we changed the power structure. We may not have to invent new languages for entirely new cultures, but it seems to certainly help. The multi-valence inherent in language isn't a weakness, as Russell or Wittgenstein may have thought... it's not an imperfection needed to be weeded out. Rather, it's a partial resolution of an infinitely resolute difference, one that is further refined...to the point of collapse only to be refined again as needed. The very ability for language to come about, ever changing and alive reflects the totally continuous becoming of the very essence of human knowledge.

In other words, our language changes as the conditions of our knowledge change. Our language changes because our knowledge shifts as we grow and evolve. This constant shifting isn't reflective of the imprecision of our knowing, but rather, reflective of the depths to which we continually try to know and with which the unfolding of time reveals how much more there is to know.

Given that Wittgenstein wanted only the determinacy of propositions, recognizing that the limits of truth conditions was merely a range upon which we did speak, we can become more mature when we understand that language contains within it the very seeds of indeterminacy so that truth can be presented to us. Only because the void of the indeterminate pure multiple hides within the shadows of language's incessant murmur can a fully formed truth jump out to us. Wittgenstein definitely chased the absolute point of reflection within language but he didn't seem to realize that such a \"picture\" of a logically perfect structure is only possible, albeit briefly, because language is raggedly rough.

The early Wittgenstein was concerned with the relationship between propositions and the world, and hoped that by providing an account of this relationship all philosophical problems could be solved; these problems arise, he thought, because the logic of language is not evident in our ordinary use of language. The later Wittgenstein rejected many of the conclusions of the Tractatus, arguing that language is a kind of motley of language-games in which the meaning of words is derived from their public use.
The Tractatus is still worth reading as the most concise presentation of the logical analysis of propositions.

The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wishes to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. The method would be unsatisfying to the other - he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy - but it would be the only strictly correct method. [...] Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Although by no means a summary of the whole work, the above quote is perhaps as good a summary of the conclusions of the work that one is likely to get. It comes from the very last pages, when Wittgenstein has already satisfactorily established that the fields of ethics and aesthetics (and indeed most other branches of philosophy too) are all but entirely meaningless. This book was not meant to be an addition in the philosophical canon (which of

course it has become) but rather a bookend for the philosophical canon, by which I mean the book which terminated the development of Western philosophy by bringing the whole field to a natural conclusion.

As you may have noticed, the field of philosophy is still very much alive. Wittgenstein did not succeed in putting an end to philosophy, but he did succeed in establishing himself as a philosophical juggernaut. As much as this work is, in its explanation of the meaninglessness of signs and the impossibility of commenting on the world from inside of the world, extremely compelling, it is nevertheless hard to swallow the pill that human language is incapable of expressing meaningful statements, beyond simple declarations of atomic facts.

I.1 An axiomatic system can negate and confute a priori reasoning, but can he confirm his own axiomatic consistency ?
I.2 Can an axiom confirm her own axiomatic physionomy ?
I.2.1 Can a madman confirm his own madness or for him is a subjective reality ?
I.3 If, the reality is an optic/perspective from one subject and represents an objective relativity, then does it mean that the Wittgenstein's negation of the absolute truth is consistent ?
I.3.1 Not because an absolute truth cannot confirm its absoluteness by its absoluteness, but because the causa of confirmness is in nexus with the subjectivity, and if the element of absoluteness contains a subjectivity in itself than it loses its absoluteness, the subjective is malign and its metastases are the negation of the absoluteness.
I.4 Can this Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus confirm itself or Godel's Incompleteness Theorem will hit it as the asylum's reality hits the madman ?

I was reminded of [that XKCD comic](#) while reading the preface, in which Wittgenstein declares:

\"...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.\"

In fact [the SEP states](#) that for several years after publishing the book he was \"divorced from philosophy (having, to his mind, solved all philosophical problems in the *Tractatus*), gave away his part of his family's fortune and pursued several 'professions' (gardener, teacher, architect, etc.) in and around Vienna.\"

He sounds like quite an interesting fellow. To what extent the book actually succeeds at its lofty aim is difficult for me to assess since I couldn't very often tell what it was saying. This should probably be read alongside, or after, a commentary. The general point seems to be that only statements about the natural world - scientific statements - are meaningful, and stuff like ethics and metaphysics is either meaningless or belongs to a mystical domain we cannot meaningfully discuss. Why one should believe that - even if we overlook the issue, alluded to in the book, that that claim would itself seem to be meaningless by its own standard - is unclear to me.

Mathematics is a logical method derived from the repeated application of operations. The number 2, for instance, is the exponent given to an operation that is applied twice. Thus, the propositions of mathematics do not say anything about the world, but only reflect the method in which propositions are constructed.

The laws of science are not logical laws, nor are they empirical observations. Rather, they constitute an interpretive method, by means of which we can more accurately describe reality. Science is ultimately descriptive, not explanatory.

There is no perspective external to the world from which we can talk about the world or its contents generally. Thus, statements of value (as we find in ethics or aesthetics) are nonsense, since they evaluate the world as a whole. The feeling of life as a limited whole is what Wittgenstein calls \"the mystical.\"

Wittgenstein tends to discount the value of a number of areas of philosophy that have obvious value, not just in the context of analytics, but in terms of practical value. While analytics isn't really concerned with much of what pragmatism has to say with respect to usefulness, it is important that when Wittgenstein says something like (6.42) \"So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher,\" it is clear that there has to be some careful scrutiny of what he means.

Maybe Wittgenstein is right and I simply don't want to agree with him, but it seems valuable to note that there is a potential for constructing propositions of ethics. There is way of expressing principles which can improve the

human condition.

He starts from an atomic fact and works through the steps to arrive at why the limits on language are a limit on one's world. And why it is senseless to seek answers beyond the language.

His final conclusion is this

\"What one cannot speak of , one must be silent\"

I don't think I can recommend it to many people since it is not an easy read but I do recommend reading it in pieces and chewing on it. It will be well worth it.

\"The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—but it would be the only strictly correct method.\"

\"Language disguises the thought\"

\"The limits of language mean the limits of my world\"

Reading this by itself feels like seeing only the corner of a great abstract painting—I feel a need for prerequisite readings, presuppositional texts, whiteboards with saturnine philosophical professors, etc. It would not make me uncomfortable to confess that these feelings could be due to some mental deficiencies on my part.

That said, there is no denying that Wittgenstein's 7 determinate theses are groundbreaking. I just don't want to spend the next six months of my life trying to understand them. Especially when the writing itself is so lifeless—so devoid of chirping birds. At times it feels like nothing more than a word game: a semantic shifting of furniture but always in the same room. Sometimes he would spend 40 sentences building up to an anticlimactic conclusion that would leave me saying, 'Yes, of course. That's obvious. Who cares?'

The worst part is that Wittgenstein admits the work is self-defeating by its own logic—the sort of in-joke that would work in something more fun. I don't want to spend the whole winter being the butt of Wittgenstein's word-chess.

Wittie never gives us an example of an object because there is nothing that can be said about objects. Interpreter claims it to be Russell's fundamental blocks, but that's simply not true.

His term \"pictorial form\" depicts a structure of a picture, analogous to \"facts\", being made up of analogous entities to \"object\". Now here the ground gets a little muddy, a picture does not exist on its own, but when and if displayed in its form by depicting facts. Parallelly, spatial picture and logical picture represents corresponding spaces; and logical picture represents possible \"states of affairs\". Now the only thing needed to know is: well what is the mapping between picture and the reality; we can't just say by looking at a picture if it is true or false: we must compare it with reality. This is just another way of saying, \"if I have in my mind that there are five apples in the drawer, I can go on and check for myself in drawer counting from 1 to 5 (loosely speaking)\".

On propositions, here things get mathematical, his \"sense\" of thought comes from building propositions through syntax, and in a way, he explicitly means, what makes the proposition \"sayable\" is the n-ary syntax that works on operands, e.g., + gives meaning to its operands a, b in a+b. Thus propositions are nothing but \"logical pictures of facts.\" Which means proposition like \"x=14 is cute\" lies in illogical space.

Now, here's something super interesting, think of it as a mapping from what can be shown (form) to what can be said (facts) they are unknown but different, and both have properties that can be compared in a mutual mapping, I think he wrote this because he couldn't comment on: what reality is and how we perceive it? And since, acc to him, this is a non-sense question. Probably that's why he created a mapping saying: well there is some correspondence but \"don't think about it.\" And the distinction between sentence and propositions are that the former is uttered and the later is said (many-to-many mapping.)

To make it even more clean, I'd say: get_logical_picture((fact)(thought)(propositions(p1, p2, p3))) E {l: where l have a logical form}. Assume: fact and thought to be like type casting, and get_logical_picture and propositions to be a function.

He says we must tell \"elucidations\" to use the propositions to show understanding, I think it's something like \"usage\" of it, but I'm not sure because he never explicitly says about it. So the usage must mean symbols themselves have no meaning. True, he says so, but Russell does not. Then there come some references to \"Russell's Paradox\" which is really just saying \"everyone is lying\" with extra steps, very stupid. Still, a cool solution is the order of sets and the \"signature\" we have for it, like using second-order predicate logic but Wittie, in a way, goes against it to say that two same variables can have different usages (which is true because of the mapping idea). Weird. Why repeat! But at least it's common with his later comments on usage that I boast so confidently in my conversations.

\"My fundamental idea is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts,\" this he says in place of saying that propositions depict facts and says nothing about logical structure, so saying \"logic of facts\" is wrong, because of different domains.

One recurring thing is that sense of a proposition is internal to it, which is something like, if it had been said, it must have been saying clearly, and you don't need anything external to understand it—contrasting to something like calling a phone \"phone\". Because of no further breakage of its term, an object, we must map it to its picture. Picture theory people!

. His work on the set of all sets problem posed by Russell is elegantly addressed, but I suppose this is the basis of deep thought in analytic thought when surrounded by claims emanating the stench of a pragmatic nihilism in meaning.
This provides the basis of logical-positivism, which this book does not necessarily condone, but provides support for anyways. As such, the \"until we can prove it, it's not worth talking about\" of positivism is directly stemming from Wittgenstein's \"the limits of my language are the limits of my world.\"
I too think language can only go so far as to describe a useful picture of the world. Yet, language is type of a tool, that allows for abstraction in ways that surpass the limits of the world; look no further than fiction. However, to overcome this self-imposed limit in analytic philosophy, some continental thinkers such as Deleuze, have claimed that analytic philosophy is not abstract enough. That is my gut instinct as well when reading analytic works. Even Wittgenstein somewhat agrees with this when he says that tautologies, by proxy his entire book, amounts to saying nothing. Perhaps that is why in later Wittgenstein, he turns away in an attempt to say something.
That being said, the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy is starting to gradually be delegated to a pseudo-historical beef that was only in name, is starting to gain traction in young readers with access to both 'canons' of thought in the 20th century. But to those who are young in the Anglosphere who are only really familiar with analytic thinkers and minds are blown by reading Wittgenstein, please go read Heidegger. After you do that, perhaps one could be convinced to go read Deleuze and really start to have a fruitful conversation about the findings of philosophy in the 20th century.

His dogmatic approach to formal logic is not something I necessarily deem a great value, but, towards the end of this text, I feel like nor does he. Having said that, it is exactly the ending of this piece that gets to me the most: good metaphors make lazy philosophy. Not only the 6.54 and 7. propositions I found unsubstantiated and/or lazy but also the following:

5.6 The limits of my language mean the limit of my world -- just because I don't have a word for a feeling, does not mean I cannot feel it;
6.421 It is clear that ethics cannot be put in words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.) -- how come? no argument follows, just stated as a groundless hot take;
6.522 There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical. -- doesn't it contradict what was said in 5.6? or, rather, all things mystical are not within the limits of my world then?