

K. Cahill, A. Pichler:  
*Introduction to Wittgenstein*

5th lecture 14.9.2020:  
The *Philosophical Investigations* read  
in contrast to and in the light of the  
*Tractatus*

# From the Tractatus to the later philosophy

- From exactness to acceptance of vagueness
- Meaning re-visited – and re-defined: From reference to rules
  - From rules to practice

Some of the driving force behind  
the *Tractatus*: The ambition to find /  
create exact language

# A fact about ordinary language

In general, the meaning of expressions and phrases of everyday language is vague, ambiguous and context dependent.

# Vagueness, ambiguity, context dependency

- Vagueness: Many expressions have vague meanings.
  - "There are **about** twenty people in this room", "She is a **good** student" ...
- Ambiguity: Many expressions have a range of meanings.
  - «2 x 2 **is** 4»; «Kevin **is** American» ....; «Die **Bank** ist teuer" ...
- (Speaker) context dependency: Many expressions have context dependent meanings.
  - Deictic expressions, : «this», «here», «now», «I», «tomorrow» ...

# «But science (Wissenschaft) needs exactness!»

- «Thank God: Ordinary language also includes some not speaker context dependent proper names and definite descriptions!»
  - «Simo Säätelä», «Bergen», «The Finnish professor at the Philosophy department in Bergen» ...

# The «ideal language» program

- «We need exact language; let's create it.»
- Or (Frege and *Tractatus!*): «Let's make the exactness, that actually already is *inherent* in our existing language (in our **thought**), explicit in a *Begriffsschrift*.»
- «In such an exact *Begriffsschrift*, we must be maximally *formal* and should as little as possible have to stress with vague, ambiguous, context-dependent meanings – 'messy' – contents.»
  - An artificial and formal language, a **logical syntax**. *Syntax* rather than semantics!

# «We need an exact language that ...»

- is context independent
- permits exact operations on the basis of logical syntax alone
- can in principle be processed by machines!
  - An artificial language («GOFAI»!)
- is as much as possible a *calculus: a formal system with exact rules for how to process signs*
- establishes the truth of compound propositions on the basis of their *logical form alone*
  - *The Tractatus' truth tables calculus!*



# Promotion of logical syntax is *one* ambition / tendency in the *Tractatus*

TLP #3.317

... Die Festsetzung wird also nur von Symbolen, nicht von deren Bedeutung handeln.

Und *nur* dies ist der Festsetzung wesentlich, *daß sie nur eine Beschreibung von Symbolen ist und nichts über das Bezeichnete aussagt.*

... The stipulation will therefore be concerned only with symbols, not with their meaning.

And the *only* thing essential to the stipulation is *that it is merely a description of symbols and states nothing about what is signified.*

TLP #3.33

In der logischen Syntax darf nie die Bedeutung eines Zeichens eine Rolle spielen; sie muß sich aufstellen lassen, ohne daß dabei von der *Bedeutung* eines Zeichens die Rede wäre, sie darf *nur* die Beschreibung der Ausdrücke voraussetzen.

In logical syntax the meaning of a sign should never play a rôle. It must be possible to establish logical syntax without mentioning the *meaning* of a sign: *only* the description of expressions may be presupposed.

# So, how does it work?

- One creates a calculus that permits identifying the truth value of a compound sentence purely on the basis of
  - writing down all possible truth value combinations for the simple sentences, plus
  - writing down the resulting truth value series for the compound sentence.
- By running a compound sentence (e.g. "p & q") through the truth table calculus we *show* how its truth value series results from the truth values of the simple sentences it is composed of (i.e. "p", "q").

– "&" is *shown* by the T, F, F, F truth value series :

p	&	q
T	T	T
T	F	F
F	F	T
F	F	F

"~" is *shown* by through the F, T truth value series:

~	p
F	T
T	F

- TLP #4.31: The truth-possibilities can be presented by schemata of the following kind ("T" means "true", "F" "false". The rows of T's and F's under the row of the elementary propositions mean their truth-possibilities in an easily intelligible symbolism).
- See TLP #5.101 for all (16!) possible truth value series for two elementary propositions p and q.

# Problems?

- Well, no problem as long as the concept of elementary proposition is presupposed and does its work as it is introduced in the *Tractatus* - as long as the elementary propositions are logically independent of each other and thus the truth value of one proposition has no bearing on the truth value of another proposition. In short: if they do not exclude each other.
- But what happens if they *do*? I.e. if p and q actually exclude each other on the basis of their semantics, like for example colour statements can exclude each other?
  - Replace "p" with «This is red», and q with «This is green»:

$$\frac{p}{T} \quad \frac{\&}{T?} \quad \frac{q}{T?}$$

- Then the truth table-calculus no longer works!!!

# Meaning:


If not reference – what is it then?

# From reference to rules

- *Tractatus*: Sense comes from **elementary propositions** composed of **names** which (in the context of the proposition) **refer** to simple objects in the world.
  - If there are no elementary propositions – how can sense and reference be accounted for?
  - "Middle period": Meaning is established through language-internal **rules** rather than language-external **reference**.
    - The meaning of a sentence does not come from reference to objects, but from a system of linguistic rules.
- **NB: RE-DEFINITION OF «MEANING»!**

# The chess analogy: Rules

Words are like chess figures in several aspects:

- The chess figures are part of a game with **rules**.
  - Words are part of a game with **rules** - which also means that they are part of an activity (→ «language game»).
- The meaning of a chess figure does not come from a relation of representation (picture theory!), but from a chess-internal system of **rules**. What would a chess figure represent / refer to?
  - A word's meaning does not depend on reference / representation, but on the language game internal **rules**.
- The **rules** for what to do with a chess figure (in chess) are purely conventional and not bound by reference to ontological entities. What would it mean that the chess rules are bound by «reality»?
  - The **rules** for how to use words are purely conventional and not bound by reference to ontological entities.
- «  This is the chess queen. » has meaning because of the chess game and its **rules** – not because of a reference relation to reality.
  - Not even linguistic ostensive definition ("This is ...") is bound by a language-external world. Ostensive acts take place within a system of language and its **rules**. Language is autonomous and independent of the world.

➤ Meaning *is rules*.

# From rules to practice\*

- The "Meaning is rules"-view can be challenged on the basis of the "Rules regress" and the "Authority regress" problems.
  - «Rules need a foundation!»
- Rules regress: If not through reference to the language-external world – where do the words and sentences get their meaning from? From rules. But *what rules the rules?* Other rules. Other rules? What rules the rules that rule the rules? Again other rules? ... ?
- Authority regress: Who decides, *which* rules to adopt? Who decides which are the rules we should agree upon? And which changes are permitted? Even if rules are conventional – don't we still need an authority to approve of the convention, or to approve of the change? Where does such authority come from? ... ?
- Wittgenstein's response to this challenge leads to the "primacy of practice"- and "meaning is use"-views.

\* According to A. Newen & E. von Savigny, *Analytische Philosophie: Eine Einführung*, 1996; p. 92f

Back to the «messy» contents  
of everyday language and  
*actual practice!*



# PI: Not logic; not even meaning and rules - but **practice** comes first

- Meaning, rules and authority are established by
  - **our practices** (linguistic and other)
- Language is
  - **an activity**, more or less\* ordered by rules
  - **a social activity**, more or less ordered by rules
  - embedded in **language games**
  - embedded in **forms of life**
- «Language games»: Language as embedded in activities / practices.
- "Forms of life" : ... And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.

\* more *and* less!

# A certain picture ...

A certain picture of the human language ...

PI §1: (...) the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names. (...) Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.

- No human agents needed? Cf. PI §1: Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. ...

# Focus on action rather than meaning

PI §1:

Now think of the following use of language: I **send** someone shopping. I **give** him a slip marked "five red apples". He **takes** the slip to the shopkeeper, who **opens** the drawer marked "apples"; then he **looks up** the word "red" in a table and **finds** a colour sample opposite it; then he **says** the series of cardinal numbers—I **assume** that he knows them by heart—up to the word "five" and for each number he **takes** an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.—**It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.**—"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?"—Well, I **assume** that he **acts** as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.—But what is the meaning of the word "five"?—No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used.

# Focus on use rather than reference

- If meaning is tied to use, then one method for dealing with philosophical problems arising from questions of meaning is to pay attention to actual linguistic usage.
- Studies of how words actually are used become key to the method of philosophy!
  - NB: Surface grammar vs. Depth grammar
  - A range of relevant contexts: linguistic, extra-linguistic, social, cultural, historical ... **ordinary language**
  - Variety and multiplicity: Not *one* "general form of proposition"; not *one* meaning of "simple" ...
- Focus on examples of use.
- Focus on the role of examples for learning language and communication - see PI §208.

The PI are to “be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking”

# PI preface

Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking.

... against the background of my old way of thinking

TLP	PI
?	Persons, humans (PI §1)
?	Body language (PI §1)
?	Behaviour, but also acting (PI §1)
?	Examples (PI §1)
?	Real, everyday language and life (PI §§1, 108, 156, 241)
?	Criss-cross (PI preface, §68)
?	1-word sentences (PI §19)
?	Many kinds of sentences (PI §23)
?	Life, biology (PI §§19, 23, 142, 441, 472; PI II xii / §365f)
?	Development, change, variation (synchronic and diachronic) (PI §§ 11, 12, 14, 18, 23)
?	Many problems (PI §133)
?	Many methods (PI §133)
?	Use (PI §§ 1, 43, 432)
?	Vagueness and open-endedness (PI §§ 18, 66f, 71, 133)

From the striving for  
exactness to attention to  
«amorphous» practice



# Exactness a continuous issue

**Understanding, as it is usually conceived, is a vague process – we are only interested in what is exact.** But not because we are only interested in the “ideal” of a language which reality only approximates, but because we only in this way can capture what is expressed in every language.

But what am I saying when I say “that only what is exact interests me”? What is the inexact? What is the vague that I exclude? Isn't it that I have to exclude what I don't know in precise enough terms? I.e. don't I want to say that — — —.

Why do I say: feelings, moods etc. that accompany, follow, or precede a sentence don't interest me! Because it is only the symbolic structure that interests me.

Doesn't the vague consist in the fact that it does not belong to the symbol, that it can be one way or the other, even when the symbol remains the same?

No, there is still something else: that, in a sense, it is my only task to say something clearly and not to allude to anything.

It is almost as though I wanted to say I'm weaving a tapestry & therefore I cannot have any unclear colour transitions. But in reality this is not a good simile.

Shall I say that exactness consists in the fact that what is dubious does not concern us?

**What does our exactness consist in?**

**Frege about psychological logic. His comments are all concerned with the inexactness of a psychological study in contrast to a logical one.**

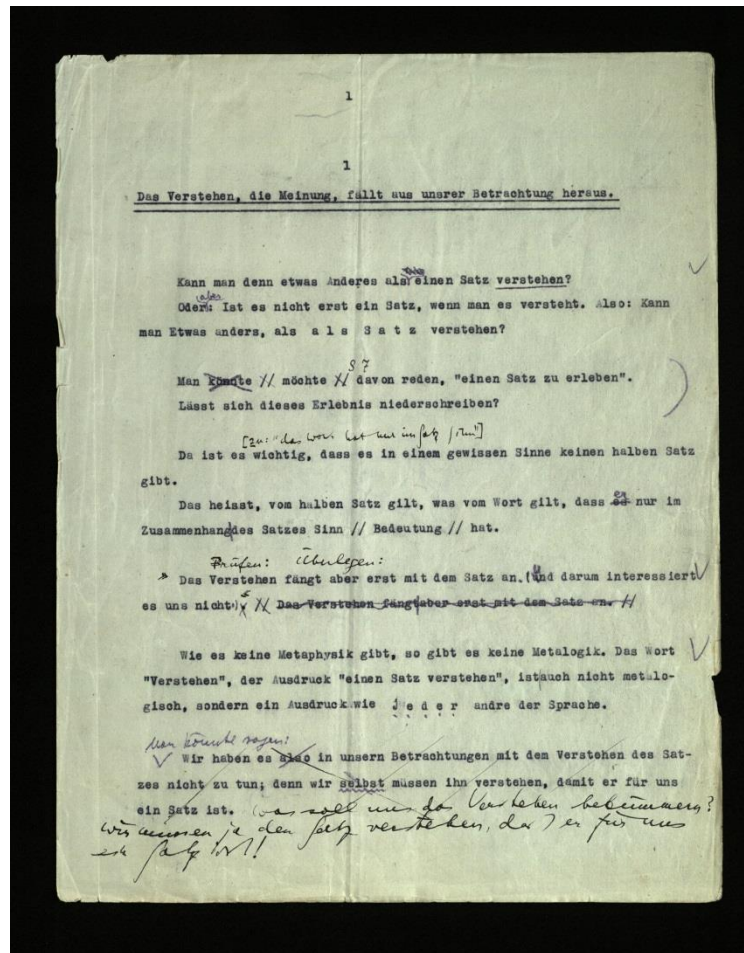
**Can I say that I am only interested in the *content* of the sentence? And the content of the sentence lies in it.**

**The sentence has its content as a component of the calculus.**

**Is thus, “understanding a sentence” of the same kind as “mastering a calculus”? Thus, as knowing how to multiply? I think so.**

[http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BFE/Ms-153a,102r\\_ff](http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BFE/Ms-153a,102r_ff) ff. (1931)

# The issue of understanding: Calculus (exactness) or human practice («amorphousness») driven?



# PI §81

(...) All this, however, can only appear in the right light when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning, and thinking. For it will then also become clear **what can lead us (and did lead me) to think that if anyone utters a sentence and *means or understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules.**