The Picture Theory

Colin Johnston, University of Stirling
Chapter 8 of the Blackwell *Companion to Wittgenstein*

Introduction

What is Wittgenstein's picture theory a theory of? An easy answer to this question is that it is a theory of representation, but insofar as this answer is indeed easy, so too is it uninformative. If I roll my eyes thereby communicating to an intended audience that the person I'm telephoning is being unreasonable, this will not be an instance of the kind of representing Wittgenstein wants to understand. So what *does* he want to understand?

The picture theory is sometimes spoken of as a theory *of the proposition*, and for two reasons this seems a good start. First, it indicates that we have a theory of representing not *by means of* propositions but *by propositions themselves* – a theory of how the proposition itself determines what it represents, its sense. And second, a proposition is complex, and so we have the suggestion that the species of representing in view essentially involves complexity in the representation. Putting these two together, the idea appears of a proposition as something which determines its sense by means of its internal structure.

This idea is of course familiar from Frege. In Frege, however, the matter goes a step further. A Fregean proposition does not merely determine its sense by means of internal structure: It determines its sense by means of *a match in* internal structure. As Frege puts it, a proposition involves a 'correspondence between the way words are concatenated and the structure of the concepts' (Frege, 1979, pp.12-13). And this too we find in the *Tractatus*. By a proposition, Wittgenstein like Frege means something which determines its sense by means of a correlation between the mode of combination of its constituent symbols and the structure of its sense.

Such a structural correlation between a proposition and its sense implies, of course, a correlation between the elements of the correlated structures: Correlating the structures means correlating their elements. A proposition's component symbols can therefore be said to *mean* the elements of the sense, to have the sense elements as their meanings:

The name means the object, the object is its meaning. (TLP 3.203)

And here we have the beginnings of an idea that, as Wittgenstein says, a proposition *puts its sense into words* (TLP 4.116, 6.5): In a proposition, the constituent symbols mean the sense elements, and the way those symbols combine mirrors the combination of the meanings in the sense. Or as both Frege and Wittgenstein put it, a proposition *expresses* its sense:

I call any sentence a sentence proper if it expresses a thought. (Frege, [1923]1984, p.392)

The proposition is the expression of its truth conditions. (TLP 4.431)

A first-pass answer to the question of what Wittgenstein's picture theory is a theory of, then, is that it is a theory of the expression of sense.

Having *some* idea of what the picture theory is a theory of, we can ask what it maintains. And a central answer to this question will be that Wittgenstein holds the correlation between the way words are combined in a proposition and the way their meanings combine in the represented fact to be a species of *identity*:

> That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another. (TLP 2.15)

What an elementary proposition represents is that the objects its constituent names stand for are *so* combined, that they are combined as their names are combined in the proposition. Much of what follows will serve, in the end, to understand this identity. Our route here will include, however, considerable further elaboration of the notion of expression. In particular, we shall need to see that this notion involves for Wittgenstein more than the bare idea of a correspondence (or identity) between the mode of combination of a proposition and that of the fact it represents. As the idea has so far been indicated, Russell could hold that the propositions of his concept script express facts: The Russellian sentences '*Fa*' and '*aRb*' could be held to identify the Russellian facts *Fa* and *aRb* by means of a match in their internal structures. But for (Frege and) Wittgenstein the idea of expressing a sense, of putting a fact into words, runs deeper than anything Russell would, or could, subscribe to. In the expression of a sense, the fact is not merely identified by means of its internal structure but *fully laid out to view*. As Peter Sullivan puts it:

> To express a sense is to *give* the sense in a much fuller or more immediate way than merely identifying that sense. […] Someone who understands the *expression* of a sense *is thereby possessed of* that sense. (Sullivan, 2001, p.90)

Understanding this notion of expression and understanding Wittgenstein's 'in the same way' condition will be two aspects of the same project; the phenomenon is clearly grasped only simultaneously with its account.

These remarks leave unanswered the question of why Frege and Wittgenstein are interested in the expression of sense. Why do they ignore the possibility, indeed actuality, of alternative modes of communication? One central response to this will be that their notion of a fact itself involves that of its possible expression. A Tractarian fact, I shall suggest, is precisely an expressible: Where other possible forms of fact communication are incidental to, or a consequence of, the nature of facts, a Tractarian fact is in its conception the kind of thing to be expressed. Before considering this, however, and indeed before taking on the picture theory, I want to set the notion of expression to one side. So far I have used the terms 'fact' and 'sense' interchangeably, and this is obviously unproblematic in connection to Frege for whom a fact just is an obtaining propositional sense, a true thought (Frege, [1918]1984, p.368). With

Wittgenstein, by contrast, commentators have often wanted to distinguish facts – or at least atomic facts – from senses. Senses are held to be *truth conditions*, and this is of course quite correct (consider for example TLP 4.431 above, and also Frege, [1893]2013, §32). Tractarian facts, it is however added, are not truth conditions but items whose existence explains the obtaining of truth conditions: A Tractarian atomic fact is not a truth *condition* but a truth *maker*. The first task of this chapter will be to reject this position and affirm the identity of fact and sense. Subsequently, we shall take a lead from Frege in drawing certain lessons from this affirmation, lessons regarding how both the constituents of senses and their modes of combination are to be understood. Only then will we return to the matter of fact expression and the picture theory.

The Identity of Fact and Sense

It has been an orthodoxy amongst *Tractatus* interpreters, and continues to be such in the wider philosophical community, that Wittgenstein follows the 1910 Russell in offering a correspondence theory of truth (See Chapter xx, TRUTH). Russell writes that 'when we judge truly some entity "corresponding" in some way to our judgment is to be found outside our judgment, while when we judge falsely there is no such "corresponding" entity' (Russell, [1910]1992, p.119). He gives the example:

> If A loves B, there is such a complex object as 'A's love for B', and vice versa; thus the existence of this complex object [which Russell identifies as a fact] gives the condition for the truth of the judgment 'A loves B'. (Russell, [1910]1992, p.123)

And comparably, one might think, Wittgenstein writes:

> If an elementary proposition is true, the atomic fact exists: if an elementary proposition is false, the atomic fact does not exist. (TLP 4.25)

Like Russell, Wittgenstein maintains that the obtaining of a truth condition, and so the truth of a judgment with that truth condition, consists in the existence of a corresponding fact. My belief that Jack loves Jill and the sentence 'Jack loves Jill' both have as their truth condition that Jack loves Jill. And the obtaining of this truth condition – its being the case that Jack loves Jill – consists in the existence of the fact of Jack loving Jill.

Such theorising involves a conception of facts as truth *makers*. But that conception is of course not compulsory. Following Frege, one might choose not to indulge the idea of truth making, using the word 'fact' to speak simply of truth *conditions* (or if one prefers, of obtaining truth conditions). Where the Russellian distinguishes facts and truth conditions, taking facts to be what make truth conditions obtain, the Fregean makes no such distinction: the fact that Jack loves Jill is precisely the truth condition of my belief that Jack loves Jill. But what, the Russellian may then press, for the obtaining of such conditions? Here the Fregean position is simple: such obtaining is *brute*. Some truth conditions obtain and some fail to obtain, but no account of this is

to be offered by reference to some further 'element of reality'. (Rather, if you like, the obtaining fact is itself already 'reality'.) As, further, for the correspondence theorist's emphasised talk of fact *existence*, this may be dismissed by, as it were, identifying a fact's existence with the fact itself. To recognize, affirm, deny, or hypothesize the existence of a certain fact will simply be to recognize, affirm, deny, or hypothesize that fact. As Ramsey wrote in rejection of Russell's correspondence idea,'"The fact that *a* has *R* to *b* exists" is no different from "*a* has *R* to *b*"' (1927, p.159).

Ramsey attributes his repudiation of Russell to Wittgenstein (Ramsey, 1927, p.170). So which interpretation, we may ask, is correct, Ramsey's or the correspondence view? I shall argue that whilst a quick reading of the *Tractatus* readily suggests an idea of atomic facts as existing or non-existing truth makers, attending more closely to, thinking slightly harder about, Wittgenstein's theorising reveals that the Tractarian system simply doesn't support, *simply doesn't provide for*, thinking of the obtaining of a truth condition in terms of distinct fact-items (cf. Chapter xx, LOGICAL ATOMISM).

To set the scene, let's ask how Russell's system provides content to his correspondence idea. Russell writes:

> The judgment that two terms have a certain relation *R* is a relation of the mind to the two terms and the relation *R* with the appropriate sense: the "corresponding" complex consists of the two terms related by the relation *R* with the same sense. The judgment is true when there is such a complex, and false when there is not. (Russell, [1910]1990, p.124)

But a definition of truth might equally well have been made as follows. The judgment is a relation of the mind to the two terms and the relation *R* with the appropriate sense; it is true when those two terms are related by the relation *R* with the same sense, and false when they are not. So what is the cash value of the talk about corresponding complexes? My alternative definition inflates into Russell's just when we add that for *a* to stand in relation *R* to *b* is for the complex *a*-in-relation-*R*-to-*b* to exist. But what is the cash value of *this* claim – how is *this* claim not a mere tautology? Well, the claim draws for Russell on a wider theoretical context in which complexes are themselves constituents as objects of further complexes, a structuring which explains certain relations of necessitation amongst truth conditions. For example, the complex knife-to-the-left-of-book – the complex whose existence constitutes the knife's being to the left of the book – is for Russell a constituent, along with Jack and the relation of perceiving, of the further complex Jack-perceiving-(knife-to-the-left-of-book), this latter complex again existing just in case Jack enjoys the relevant perception. And as the existence of a whole requires the existence of its parts, Russell has an explanation of why Jack's perception is possible only if the knife is indeed to the left of the book. Such explanations to one side, however, the key thought here is that it is Russell's general theory of *complexes*, and not in itself his theory of *judgment* – not in itself, that is, his theory of a judgment's possession of a truth condition – that provides content to his correspondence idea.

Turning with this to Wittgenstein, we can straightaway note that he emphatically rules out any such context for thinking of facts other than as truth conditions. He both vigorously disassociates

facts from objects and insists that objects are simple (see, e.g., TLP 1.1, 2.02, 3.144). A fact is not a possible constituent, as an object, of further facts. As for perception, Wittgenstein writes:

> To perceive a complex means to perceive *that* its constituents are related to one another in such and such a way. (TLP 5.5423)

Perceiving *a*-in-relation-*R*-to-*b* is to be understood as perceiving *that a* stands in relation *R* to *b*. And perceiving that *aRb*, Wittgenstein further implies, is a matter of having a true perceptual representation that *aRb*. We shall, it seems, need to look elsewhere if we want to think of Tractarian facts other than as truth conditions.

But where? Well, the obvious place is where for Russell we didn't find the relevant provision, namely the theory of judgment. The thought here is this: Perhaps one's theory of the *possession* of a truth-condition will carry implications for what it is for a truth condition to obtain. Russell has a judgment connect to a fact by virtue of having a truth condition. His theory of judgment explains a proposition's having a truth condition, whose obtaining is then, for reasons external to the theory of judgment, identified with the existence of a particular fact. Alternatively, though, one could suggest that a proposition has a truth condition by virtue of connecting to a fact. A proposition first picks out a fact; subsequently it does something like 'affirm the fact (or the fact's existence)', coming thereby to have the relevant truth condition. If a theory of this shape of the functioning of a proposition could be ascribed to Wittgenstein then all would be set for thinking of Tractarian facts other than as truth conditions. An atomic fact would be the object of a 'picking out' relation, and – depending on how the affirmation part of the theory is understood – the door would be open for thinking of the obtaining of an atomic truth condition in terms of the existence (or something similar) of such an item.

Certain commentators have understood the *Tractatus* as proposing just such a two-step theory of elementary propositions. First, the proposition picks out a fact: It depicts or images a (non-truth condition) fact in a way which does not presume that fact's existence. Subsequently, the proposition affirms (or something similar) the picked out fact, thereby coming to have a truth condition. There is, however, ample reason to reject any such understanding of Wittgenstein's picture theory. For a start, the attribution is seriously undermined by criticisms Wittgenstein makes of Frege:

> The verb of a proposition is not 'is true' or 'is false', as Frege thought: rather, that which 'is true' must already contain the verb [i.e. already have a truth condition].
> Every proposition must *already* have a sense [truth condition]: it cannot be given a sense by affirmation. (TLP 4.063-4.064)

Rightly or wrongly (I take it wrongly), Wittgenstein here *accuses* Frege of explaining the possession of a truth condition by reference to an affirmation, or asserting as true, of some prior item. What most severely undermines the attribution to Wittgenstein of a two-step picture of elementary judgment, however, is its complete and conspicuous absence from Wittgenstein's central statement of his account:

In the picture the elements of the picture are the representatives of objects. (TLP 2.131)

A picture is a fact.
That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents
that the things are so combined with one another. (TLP 2.141-2.15)

A proposition's having a certain truth condition – its representing that *p* – is explained *directly* in
terms of its elements referring to objects; it is not explained via the proposition as a whole
imaging some non-truth-condition fact.

Nothing in Wittgenstein's theorising, it would thus seem, provides for interpreting those points
at which he talks of fact existence as the expression of a Russellian correspondence theory, or
indeed of any theory in which facts are distinguished from truth conditions. A Tractarian fact is
nothing other than a truth condition.

The Priority of Sense (i)
We asserted in the introduction that a Tractarian fact is in its conception an expressible, and some
progress has now been made towards this. A fact, we have argued, is a truth condition, and the
idea of a truth condition is immediately that of a truth condition of a possible representation, and
so the idea of a representable. From here it needs to be added only that the going notion of
representation in the *Tractatus* is that of *expression* and we shall have that a Tractarian fact is
precisely an expressible. Before considering the idea of expression, however, I want in the next
two sections to draw out some consequences of our identification of fact and truth condition.

To begin, we can consider the following passage from Frege:

What is distinctive about my conception of logic is that I begin by giving pride of place to the
content of the word 'true', and then immediately go on to introduce a thought as that to which
the question 'Is it true?' is in principle applicable. So I do not begin with concepts and put
them together to form a thought or judgement; I come by the parts of a thought by analyzing
the thought. (Frege, 1979, p.253)

This distinctive Fregean conception of logic, I want to press, is also that of the *Tractatus* (see also
Chapter xx, FREGE). Following Frege, Wittgenstein too gives pride of place to truth and
introduces facts as truth conditions. And so Wittgenstein too does not begin with objects and put
them together to form facts but comes by objects as elements of facts.

There is a good deal here to unpack; let's start with Frege's first sentence. Thoughts, Frege
says, are the kind of things to be true or false. One might read this introduction simply as a
singling out by Frege of a class of items in which he is interested: He is interested in thoughts,
and one way to identify a thought is as something which is either true or false. This obviously
mistaken reading ignores, however, the role signalled for truth in the first half of the sentence.
Keeping the first half of the sentence in view, it is clear that Frege is introducing his *notion* of a

thought as the *notion of something true or false*, as the notion of a truth or falsehood. And Wittgenstein's identification of facts and truth conditions, we can underline, is an introduction of this same kind. It would be a serious misunderstanding of the argument of the last section to read its conclusion as a claim that facts, on some prior understanding of that notion, 'play the role of truth conditions'. The point is not that the *Tractatus* has a notion of fact separate from that of truth condition but then commits to the identification of facts, so conceived, with truth conditions. What was argued was rather that Wittgenstein does not conceive of facts other than as truth conditions, that the Tractarian idea of a fact is, from the start, that of a truth condition.

One useful way to drive this home is to draw the consequence that Wittgenstein's identification does not stand only against a particular, Russellian version of the correspondence theory but against the correspondence theory in all its versions. The basic idea of the correspondence theory is of truth as a match of some kind between representations on the one hand and reality on the other. And the content of talking of two hands here includes that reality is 'constitutively separate' from representation. In giving one's account of 'the intrinsic character of reality', one's account of the intrinsic nature of what is found on the reality side of the representational affair, one does not deploy notions which are bound to that of representation. In itself, in the shapes it takes, the world is ignorant of any possibility of being represented. This is Russell's stance in 1910, and it is here that the correspondence theory involves a certain metaphysical realism. But this point of realism is rejected by Frege and Wittgenstein's beginning with truth. Tractarian facts have no account separate from the notion of truth, no more basic understanding to which their status as truth conditions is external. And this means they have no account separate from the notion of representation, for a truth condition is precisely a truth condition of possible representations: it is precisely a representable.

But Frege and Wittgenstein's beginning with truth goes deeper still than this. Consider the 'So' of Frege's second sentence. It is a consequence, Frege asserts, of his beginning with truth that he comes by the parts of a thought only by analyzing the thought. How so? One can imagine a position in which certain items are in their conception the kinds of things to be true or false, but nonetheless have parts arrived at other than by analyzing the wholes. More specifically, an item could *in its mode of combination* be essentially a truth or falsehood and yet have parts given independently of the whole. (This is the position of the early, pre-correspondence theory Russell.) So what supports Frege's inference? Well, Frege's idea here is that a thought would have an understanding other than as, simply, a truth or falsehood if its parts were understood other than as possible parts of truths and falsehoods. Even if a thought has a mode of combination connected essentially with the notion of truth, if the parts arrive from elsewhere, then there will be substance to the whole other than that of a truth. And just this is what Frege is set against. What is distinctive of Frege's conception of logic is that it gives *sole* pride of place to the content of the word 'true', where this means that no substance arrives into his theorising separately from that content. His theorising is in this sense nothing other than an *unpacking* of the notion of truth. So in particular no elaboration of his notion of a thought can be in view other than its unpacking as the notion of a truth or falsehood. And this means that the parts of a thought cannot be understood other than as such. What a thought part is, essentially and from the start, is a part of thoughts.

Wittgenstein takes exactly the same line. Directly after introducing his notion of an object with the remark:

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

Wittgenstein writes:

It is essential to things that they should be possible constituents of atomic facts. (TLP 2.011)

In itself this sentence could be taken in two ways. One could read Wittgenstein as saying that objects have essential natures which *suit* them to be possible constituents of facts. Or one could find the claim that an object's essential nature *consists* in its being a possible constituent of facts. As the passage continues, Wittgenstein makes clear many times over that he is affirming the second of these and rejecting the first:

In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in an atomic fact, the possibility of the atomic fact must be written into the thing itself.
It would seem to be a sort of accident, if it turned out that a situation would fit a thing that could already exist entirely on its own.
If things can occur in atomic facts, this possibility must be in them from the beginning. […]
Just as we are quite unable to imagine spatial objects outside space or temporal objects outside time, so too there is *no* object that we can imagine apart from the possibility of combining with others. (TLP 2.012-2.0121)

If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrence in atomic facts.
(Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the object.)
A new possibility cannot be discovered later. (TLP 2.0123)

If a thing can occur in an atomic fact, this possibility must be written into the thing itself, into its basic nature, from the beginning. One cannot be given the object apart from its possibilities for occurring in facts, and then later consider (discover) that the nature of what one has grounds certain such possibilities. This cannot be so for the object's basic nature doesn't *ground* its possibilities for occurring in facts: It *is* its possibilities for occurring in facts. What a Tractarian object essentially is, is a possible part of facts.

As Frege, then, Wittgenstein gives sole pride of place to truth. Tractarian facts are not only essentially truth conditions but *exhaustively* truth conditions, their constituents having no account separate from the notion of truth.

The Priority of Sense (ii)

The Tractarian conception of an object as a possible part of facts carries a conception also of object combination. Tractarian objects have their possibilities of occurrence in atomic facts

written into them; object combination, it follows, is simply the realization of such inscribed possibilities. And this means that if certain objects combine to form an atomic fact, this will involve no go-between or copula additional to the objects. For to suppose that an object combination involves such an additional item is to suppose that the constituent objects' possibility for so combining is not written into them 'from the beginning', but is grounded instead in their suitability to this 'something more': The copula defines a mode of combination, and the objects will be combinable in this mode by virtue of their suitability to the copula. In hand with his repudiation of any such grounding, then, Wittgenstein writes:

> In the atomic fact objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain. (TLP 2.03)

Wittgenstein's translator C. K. Ogden had initially rendered the German here as 'In the atomic fact objects hang one *on* another, like the links of a chain.' But Wittgenstein made the correction:

> Here instead of "hang one on another" it should be "hang one in another" as the links of a chain *do*! The meaning is *that there isn't anything third* that connects the links but that the links *themselves* make connexion with one another. (Letter to Ogden, 23 April 1922)

There is no copula beyond the objects themselves in or by which they are combined: Rather, the objects *concatenate*, holding themselves together.

The idea of concatenation implied by Wittgenstein's conception of objects runs deeper, however, than the mere rejection of 'non-object copulae'. Objects come, Wittgenstein envisages, in a variety of different types or forms, with two objects being of the same form if they can combine in the same ways with the same other objects:

> The possibility of occurrence in atomic facts is the form of the object. (TLP 2.0141)

And what I want to draw out of Wittgenstein's conception of objects is that a Tractarian concatenative mode has no content, no internal understanding, other than as a mode of the unique forms which may so combine. If entities of forms f and g can combine in mode M, then there is nothing to mode M beyond its being a mode in which forms f and g may combine. Or to put the matter in terms of roles rather than modes, the role an entity of form f plays in an f-g combination has no internal characterisation other than as that of combining, as an entity of form f, with an entity of form g.

To see this, suppose for *reductio* that Tractarian modes of combination and so Tractarian combinatorial roles were given independently of unique Tractarian entity types suited to those modes or roles. Then the entity types would equally be given independently of the combinatorial modes. Why? Well, because without such an independent understanding of the types no sense could be made of an entity – with a nature – playing a combinatorial role. To think of some *thing* playing such a role is to think of something of a certain basic kind playing that role, and so if having the role in view does not mean having in view also a unique entity kind, then the entity's kind must arrive from elsewhere, from the entity itself in separation from the role it is there playing. But this is precisely what Wittgenstein is set against: A Tractarian entity has no nature

other than that of a role player in facts. Now one might complain that this reasoning is a little quick. Specifically, one might suggest that when making sense of the idea of an entity playing some role, an appeal to the entity type in separation from the role in view does not (immediately) amount to an appeal to the entity's nature in separation from its role playing profile, for that profile may involve a variety of different roles. But this complaint is readily deflected, for if, as is being supposed, roles are given independently of types, then the idea of a single entity playing different roles itself depends upon an idea of the entity in separation from its nature as a role player. If roles are independent of types, then identifying the same entity across different roles – this entity here is the same as that entity there – means deploying an idea of the entity in itself, an idea distinct from that simply of a role player. If there is no nature and so no entity to hold on to independently of the roles in view, then sense can be made of one and the same entity playing different roles only if it is internal to those roles that they are roles of the same type, and so only if roles are not given independently of types.

   This argument is somewhat abstract, but its force and conclusion should not be unfamiliar. The pride of place Frege gives to truth renders it incoherent at the level of reference to suppose that something other than a Fregean object might fall under a Fregean concept, that something other than a Fregean concept might have a Fregean object falling under it etc. At the level of sense, it renders it incoherent to suppose that the sense of a proper name might be substitutable in a thought for the sense of a concept expression. And what I am pressing is that the same theoretical vision renders the idea incoherent for Wittgenstein that objects of different forms might play the same role in facts. A fact's being exhaustively a truth condition, its constituents being precisely possible constituents of truth conditions, means that to give the fact's mode is to give its constituent types, and *vice versa*.

   The Expression of a Sense (i)

The last three sections have sought to provide a substantial understanding of Tractarian facts as truth conditions. To progress further in this same project we need now to consider the notion of expression. Somewhat vaguely, this notion was said above to be one of a fact's being *fully laid out to view*: A proposition expressing a fact *gives that fact without remainder*, where this giving is a kind of *displaying*.

   Perhaps the easiest approach to the idea here of 'giving without remainder' is to contrast it with the first and most basic idea of fact expression we considered in the introduction, namely that of a proposition's singling out a fact by means of a match in their internal structures. We noted that with only this idea in view, a Russellian sentence '*Fa*' could be held to 'express' the Russellian fact *Fa*: A Russellian sentence '*Fa*' can be thought to indicate the Russellian fact *Fa* by means of a match in their internal structures. Unlike a Tractarian proposition, we however continued, there is an important sense in which a Russellian sentence does not *fully give* the fact it singles out. And this is something on which we can now take a substantial grip. The Russellian sentence provides, by its subject-predicate syntax, the mode of combination of the fact's elements: This is a mode of combination as term and property. But in doing this the syntax does not thereby give us the 'full ontology', as one might put it, of the fact *Fa*, for it does not

thereby provide the ontological kinds of the fact's constituents. The most obvious way to digest this point is to note Russell's position that entities of different kinds can appear in facts as term, and to infer that the syntax of '*Fa*' does not tell us the ontological kind of *a*. For all the syntax tells us, *a* could be a particular, a property, a dual relating relation, or whatever. To be clear, though, the syntax of '*Fa*' would not by itself give us the full ontology of the fact *Fa* even if Russell held – as he indeed does in 1918 (Russell, 1956, p.206) – that only particulars can appear in facts as term, that universals can appear only as relating relations. For the question for Russell of whether universals can appear as term is a matter independent of his notion of combination as term and property. It is not *incoherent* for Russell, even in 1918, to suppose that entities of different basic types can appear in facts as term. If only one kind of entity can play the Russellian term role, this does not belong to the role itself but is a further thesis on the part of Russell, one he sometimes holds and sometimes rejects. For Wittgenstein, by contrast, it precisely is incoherent to suppose that entities of different forms might play the same role in facts. And so where the expression of a fact gives us, through its structure, the fact's mode of combination, it *thereby* gives us – without the need for any additional premise – the full ontology of that fact. The expression of a Tractarian fact provides that fact's mode of combination, and from here there can be no further question as to the ontological types of its constituents.

This view on the provision by a proposition of a Tractarian fact's 'full ontology' underplays, however, its directness, making it look as if the provision happens only via an indication of the fact's combinatorial mode. But in fact an object's ontological type is already indicated by the syntactic type of its name, no matter the wider propositional context. The contrast with Russell can thus be put as follows: Whilst it does not immediately follow from the fact that two Russellian symbols are of the same syntactic type that their referents are of the same ontological type, one is committed merely in identifying the syntax of two Tractarian names to identifying the form of their referents. To arrive at this version of the contrast, however, more work needs to be done. One thing we shall need to do is to take a short look at the Tractarian notion of a 'symbol', considering in particular that just as Wittgenstein understands objects as essentially possible parts of facts, so too he understands names, and indeed symbols more generally, as essentially possible parts of propositions. On top of this though, we shall need also to affirm that the relation between syntax and ontology is in an important sense internal.

So what is a Tractarian symbol? Well, perhaps the first thing to say, something we have already implied, is that it is an essentially syntactic element, and so something distinct from its associated mark or sound, what Wittgenstein calls its 'sign':

A sign is what can be perceived of a symbol. (TLP 3.32)

As for the relation between symbols and their perceptible aspects, their signs, Wittgenstein then writes:

In order to recognise the symbol in the sign we must consider the significant use. (TLP 3.326)

And in a comment on Ogden's translation, Wittgenstein explains this remark as follows:

> I think "significant" is alright here. The meaning of the prop is: that in order to recognise the symbol in a sign we must look at how this sign is *used* significantly in propositions. I.e. we must observe how the sign is used in accordance with the laws of logical syntax. Thus "significant" here means as much as "syntactically correct". (Letter to Ogden 4 August 1922)

A symbol is a sign in what Wittgenstein calls 'logico-syntactic use', use in accordance with the laws of logical syntax. In such a use, the sign has a syntactic character, it is the sign of a symbol, a syntactic element of a particular kind (see also Chapter xx, MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING). In his comment to Ogden, however, Wittgenstein does more than imply that a symbol is a sign in syntactic use: He further characterises such use as a use *essentially in propositions*. In order to find the symbol we *must* look at how it is used *in propositions*: The logico-syntactic use of a sign, the use of a sign as the sign of a symbol, is essentially a use of the sign as an element of propositions. This position that 'the proposition is the unit of language' (LWL 119) parallels in its structure the stance we have examined regarding facts and their constituents. As what an object essentially is is a possible part of facts, so what a symbol essentially is is a possible part of propositions. And parallel consequences may be drawn for propositional modes of combination. The syntactic use of a sign is not a use by which the symbol is suited to some copula; rather, it is essentially a use *together with other signs in such use*. The combination of names – the 'simple symbols' (TLP 4.24) – in elementary propositions is thus a species of concatenation:

> The elementary proposition consists of names. It is a connexion, a concatenation, of names. (TLP 4.22)

And mirroring the consequences drawn above for objects and facts, it follows with this that a symbolic mode of combination is exhaustively given by the unique syntactic types which may so combine. To give the types of a proposition's constituents is to give its mode of combination, and *vice versa*.

Here with symbols rather than objects, this last result should be completely familiar. To say that an atomic proposition is composed of a singular term and a predicate is to say that it has a subject-predicate mode of combination, and to say that such a proposition has such a mode is to say that it is composed of a predicate and a singular term. More generally, to find the syntactic mode is to find the syntactic types, and *vice versa*. Familiar or not, it is in any case this result that moves us towards our claim above that the ontological type of an object is given by the syntactic type of its name. It belongs to the most basic notion of expression that a proposition's syntactic mode provides the ontological mode of the fact it expresses. But if syntactic and ontological modes have no substance beyond the syntactic and ontological types which may so combine, then this correlation of modes is just as such a correlation of types. To correlate a syntactic mode with an ontological mode is to correlate the types of the syntactic mode with the types of the ontological mode. And with this, it may seem, we have our projected result that an object's ontological type is given by the syntactic type of its name.

We need, however, to be slightly careful. Whilst it is true that the correlation of modes is a correlation of types, nothing so far said rules out that the type correlations might vary depending upon the mode. It has not been ruled out, that is to say, that a name's syntactic type might indicate different ontological types depending on the wider syntactic context. Now this is of course not something the *Tractatus* envisages; it would imply, amongst other things, that different occurrences of the same name might be barred from bearing the same meaning. Equally, it is not hard to sense what it is we need in order to rule the possibility out: What we need further to bring into play here is that as Wittgenstein conceives of the provision by syntax of ontology, this is in some sense *internal*. A proposition's syntax is not correlated merely externally with the ontology of the fact it represents; rather, it tells us that ontology 'in or by itself'. Such a claim is, as we shall see, certainly present in the *Tractatus*. And with such a claim in play it is certainly ruled out that a syntactic type might indicate different forms in different contexts: Because the modes' substance is that of the types, a propositional mode can be correlated 'in or by itself' with an ontological mode only if its types are correlated 'in or by themselves' with those of the ontological mode. What we now need to do, it seems, is investigate this claim of internality.

The Expression of a Sense (ii)

One might think that in understanding a proposition there is a substantial move from syntax to ontology. Given a proposition, one notes its syntax, the syntactic character of its constituents, and from this one infers the form of the fact, the ontological character of its constituents. But for Wittgenstein the expression of a fact is not merely the *provision* of that fact: It is *a laying out* of that fact, where this rules out there being any such inference, any kind of question, given the syntax, of what ontology it signalizes. Indeed, that there is no such inference is a central point of Wittgenstein's analogy with pictures:

> The proposition must enable us to see the logical structure of the situation that makes it true or false. (As a picture must shew the spatial relation in which the things represented in it must stand if the picture is correct (true).) (NB 20.10.14)

We do not recognise the structure of the proposition and from there move, somehow, to that of its sense; rather, we *see* the latter *in* the former.

Let's consider for such 'seeing in' a traditionally painted picture of a grouping of people. If one were to come across such a picture in a gallery, one might well find next to the picture a key telling us who the various figures in the picture represent. Think here of David's *Coronation of Napoleon*. We will not, however, find a further key telling us how the represented people are to be spatially interrelated if the picture is correct: So much is shown by the picture itself. That a certain represented person is to be to the left of another and in front of a third is something we can see in the picture itself. David's painting *shows* us, *displays* to us, how the people represented by the various figures within it are to stand with each other if the picture is to be correct. In the same way, Wittgenstein presses:

A proposition *shows* how things stand, *if* it is true. (TLP 4.022)

One can actually see from the proposition how everything stands logically if it is true. (TLP 4.023)

As we can see in a picture how the things represented within it are to stand with each other spatially if the picture is correct, so a proposition enables us to see how things stand logically if it is true. We may need a key to determine what is represented by the various representatives (names) in the proposition, but we do *not* need a further key to tell us how the represented objects are to stand with each other if the proposition is to be true – *that* is given in the proposition-picture itself.

Wittgenstein insists, then, that there is no substantial move from the proposition's syntax to the mode of combination of its sense. And this means, as we have argued, that there is no move from the proposition's syntax to the sense's 'full ontology'. Rather, o*ne can see in the proposition all there is to the fact*. The fact is *fully on display, set out without remainder*, in the proposition. Here we are finally, I think, approaching the full depth of Wittgenstein's notion of expression. But we do not yet have a clear understanding of what it is we are reaching: How is it that in 'seeing' the syntax of the proposition one thereby 'sees' the ontology of the fact?

A tempting but in the end unhelpful answer to this question considers again the picture analogy. An obvious, naïve construal of the operation of a simple picture of two people next to each other would run as follows. The picture represents the two people as next to each other first by containing two figures which stand for the two people, and second by having those two figures located next to each other in the picture. More generally, one might suggest, a picture represents people as related spatially by having figures standing for those people related in that same spatial way in the picture. The reason, the thought will go, that one can see in the picture how the represented people are to be spatially interrelated if the picture is true, the reason why no key is necessary for telling us this, is that it is *there* in the picture to be seen: The spatial interrelations are one and the same. This naïve idea will not of course carry us terribly far in understanding the general operation of pictures of groupings of people – one person is not (standardly) represented as behind another by having its figure located behind that of the other – but Wittgenstein's thought, one might suggest, is nevertheless that it is through such a combinatorial identity that propositions represent objects as combined. So Wittgenstein writes:

In order for a proposition to present a situation it is only necessary for its component parts to represent those of the situation and for the former to stand in a connexion which is possible for the latter. (NB 15.11.14)

How does the picture present a situation? […]
One name is representative of one thing, another of another thing, and they themselves are connected. […]

> The logical connexion must, of course, be one that is possible as between the things that the names are representatives of. […]
> In this way the proposition represents the situation – as it were off its own bat. (NB 4.11.14)

Off its own bat, a Tractarian proposition represents that objects are combined together in a certain way by containing representatives of the objects which are themselves connected together in that same way.

This thought, I said, is unhelpful. One way of querying it is to note that it provides no way of deflecting the apparent but bizarre consequence that a name and its meaning will be intersubstitutable. As we have seen, a propositional or fact mode of combination determines the unique types which may so combine, and so if a proposition and its sense have the very same mode, then their constituent types must also be identical. A name will be identical in type to the object for which it stands. But this in turn entails that just as a figure in a picture could be next to a person just as well as it could be next to another such figure, so in general one could substitute in a proposition a name's meaning for the name itself, or substitute in a fact a name of an object for the object itself. But it is unclear at best what such substitutions could amount to. A symbol is a sign in use together with other signs in a proposition. So what could it possibly mean to have something non-linguistic in place of a symbol in a proposition? What could it possibly mean to take a sign in use together with other signs, extract it from those other signs in use, and put it in place of a non-linguistic object in a non-linguistic fact?

Second, we can usefully step back and wonder what sort of an account is supposed to be on offer here. Insofar as the story has any naïve appeal, it is surely as a *reductive* account of situation representation. The representation of a sense is being given a straightforward explanation in terms of two more basic notions: that of reference, standing for, and that of two combinations being of the same kind. On reflection, however, this can't be what is going on. For one, the Tractarian notion of reference is transparently not prior to the notion of sense expression (see e.g. TLP 3.2). More than this, though, the 'in the same way' condition is equally not so prior. The modes of combination in play here are modes of facts, and facts, we have argued, are precisely representables and so understood only in hand with the notion of representation. Absorbing this point must leave us, I think, off balance. The 'in the same way' condition seemed to be presented here as a simple type identity given in advance of the notion of representation and in terms of which representation is to be understood; if this priority is taken away, it becomes unclear what to make of the identity claim, unclear what place it could have in an account – of whatever sort – of representation.

Third, and perhaps most worrying, one can doubt whether the story on offer here captures – in any manner – the phenomenon we were after. The internality of the provision of ontology by syntax was supposed to rule out there being any question, given the syntax, what ontology it signalizes. But here it seems there *is* such a question, indeed a question we have answered: The ontology is the same as the syntax. The 'in the same way' claim threatens to appear here, that is to say, as something external to syntax: One has the syntax; separate from this one has the 'in the same way' claim; putting the two together one infers the ontology. To repeat the point, we suggested above that one is committed merely in identifying the syntax of two Tractarian names

to identifying the form of their referents, but this now appears incorrect: One has this commitment only when one is given also the identity claim. From this perspective, identity is just as external as any other substantial correlation. This complaint might prompt one, of course, to retrace and revise one's understanding of what it is one is after, but enough has been said to move on.

The Expression of a Sense (iii)

We need a rather different route to understanding how for Wittgenstein a fact is fully on display in the proposition, a different route to understanding how 'seeing the syntax' is 'seeing the ontology'. We are already equipped, I however think, for finding such a route. First we need to redeploy Wittgenstein's basic Fregean tenet of giving (sole) pride of place to truth in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of Tractarian symbols. And second we shall need to recall and place that Tractarian facts are in their conception the kinds of things to be expressed.

We talked somewhat blandly above of propositions as having 'syntactic' structure, of symbols as 'syntactic' elements. And then we found Wittgenstein asserting that the proposition is the unit of syntax: As what an object is is a possible part of atomic facts, so what a name is is a possible part of elementary propositions. Where the worldly priority was explained by Wittgenstein's giving pride of place to truth, however, the priority in language was left unexplained. But the two have, of course, the very same source. As Wittgenstein's giving pride of place to the notion of truth dictates that facts are not understood other than as truth conditions, so too it dictates that propositions are not understood other than as expressions of truth conditions. What a proposition is, essentially and from the start, is the expression of a truth condition. And on both sides the Fregean tenet austerely demands that propositional or fact elements are not understood other than as such. A separate understanding of propositional elements would be an understanding of them independent of truth, and so, for Wittgenstein, a *non-logical* understanding. To repeat: The syntactic use in which a sign is a sign of a symbol is not a use in some system comprehensible without reference to truth; rather it is a *logico*-syntactic use, a use essentially in the expression of sense. So immediately after 'The proposition is the expression of its truth-conditions' we find: 'Frege has therefore quite rightly put them [truth conditions] at the beginning, as explaining the signs of his logical symbolism' (TLP 4.431).

Wittgenstein considers no phenomenon of language, no phenomenon of sentences or syntax, given separately from the notion of truth for which he then asks how *these* kinds of things, being what they are, come to represent the world and so to be truth bearers. There is no theory of *that* kind in the *Tractatus*. Rather, Wittgenstein's notion of a proposition is from the start one of something 'world-involving' (TLP 3.12): It is that of the expression of a sense. It is, therefore, in terms of sense expression that a proposition's structure, its syntax, is to be understood. If what a proposition essentially is is the expression of a truth condition, then propositional structure is precisely structure in the expressing of such a condition. There is no understanding a proposition as dividing in a certain way and then asking whether (or substantially asserting that) it is by this division that its sense is expressed. Rather, to say that the proposition divides in a certain way *is already to say* that it is in this way that its sense is expressed. *Structure in a proposition means*

structure through which its sense is expressed. (Compare here a slightly different case in Frege. To say that the Fregean singular term 'The capital of Denmark' divides into the Fregean symbols 'The capital of …' and 'Denmark' just is to say that it is in this division that its referent is determined: Structure in the Fregean expression means structure in the determination of its referent.)

Propositional structure, we thus have, is expressing structure. More than this, though, Wittgenstein writes:

> I call any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense an expression (or a symbol).
> (A proposition is itself an expression.)
> Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression. (TLP 3.31)

Propositional structure, Wittgenstein here asserts, is structure in its sense. A symbol or propositional part – 'the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions' (TLP 3.311) – is at the same time something which characterizes the proposition's sense. A commonality amongst propositions is a commonality in their senses. A move is made, it thus seems, from propositional structure as expressing structure to propositional structure as structure in what is expressed. What underwrites this move?

Well, here we need simply to bring to centre stage something that has been running through our discussion: Representable means *expressible*. We are not dealing here in the *Tractatus* with some undifferentiated notion of representation, a notion of 'fact indication by means of signs' which could take a variety of different forms; rather, our concern is with *expression*, and with that our idea of a truth condition is that of an expressible. And it is this that takes us from propositional structure as expressing structure to propositional structure as structure in the sense expressed. Expressing a fact is not a matter of latching on in a certain way to something given separately from the possibility of so latching on. If it were, then a distinction and comparison would indeed be possible between the way one is latching on and the nature of the item being latched on to, between the structure of the act of latching, as it were, and the structure of its object. With a fact understood as an expressible, however, no such distinction can be made, and this means no contrast is possible between the structure of the expressing and that of what is expressed. To repeat: If, given the expression of a fact, one doesn't take the structure of the expression to provide *in itself* that of the fact, then one is taking the fact to have an expression-independent structure, and so to be something other than an expressible.

This thought that propositional structure is structure in its sense is Wittgenstein's position that what an elementary proposition represents is that its objects are *so* combined (TLP 2.15). We arrive here by holding at once that a proposition is the expression of a sense and that a sense is an expressible. The thought at which we arrive is not, however, the thought above of a simple identity of combinatorial modes between a proposition and its sense, the thought that there is no more distinction between the combinatorial modes of the proposition 'Jack loves Jill' and the fact that Jack loves Jill than there is between those of the fact that Jack loves Jill and the fact that Mike loves Jane. Rather, the view is one in which the logico-syntactic mode of a proposition and

the logical mode of the fact it expresses arrive together but are differentiated in that one is the mode of a representation and the other the mode of what such a representation represents. This exhausts, however, their differentiation. Indeed, the modes form an internally related pair such that the one is the mode of a representation and the other the mode of a representable such a representation can represent. Identifying an elementary proposition's composition, then, identifying it as the type of combination it is, will mean identifying how it represents its objects as combined. Or again, given what has been said above, identifying a name, identifying it as the logico-syntactic element it is, will mean identifying the logical form of its referent. One *sees* the form of the fact or object – one *has* that form – *in* that of its representing name or proposition.

Truth as the Given

One may have a sense here of groundlessness or circularity, and of course there *is* a certain circularity. To close it may be helpful briefly to place this point. The general structure in Wittgenstein's thinking being found in this chapter involves the rejection of a realism which starts from facts and their constituent objects and then seeks to deploy such ideas in coming to an understanding of the operation of language and the nature of truth. Our proposal is rather is that for Wittgenstein language and the world are comprehensible only together: a proposition is precisely the expression of a fact, and a fact is precisely an expressible. This is of course circular in a sense, but the circle should raise no obvious point of concern: the lesson is merely that proposition and fact are coeval notions for Wittgenstein. If one wants something to speak of as basic in the *Tractatus*, something to call a given, then what one should reach for is neither 'the world', nor indeed 'our language game of propositions', but *truth*. For Wittgenstein, language and the world are to be understood together as aspects of the unfolding of the single notion of truth. In this way the *Tractatus* is profoundly Fregean.

COLIN JOHNSTON, UNIVERSTY OF STIRLING

References

Frege, G. (1979). *Posthumous writings*. Oxford: Blackwell
Frege, G. (1984). *Collected papers on mathematics, logic and philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell
Frege, G. (2013). *The basic laws of arithmetic*. (P. Ebert and M. Rossberg, Trans.) Oxford: OUP
Ramsey, F. (1927). Facts and propositions. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 7: 153-170
Russell, B. (1956). The philosophy of logical atomism. In R. Marsh (Ed). *Logic and knowledge* (pp. 177-281). London: Unwin Hyman
Russell, B. (1992). On the nature of truth and falsehood. In J. Slater (Ed). *The collected papers of Bertrand Russell volume 6* (pp. 116-124). London: Routledge

Sullivan, P. (2001). A version of the picture theory. In W. Vossenkuhl (Ed). *Wittgenstein: Tractatus – Klassiker Auslegen* (pp. 89-110). Berlin: Akademie Verlag