

Wittgenstein's 'Picture Theory' and the Æsthetic Experience of Clear Thoughts

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1

'Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts'

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein appeals to clarity when he characterises the aim, task and results of philosophy. He claims that philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts, the task for philosophy is to make thoughts clear and the results of philosophy are that some propositions have become clear (4.112).¹ In the Preface to the *Tractatus* he invokes clarity when he sums up the sense of the book as: 'what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence'.² Beyond brief remarks of this kind, Wittgenstein does not define or explain the notion of clarity he employs in the *Tractatus*. In the following discussion I examine his remarks about making thoughts clear to reach conclusions about his notion of clarity. My conclusion is that his picture theory of propositions implies that clarity in philosophical work has æsthetic significance.

In section two, I elaborate Wittgenstein's view that a thought is a proposition with a sense and a proposition is a picture of reality. The specific question I then pose is: if making a thought clear is making clear a picture of reality, how should we construe his notion of clarity? To provide the basis for an answer, in section three, I examine the picture theory of propositions and detail how Wittgenstein differentiates between depicting, presenting and mirroring. In section four, I suggest that, according to the *Tractatus*, achieving clarity of thought is an æsthetic experience.

2

Thought, Proposition and Picture**2.1 'A thought is a proposition with a sense'**

The stated aim of the *Tractatus* is to draw a limit, 'not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts' within language (p. 3), where language is understood to be the 'totality of propositions' (4.001). For this purpose Wittgenstein is not concerned with thoughts as mental items or as aspects of human psychology. Rather, he is concerned with thoughts insofar as they are logically equivalent to propositions. In this vein he makes the categorical statement that 'a thought is a proposition with a sense' (4).³ This position has two notable implications: every thought is expressible as a proposition, hence publicly communicable; and there are no unthinkable propositions.

Although equivalence, in respect of logic, between thought (*der Gedanke*) and proposition (*der Satz*) is a central feature of Wittgenstein's account, this does not imply that thoughts are straightforwardly accessible when we encounter propositions of everyday language. Instead we must note his qualified claim that 'in a proposition a thought finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses' (3.1). A proposition 'expresses'—or to use Wittgenstein's alternative term—'symbolises' a thought when a perceptible propositional sign, such as a string of words, is employed with a logico-syntactic mode of signification (3.327). However, in natural language not every perceptible feature of a proposition has logico-syntactic significance and we may fail to grasp the logic of language if non-essential features of signs distract from their symbolising role.⁴ In Wittgenstein's example, perceptible similarity between two signs in the proposition 'Green is green' can obscure the logical difference that one sign symbolises as a proper name and the other symbolises as an adjective (3.323). Thus Wittgenstein cautions that 'language disguises thought' (4.002) and claims that philosophy is full of 'fundamental confusions' of this kind (3.324). Even though all the propositions of everyday language are in 'perfect logical order' (5.5563), the logic of propositions is sometimes unclear and an unclear proposition is not just the unclear expression of a thought: it is an unclear thought.

The difficulty this poses is important because, according to Wittgenstein, philosophical questions and pseudo-propositions emerge out of confusions that arise when we fail to understand the logic of our language. It is the

basis for his view that 'all philosophy is a "critique of language"' (4.0031). Philosophical problems can only be resolved by exposing and dispelling such confusions, an activity that 'aims at the logical clarification of thoughts' (4.112). Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy rests on two considerations about thought and language. The idea that thoughts can be rendered unclear by inessential features of language is evident in his view that that 'without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct' (4.112). The idea that thoughts are nonetheless logically equivalent to propositions makes it coherent for him to claim both that philosophy aims at the 'clarification of thoughts' and that philosophy results in the 'clarification of propositions'.

The *Tractatus* therefore contains a qualified equivalence between thoughts and propositions: a thought is a proposition insofar as a proposition is the symbolic expression of a thought. Anything logically constitutive of a thought is an essential, symbolising feature of the proposition; anything else is merely an accidental feature of the propositional sign. We find thought and proposition addressed in tandem in Wittgenstein's twofold remark: 'everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be put into words can be put clearly' (4.116). The important point for philosophy is that if the thought expressed in a proposition is unclear, it can nonetheless be made clear. There are no illogical thoughts (3.03) and no illogical propositions, but there can be unclear propositions, or there can be nonsensical pseudo-propositions which may confuse us by presenting the appearance of an illogical thought. The former is the unclear expression of a thought; the latter is not a thought at all. Philosophical work will draw a limit to the expression of thoughts by expressing thoughts in clear propositions and avoiding nonsensical pseudo-propositions. 'It will signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said' (4.115). To understand how an unclear proposition can be made clear I now turn to Wittgenstein's account of propositions as pictures.

2.2 'A proposition is a picture of reality'

Wittgenstein's theory of the proposition is designed to address many long-standing puzzles in philosophy, including questions about the unity of a proposition and the status of logical propositions and logical constants. Two key questions are: how is a proposition capable of describing reality and how can a proposition be a true or false description of reality?

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein answers that a proposition describes reality, truly or falsely, just if it is a picture (*das Bild*) of reality; thus his account has become known as the 'picture theory'. Interpreters have debated the problem that 'picture' is not an ideal translation for the German word '*Bild*' and some, such as Hidé Ishiguro prefer the term 'image'.⁵ Certainly in the *Tractatus* 'picture' is not a metaphorical notion, even though the category of picture covers more than just visual images such as drawings or diagrams and visual arrangements such as tableaux. It can also include a musical score, the grooves on a record surface and sound wave structures (4.014). Although the category of 'picture' is expansive, it is nonetheless a technical and demanding notion; in all cases a picture is a logical configuration of elements and a picture is either true or false when compared with reality. The paradigm for his notion of a picture is a model (2.12), supposedly inspired by a courtroom model of persons and vehicles involved in a traffic accident.⁶ It is recognised that Wittgenstein's conception of a picture has prior associations in mathematics and science, for example Hertz's view that a scientific theory is a picture of phenomena; however, the picture theory of the *Tractatus* advances additional and original measures to establish that all propositions are pictures of reality.

Wittgenstein acknowledges that, in most cases, a proposition in speech or writing will not immediately strike us as a picture of reality (4.011), but he believes that further reflection will leave us convinced that every proposition must be a picture (4.011). Although the propositions we encounter are typically complex, he claims that every complex proposition is a truth-function of the most basic propositions: elementary propositions (*Elementarsätzen*). Wittgenstein sets out conditions that must be met by elementary propositions and argues that all propositions, whether elementary or complex, are truth-functional pictures of reality (5).

In order for a proposition to describe reality it must be distinct from what it describes, but nonetheless essentially share something in common with what it describes. To satisfy the first requirement Wittgenstein explains that 'a picture is a fact' (2.141) which presents its subject 'from a position outside it' (2.173).⁷ To satisfy the second, he claims that the fact that constitutes the picture shares logical form with what it depicts (2.18). Thus, when Wittgenstein claims that a picture is 'laid against reality like a measure' (2.1512) his point is that a picture is distinct from the reality it depicts, yet picture and what is pictured share identical co-ordinates in logical space.

Only a fact can serve as a picture, because in order to fulfil the two

conditions just discussed pictures must be articulate, with elements related to one another in a determinate way (2.14). A single object or a collection of objects would fail to meet this condition. The fact that a stands in a certain relation to b is a configuration of objects rather than a collection of objects; thus the propositional sign 'aRb' is a fact that has determinate structure.⁸ If a fact has structure, then it must have the possibility of that structure. According to Wittgenstein, form is the possibility of structure (2.033), thus a fact with determinate structure can have a pictorial form (See 2.15 and 2.151). Facts can have a pictorial relation to reality with various different kinds of pictorial form (2.171), but every kind of picture has logical form in common with reality (2.18). Not every picture is, for example, a spatial picture, but every picture is a logical picture. A fact can serve as a picture because it is a determinate structure, independent of the subject it depicts, yet it shares the same logical form as the state of affairs it depicts. Even a written or spoken proposition which does not immediately appear to be a picture nonetheless counts as a logical picture as it has logical form in common with reality.

The remarks discussed so far in this section set out some of Wittgenstein's reasons for claiming that a proposition must be a picture and that a picture must be a fact.⁹ In the following section I detail his account of how facts can serve as pictures. Before turning to this topic, I will pose a question that is to be the target for the remaining discussion. My question is: if making a thought clear involves making clear a picture of reality, how should we construe Wittgenstein's notion of clarity? In the *Tractatus* we find that taking a proposition to be a picture of reality involves three differentiated but interdependent notions: depicting, presenting and mirroring. My eventual aim is to show how these notions have a bearing on understanding Wittgenstein's notion of clarity when he says that philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts.

3

Depicting, Presenting and Mirroring

In principle it is possible for any fact to serve as a picture of reality, but only some facts are employed as pictures. In Wittgenstein's account of how facts can be pictures we find a variety of different technical terms, translated variously as: representing, presenting, picturing, projecting, expressing, reflecting and mirroring. Commentators have claimed that several of these

notions are simply synonyms, but my view is that we can better understand his account if we assume, at least in the first instance, that they are differentiated for a purpose. For example, with rare exceptions, Wittgenstein systematically uses *abbilden* to say that a picture depicts reality but *darstellen* to say that a picture presents a sense. Hidé Ishiguro and Christopher Gilbert claim that *darstellen*, *abbilden* and *projectieren/projizieren* are synonymous terms;¹⁰ whereas I agree with Roger White's view that they play separate roles in the *Tractatus*.¹¹ In this section I elaborate the role of three key notions, *abbilden*, *darstellen* and *spiegeln*, following significant patterns in Wittgenstein's use of the terms. I depart from most interpretations in translating *darstellen* as 'presenting' rather than 'representing'. This is because 'representing' might otherwise appear interchangeable with 'depicting' and, instead, my account takes presenting a sense to be a literal notion, similar to 'setting forth'.¹²

One problem facing any theory of language is to answer the question: how can we grasp what would make a proposition true, without knowing already whether or not it is true? By combining the distinct notions of depicting reality and presenting a sense, Wittgenstein can establish that every proposition is either true or false, but at the same time establish that we can grasp the sense of the proposition independent of knowing what states of affairs obtain or do not obtain in reality. This will prove significant because making a thought clear cannot involve comparing it with reality to ascertain its truth, or its falsity. According to the *Tractatus* the truth of propositions is irrelevant to the work of philosophy, in direct contrast with the work of the natural sciences (4.11). Instead it must be possible to make a thought clear independent of knowing whether or not it is true.

We might imagine that a picture theory of language would be based on the idea that a picture is a fact that stands in a relation to some other fact. For example, the fact that the model car is turned upside down might stand in a depictive relation to the fact that the motor car landed on its roof. However, this cannot be the basis of a theory of propositions. If a proposition were to describe reality because it stands in a relation to some particular fact, a proposition could only have sense under circumstances when the state of affairs it describes obtains. Whether or not a proposition had sense would depend on a fact in the world. But Wittgenstein's point is to establish that a proposition can describe reality regardless of how the world is—regardless of which states of affairs obtain. To achieve this, he must distinguish between what a picture depicts and what a picture presents. As I will now elaborate, *darstellen* is

systematically distinguished from *abbilden* because a picture presents a possible situation and depicts that possible situation as being the case.

3.1 Depicting (*abbilden*)

Wittgenstein uses *abbilden* as the principle term for his idea that a proposition that says anything at all is a picture of reality. His view is that a proposition describes certain facts, truly or falsely, insofar as it 'depicts' reality. It would be easy to form the wrong impression of how a proposition depicts reality by assuming one familiar notion of producing a picture: the notion that a painter may observe a bowl of fruit on the table and paint a picture of that bowl of fruit. If we think of propositions in this way, we might think that we can describe the facts by creating a picture of the facts. But this is precisely not Wittgenstein's notion of depiction. It would lead to the problem outlined above.

Instead, it is helpful to consider a different but equally familiar notion of producing a picture. This time the painter paints an imagined arrangement of elements on the canvas so that these elements, which stand in for an apple, a bunch of grapes, an orange, show a possible situation. If, furthermore, it is asserted that this possible situation agrees with how things really are, the painted arrangement serves as a depiction of reality. This is how we are to understand Wittgenstein's notion of depiction. A proposition depicts reality when, to speak abstractly, it says 'this is how things stand' or 'such and such is the case'. To say 'this is how things stand', a propositional sign is used to present a possible state of affairs—a possible situation (*die Sachlage*)—and to assert that this possible state of affairs obtains in reality. A proposition says, in effect: the possible situation shown here is really the case.

According to Wittgenstein's notion of depiction, a picture that asserts how things really are must be either true or false. It is true if what is asserted agrees with the facts and false if what is asserted fails to agree. Reality, or what is real, is the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs (*Sachverhalte*) (2.06). I have explained that a fact does not become a picture of reality as the result of being compared with reality; instead the truth or falsity of a picture is settled by comparing it with reality, or specifically, by comparing the possible situation that it presents with reality (2.222).

By presenting a possible situation, the propositional sign determines exactly

how the proposition is to be compared with reality. It sets out conditions for comparing the possible situation with what is really the case.

A proposition must restrict reality to two alternatives: yes or no. In order to do that it must describe reality completely. (4.023)

To say that a proposition describes reality completely is not to say that it depicts the whole of reality. Otherwise all propositions would say the same thing. Wittgenstein uses the term 'reality' to mean some particular states of affairs, rather than the totality of states of affairs.¹³ Specifically, 'reality' means whatever states of affairs would be the case if the proposition were true. Thus Wittgenstein writes:

(A proposition may well be an incomplete picture of a certain situation, but it is always a complete picture of something.) (5.156)

To understand how an elementary proposition is able to present a possible situation, it is relevant to consider how a name can stand in for (*vertreten*) an object in the context of a proposition. The terms *abbilden*, *darstellen* and *spiegeln* apply only to propositions, so a name does not depict, present or mirror anything; instead *vertreten* is a term that applies solely to names (3.221). When a fact is a picture it presents a possible situation because the elements of the picture stand in for objects in a possible state of affairs: in other words, in an elementary proposition the picture elements are names of objects. The correspondence between a picture element and object is not itself determined by logic—assigning a meaning to a name is an arbitrary matter of convention—but once a name has been assigned to an object it then stands in for (*vertreten*) that object and is governed by the rules of logic.¹⁴ When the elements of a picture are correlated with objects in a possible state of affairs, the picture stands in a 'pictorial relationship' (*die abbildende Beziehung*) to reality (2.1514). If any words have not been assigned a meaning, the result is nonsense rather than a picture of reality.¹⁵ A nonsensical 'pseudo-proposition' merely resembles the appearance of a proposition and has no pictorial relationship to reality.¹⁶

3.2 Presenting (*darstellen*)

Wittgenstein uses the term '*darstellen*' when he explains that a picture 'presents' a possible situation. If a fact such as 'aRb' serves as a propositional sign it presents a possible situation and the possible situation it presents is what Wittgenstein calls the 'sense' of the proposition (2.221). It is important to recognise that the sense of a proposition is presented, rather than depicted.

An important feature of the picture theory is that the sense of a picture is not a fact; rather it is a possible situation (*die Sachlage*)—the possibility of the obtaining, or the non-obtaining, of a state of affairs. The courtroom model does not present the fact of the motor car landing on its roof. Instead putting a model car on its roof presents the possible situation of a motor car landing on its roof. As the sense of a picture is a possible situation, rather than a fact, Wittgenstein can establish that 'a proposition has a sense that is independent of the facts' (4.061). His view is that a proposition cannot depict reality unless it has a sense that is both independent of the facts and prior to assertion.

Every proposition must already have a sense; assertion cannot give it a sense, for what it asserts is the sense itself. (4.064)

The sense of a proposition sets the conditions for how the proposition is to be compared with reality. We must be able to grasp the sense of a proposition before we can compare it to reality to determine whether it is true or false. This has an implication that is important for Wittgenstein's purpose in the *Tractatus*: it is possible to grasp the sense of a proposition solely by examining the picture.

A proposition is a picture of reality: for if I understand a proposition, I know the situation that it presents. And I understand the proposition without having had its sense explained to me (4.021)

The courtroom model makes this idea plausible. A model car placed upside down presents the possible situation of a motor car landing on its roof. A new witness who is asked to arrange the model might instead put the model car on its side. This configuration of objects is a new fact, a new propositional sign, which uses the pre-established modes of signification to present a different possible situation. We grasp the sense of the proposition because the possible

situation is presented—set forth—by the model. The model doesn't have to be compared to how the world is for us to grasp its sense—the possible situation is simply what is presented to us by the model.

Translating *darstellen* as 'represent' could create the impression that when a fact serves as a picture it stands in a representational relation to its sense. Rather, when a fact serves as a picture it presents a sense and the sense is used to depict reality. It is particularly important to note that the sense of a proposition is not depicted. Presenting is not a kind of depicting or describing, or a way of saying something. When a fact is used to present a possible situation, that situation—the sense of the proposition—shows itself and 'what can be shown, cannot be said' (4.1212). The distinction between *abbilden* and *darstellen* can be used to understand the following remarks, which lie at the heart of the picture theory of propositions:

A proposition shows its sense.

A proposition shows how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand. (4.022)

A proposition is able to say something insofar as it depicts reality, but in order to depict reality a proposition must have a sense independent of reality. The sense of a proposition is a possible situation which is presented rather than depicted—it shows itself. Propositions are pictures because they show a possible situation and say that the possible situation is how things really stand.

3.3 **Mirroring** (*spiegeln*)

Wittgenstein writes that 'in order to discover whether a picture is true or false, we must compare it with reality' (2.223). He does not mean that language users have a role in mediating the outcome; instead the truth or falsity of a proposition is immediately settled by agreement or disagreement between the sense of the proposition and the facts (2.21). Truth is settled directly because there is an essential commonality between a picture and what it depicts: the sense of the proposition is exactly the possible state of affairs that would be the case if the proposition were true. Logical form is the key to this essential connection and in what follows I will examine

how Wittgenstein uses the term '*spiegeln*' to elaborate the commonality of logical form that is central to his theory of propositions as truth-functional pictures.

When a fact serves as a picture, it is used to present a sense and to assert that this is how things stand. In order to present a sense, and thereby to depict reality, the picture must have a form—the possibility of structure—that it shares in common with the form of what is presented and thereby depicted.¹⁷ More strongly, the form of the picture is identical with the form of what is depicted: 'there must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all.' (2.161). Every picture essentially shares logical form with what it depicts.

Imagine that there are two facts: one fact is a picture and the other is the fact that makes the picture true. The first has structure, the second has structure. If one fact is a picture of the other fact, then they must share a single logical form. There are not two forms, as there are two structures: the form of one fact and the form of the other fact. There is one form in common to both: the logical form of the picture is identical to the logical form of the fact. To elucidate this idea Wittgenstein employs the terminology of 'mirroring'. It is possible that he had a strictly mathematical notion in mind, but even if he uses the term figuratively, our intuitions about ordinary mirrors are adequate. Ordinarily if you place a candle in front of a mirror you can apparently see two flames. But we should not conclude that there are two entities and imagine that one entity, the flame in the mirror, is a representation of another entity: the candle flame. By contrast this conclusion would be correct if we were seeing a candle flame and a painting of that flame. When a flame is mirrored we see one and the same flame in two places.¹⁸ To say that logical form is mirrored in a picture and what it depicts enables us to understand that logical form is not something that occurs in one structure and is represented or depicted in another structure. Nor can we say that the logical form of the picture resembles or matches the logical form of what is depicted. Rather, there is only one logical form which occurs in two structures when a proposition depicts reality.¹⁹

Acknowledging that 'mirroring' implies identity of logical form makes it straightforward to understand an important logical requirement for pictures: identity of form means that the number of (distinguishable) objects in the picture must be identical with the number of (distinguishable) objects in what is depicted (4.04). As a consequence of the mirroring of form,

identical mathematical multiplicity, governing the number of names assigned for an elementary proposition, is necessary not contingent. On this topic, Wittgenstein states that 'mathematical multiplicity, of course, cannot itself be the subject of depiction. One cannot get outside it when depicting' (4.041). His point is a corollary of the wider claim that pictorial form, which generates the requirement for identical mathematical multiplicity, cannot be the subject of depiction. As we saw above in section 2.2, a picture must be distinct from what it depicts, meaning that it 'presents its subject from a position outside it' (2.173). It is impossible for pictorial form to be the subject of a picture because a picture cannot place itself outside pictorial form (2.174). Wittgenstein claims that:

A picture cannot depict its pictorial form; it shows it forth (2.172).

This is relevant for a full understanding of Wittgenstein's idea that logical form is mirrored: mirroring is different from both presenting and depicting. Logical form cannot be depicted because it cannot be presented as the sense of a proposition. It is only possible to present a possible situation if it occupies a set of co-ordinates in logical space. Logical form simply is the set of co-ordinates that a picture shares with what it depicts. Form is mirrored but cannot be depicted.

Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What is mirrored in language, language cannot represent (4.121).

This has consequences for understanding the status of so-called 'logical propositions' which are tautologies or contradictions. A logical proposition is not a picture of reality (4.462) and does not say anything at all (6.11); however, logical propositions are called 'senseless' rather than nonsensical because their lack of sense is not due to a failure to assign meaning to the signs. Rather, they fail to present a possible situation that has conditions for agreement or disagreement with reality. A tautology is true, or a contradiction is false, no matter which states of affairs obtain in reality. Truth is settled *a priori* by the internal structure of a logical proposition (6.113).

Although logical propositions do not present a sense and do not depict reality, logical form is nonetheless mirrored in their structure. For this reason they are said to 'present' or 'show' the logical form of the world (6.12):

Logical propositions describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they present it. They have no subject matter (6.124)

Wittgenstein calls logic 'the great mirror' of the world (5.511); however, this does not mean that logic, consisting of a body of logical propositions, is an important source of truth or knowledge of the world. Rather Wittgenstein's point is that logic is not a significant body of theory or doctrine:

Logic is not a body of doctrine but a mirror-image (*ein Spiegelbild*) of the world. Logic is transcendental (6.13).

Pears and McGuinness translate '*Spiegelbild*' as 'mirror-image', whereas Ogden's translation has 'reflexion'. The remark should not imply that logic is an image or picture in Wittgenstein's technical sense. On the contrary, Wittgenstein's point is that logic is not a body of propositions because there can be no propositions which describe logic. Logical space is the 'scaffolding' in which propositions share logical form with possible states of affairs and facts. A 'proposition' describing logical form would need a standpoint outside logical space, but this would make it impossible for the 'proposition' to share identity of form with its subject (4.12).

Although logical propositions are a mirror for the logic of the world, they do not play a privileged role in philosophy (6.122). There is no need for logical propositions if the logic of ordinary propositions is made clear, because the logical form shared by language and the world is mirrored in every proposition with sense: 'propositions show the logical form of reality; they display it' (4.121). According to Wittgenstein the aim of philosophy is to clarify the logic of thoughts expressed as propositions. We have seen that, as propositions are pictures of reality, logical form must be mirrored in propositions but cannot be depicted. Thus we should not expect the results of philosophy to be logical propositions or 'philosophical propositions' that describe the logic of language. Achieving a clear thought does not involve gaining knowledge about the world and the result of philosophical activity will not be expressed as a thought about the world, a thought about language, or a thought about logic. Rather the successful result of philosophical activity is to express ordinary thoughts clearly. It now remains to consider what this involves.

4

The Aesthetic Experience of Clear Thoughts

I have examined depicting, presenting and mirroring in Wittgenstein's picture theory of propositions to be able to address the following question: if making a thought clear is making clear a picture of reality, how should we construe Wittgenstein's notion of clarity in the *Tractatus*?²⁰ I propose that, commensurate with remarks about aesthetics in the *Tractatus*, attaining the clear expression of a thought is an aesthetic experience. I will suggest that clarity is experienced as a feeling of pleasure by a language user who experiences the clear expression of a thought made perceptible to the senses. A thought expressed with clarity has intrinsic value, though the value cannot be expressed in a proposition.

A clear thought is a thought expressed clearly in a proposition that is perceptible to the senses. We have seen that a proposition depicts reality when a propositional sign is used to mirror the logical form of the situation it presents and to assert that this possible situation is really the case. Thoughts may be rendered unclear by non-essential features of language: 'from the outward form of the clothes, one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe' (4.002). The task of philosophy is to establish whether a proposition has sense and, if it has sense, to remove any confusion that has arisen because the logic is unclear. This task does not require in every case that the proposition be made 'absolutely' clear—i. e. to undertake the complete analysis of a proposition into a truth-function of elementary propositions. It is simply to make the logical form of the proposition sufficiently clear that confusion on the part of the thinker is dispelled.²¹

Whenever a thought is expressed in a proposition, it is in perfect logical order regardless of whether it displays its logical form clearly or unclearly. As every propositional sign is a fact in logical space, there can be no illogical propositions.²² Although the logic of a proposition might not be immediately available to a language user, it is possible to determine the logic of a proposition by examining the symbolising function of the signs:

What does not get expressed in a sign its application shows. What signs obscure their application declares. (3.262)

There are two important aspects to this remark: first, although the logical

form of a proposition cannot be said, it shows itself in the logico-syntactic application of the sign and, second, even though the sense of a proposition may be unclear, its logico-syntactic application determines what the proposition says. The difference between a clear and unclear thought is not a logical difference, but concerns the experience of the person who expresses or perceives the thought. An unclear thought is a proposition with perceptible features that disguise the logico-syntactic function of the propositional sign. A clear expression of the same thought mirrors the same logical form, presents the same sense and depicts the same reality; but it makes the thought perceptible to the senses with a propositional sign that clearly mirrors logical form and clearly presents its sense. This makes it possible to say what can be said clearly. In what follows I will argue that the experience of expressing a thought clearly rather than unclearly is pleasurable and intrinsically valuable, though its value is inexpressible.

Wittgenstein claims that philosophy is an activity, rather than a body of doctrine. The clarification of thoughts is an activity that does not deliver knowledge and true claims, so the question might arise: why should we bother? What value is achieved by undertaking philosophical activity? Or, as Wittgenstein asks in the context of ethical action: 'and what if I don't do it?' Wittgenstein argues that the value of an ethical action does not take the form of reward and punishment as material consequences, construed as factual states of affairs in the world. Instead, value must be intrinsic to the action:

There must be some sort of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but this must lie in the action itself.

I suggest that it is helpful to use this passage as the basis for understanding the value of philosophical activity. It is significant that the next sentence from the passage indicates that Wittgenstein is not straightforwardly or solely making an ethical point:

(And this is clear also that the reward must be something agreeable and the punishment something disagreeable.) (6.422)

Instead, the passage as a whole is best understood in light of a distinctive view expressed in the *Tractatus* that 'ethics and aesthetics are one and the same' (6.421). Relating to the first point of the passage, I suggest that the

clarification of thought is an activity that is intrinsically valuable, as having a clear appreciation of what is mirrored, presented and depicted is its own reward. Relating to the second aspect of the passage, I suggest that a thought expressed in a proposition is aesthetically perceptible to the senses and when it makes what is mirrored, presented and depicted clear, there is an appropriateness of fit that makes the experience of expressing the thought clearly agreeable, or pleasurable. Correspondingly we would expect the confusion and perplexity that accompanies thoughts expressed unclearly to be disagreeable and unrewarding or disadvantageous.

Wittgenstein says that it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics or aesthetics (6.42) because value is not a state of affairs in the world:

If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

What makes [value] non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.

It must lie outside the world. (6.41, my insertion)

If it is correct to think that clarity has aesthetic value, the value of clarity cannot be expressed in a proposition. This would be one of two respects in which the achievement of making a thought clear is indescribable. The other bears on the inexpressibility of logical form already discussed: although a clearly expressed thought makes it possible for a language user to grasp what is mirrored, presented and depicted in a proposition, logical form and the sense of a proposition are shown but cannot be said. To attain a clear thought does not mean being able to put into words what has become clear. It simply means being able to have that thought, but clearly.

According to the *Tractatus*, the result of philosophical activity—the clarification of propositions—is pleasurable and intrinsically valuable, though the result and its value are inexpressible. This implies that the attainment of a clear thought is an aesthetic experience.²⁴ Rather than suggesting that the clear expression of a thought is 'beautiful', I think it is worth anticipating later trends in Wittgenstein's views on aesthetics and to construe the clear expression of a thought as a well-crafted or aptly fitting proposition, in the spirit of a building that has been constructed to reflect its function without distracting ornamentation. Perhaps Wittgenstein has aesthetic clarity in mind when

he evaluates his own work in the *Tractatus* (p. 3), by saying that 'thoughts are expressed in it' and 'the better the thoughts are expressed—the more the nail has been hit on the head—the greater will be its value'. He also says that its goal would be achieved if it 'afforded pleasure to someone who read it with understanding'; however his concern that his craftsmanship 'may have been insufficient for the task', led him also to say that the book might only be understood by those who have themselves 'already thought the thoughts that are expressed'.²³

Notes

- 1 Unless indicated otherwise all references are to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translation by either C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1974 edition), or D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1996 edition).
- 2 This idea is echoed in 4.115 and 4.116.
- 3 Hereafter 'proposition' will always be shorthand for 'a proposition with a sense'. In the *Tractatus*, a proposition has sense, a logical proposition is senseless and a pseudo-proposition is nonsense.
- 4 I discuss this idea in detail in Dawn M. Phillips, 'Complete Analysis and Clarificatory Analysis in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *The Analytic Turn: Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, edited by Michael Beaney (London: Routledge, 2007), 164–177.
- 5 Hidé Ishiguro, 'The So-called Picture Theory: Language and the World in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*', in *Wittgenstein: A Critical Reader*, edited by Hans-Johann Glock (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 26–46.
- 6 Susan Sterrett has argued that it is important to understand this in terms of an experimental scale model. 'Physical Pictures: Engineering Models circa 1914 and in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*' printed in *History of Philosophy of Science: New Trends and Perspectives*, (eds) Michael Heidelberger and Friedrich Stadler (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2002) 121–136.
- 7 This point assumes that elementary facts (*Sachverhalte*) are logically independent of one another (2.061).
- 8 Structural relations are internal relations (4.122–4.125).
- 9 This does not entail that a proposition is just a fact. Rather, a propositional sign is a fact and a proposition consists of a propositional sign applied with a mode of signification.
- 10 Hidé Ishiguro 'The So-called Picture Theory'; Christopher Gilbert 'The Role of Thoughts in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*' in *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21 (1998): 341–352. Gilbert attributes this view to Max Black.
- 11 Roger M. White, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (London: Continuum, 2006).
- 12 My translation makes *darstellen* appear similar to *vorstellen* rather than *abbilden*.
- 13 Wittgenstein's distinction between world (*die Welt*) and reality (*die Wirklichkeit*) is relevant. The world is the totality of states of affairs that obtain (2.04), which thereby determines which states of affairs do not obtain (2.05). In this respect the 'world' is the same as what Wittgenstein calls the 'total reality' '*die gesamte Wirklichkeit*' (2.063).

- 14 'Although there is something arbitrary in our notations, this much is not arbitrary—that when we have determined one thing arbitrarily, something else is necessarily the case. (This derives from the essence of notation.)' (3.342)
- 15 See 5.473.
- 16 See 5.4733.
- 17 Wittgenstein uses *darstellen* and *abbilden* when he talks about presentational form (2.173) and pictorial form (2.181). These are not two different types of form, but two ways of describing form relative to whether we are talking about what a proposition presents or what it depicts.
- 18 Writing about mirrors, Virgil C. Aldrich says, 'the thing in the role of appearing in the mirror is to be compared with the thing itself, which involves looking in two directions, now one, now the other—at the same thing', 'Mirrors, Pictures, Words, Perceptions' in *Philosophy* Vol. 55, No. 211 (1980): 42.
- 19 See 4.014.
- 20 I discuss the role of clarity in his later work elsewhere: Dawn M. Phillips, 'Clear as Mud', *The Journal of Philosophical Research* 31 (2006): 277–294.
- 21 See 'Complete Analysis and Clarificatory Analysis' for an argument on this point.
- 22 See 3.032.
- 23 I presented early versions of this essay to the British Wittgenstein Society Conference 'Wittgenstein and Æsthetics' at the University of Southampton and the 33rd International Wittgenstein Symposium '*Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*' at Kirchberg. I am grateful for feedback from the audience and organisers and would also like to thank Roger White and Stig Børsen Hansen for helpful comments on draft sections.

