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BARE PARTICULARS,
NAMES, AND ELEMENTARY PROPOSITIONS

Perusing the history of philosophy, one can hardly overlook one fact: key propositions in pieces of philosophical explanation rise and fall in plausibility. Thus we have fashions in philosophy. And certain philosophers, on noting this – especially Pragmatists and those who have been influenced by the writings of cultural anthropologists – have proposed that philosophical thought is a function of the social context. They have not so willingly faced up to the difficulties in making a case for this view which is not ridiculous or not at odds with the observation which led to that thesis. Be that as it may, I am not concerned to enter the dispute at this time. I simply wish to allow the fact of the fashionable.

But while admitting the fact, resulting in a period being known as an age of realism, idealism, etc., we must also allow changes which are mere changes in *emphasis*. Though the present period is one of analysis, emphasis has changed from the attempt to discover 'correct logical notation', the main burden of the *Tractatus*, to analysis of daily expression, the main element in *Philosophical Investigations*. All those who do not take the *extreme* position that there is only the logic of usage admit that there were problems faced in the *Tractatus* which have a bearing upon problems to which the *Investigations* was directed. Believing this, it is a source of satisfaction to note that in the near past several interesting papers have appeared examining this early work of Wittgenstein.[1]

I propose to show certain incompatibilities between elementary propositions and the determination of even the probable truth of any proposition. The basic weakness is revealed on an examination of bare particulars and names.

First for the pedestrian but required review of what Wittgenstein says about elementary propositions. An elementary proposition is an atom of sense. All non-elementary propositions are compounds of elementary

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[1] Of special interest is Irving Copi, 'Objects, Properties, and Relations in the Tractatus' *Mind*, April, 1958, and replies to this, direct and indirect.

propositions. After arguing that there are elementary propositions, Wittgenstein adds, 'The possibility of propositions is based upon the principle of the representation of objects by signs. My fundamental thought is that the "logical constants" do not represent. That the logic of facts cannot be represented.'[1] (4.0312) Now, having given reason for believing that extensionality holds throughout, if complex propositions are a result of successive truth operations on elementary propositions, then every complex proposition is a connection of meanings found in the elementary propositions.

Wittgenstein cannot further characterize elementary propositions without turning to consider the nature of facts. Since, on his own theory, no proposition can express what the relation is between itself and the fact or facts it is supposed to represent, everything he says about facts is by way of an ellipsis which once grasped must be put aside as nonsense. This is admittedly a defect but, as it is not relevant to my thesis, I shall not examine it here. The reason Wittgenstein is forced to say so much about facts is that the apparent form of a given proposition does not show that it is elementary. The form of the proposition will depend upon the nature of the constituents in the fact which the elementary proposition represents.

Let us begin with the term 'fact'. Commonly one says that a fact is whatever is the case, and believes that there is something by virtue of which any given true proposition is true. By 'fact' Wittgenstein means the non-linguistic complex because of which one proposition is true and another false. To this extent he keeps to what common sense understands by the term, but it has further technical meaning which can best be explicated by considering the non-linguistic complexes and elementary propositions.

We are told that elementary propositions are pictures of facts. Any elementary proposition is distinguishable from an object name in that the elementary proposition is a complex of names. Each name in the complex is seen as naming some object in the fact, and in so functioning the word has a meaning. To say that a word has meaning is not to say there is a third sort of entity called meaning or interpreter. Rather, it is to say that as a *name* it indicates an object in the fact. He writes, 'To the objects

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[1] All references to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* are to the Kegan-Paul, Harcourt Brace ed. 1933.

correspond in the picture the elements of the picture.' (2.13) There is no representation as a relation between fact and elementary proposition. The representation is in the elementary proposition, in the complex of names. However, names cannot occur outside elementary propositions. As he writes 'Only the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning.' (3.3) Similarly we are told that objects cannot occur outside facts. 'It is essential to a thing that it can be a constituent part of an atomic fact.' (2.011) But, further, though an object occurring in the fact is independent of that fact, in the sense that the same object occurs simultaneously in many other facts, still the object is dependent on the set of these facts. The same is true of a name. It may occur in different statements yet have no significance outside all of them.

An elementary proposition is then at least a sequence of names. But this is not sufficient, for there are many sequences of names which are not elementary propositions. There are two other requirements. Namely, (a) *multiplicity*, and (b) *order*. Wittgenstein says, 'In the proposition there must be exactly as many things distinguishable as there are in the state of affairs which it represents. They must both possess the same logical (mathematical) multiplicity...' (4.04) Thus much on multiplicity. About order Wittgenstein writes, 'In the atomic fact objects hang one in another, like the members of a chain.' (2.03) Since objects are the distinguishable elements of the fact and since relations in the fact depend on objects in that fact, we are not to understand that the hanging together of two or more objects is a further object in the fact. So we do not interpret this expression of Wittgenstein in such a way as to allow for an infinite regress of relations and thus come under the criticism of Bradley. Instead, we interpret Wittgenstein to mean that *how* objects hang together is through internal properties of the objects in the fact. Let us take the fact of Brutus killing Caesar. The fact has the structure it has by being composed of the collection of objects which constitute it. On the side of language we say that the proposition, Brutus kills Caesar, is a picture of this fact by having something identical with the structure of the fact. This point of identity is the form. The form shows itself and by it we understand how the fact which it represents is structured. This view has sometimes been taken to mean that the proposition has some quality or property in common with the fact it represents. This is, I believe, incorrect. All that is required is the adoption of rules by which the structure

of the fact is introduced in the language. 'In that fact *that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the symphony out of the score*, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct the symphony from the line of a gramaphone record and from this – by means of the first rule – construct the score, *herein lies the internal similarity between those things which at first sight seem to be entirely different*. And the rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of the musical score. It is the rule of translation of this language into the language of the gramaphone record.' (4.0141) (Italics mine).

In brief summary before continuing, the elementary proposition represents facts. A given elementary proposition represents a fact by picturing. To be a picture of a fact, the elementary proposition must have something identical with the fact it pictures. What it has in common is the form. By the form the proposition shows how the objects hang together in the fact. 'This picture can represent every reality whose form it has.' (2.171) A given proposition, having a specifiable form, may represent a large number of quite different facts. Indeed the form of a given proposition represents all facts whose structure is shown by the form of the proposition in question. If these facts, all of a specifiable structure, are different, they are different solely in the different objects that enter them. A true proposition represents that fact whose objects are named by the proposition and whose structure is shown by the form of that proposition. Since propositions express by their form, false propositions have a sense. (See 2.22).

Now for the important matter of verification. We may infer from false propositions. Sense is independent of truth. 'The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the *possibilities* of the existence and the non-existence of the atomic facts' (4.2) (Italics mine). Thus whether a proposition has sense depends on whether it is possible that *that* proposition represents a fact or state of affairs.

Two senses of 'possible' must be distinguished. The first is based on the patterns of truth values. In truth table rendering we have complex propositions with a mixed pattern of values, one which is true in all circumstances, and a third false in all circumstances. 'The truth of tautology is certain, of propositions possible, of contradiction impossible. (Certain, possible, impossible: here we have an indication of that gradation which we need in the theory of probability.)' (4.464). This is not the sense of

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possible used in the determination that a given proposition has sense. Wittgenstein makes this clear by pointing out that logic cannot tell us whether a proposition has sense. It can not tell us that this one has a sense, another does not. For logic, the matter has already been judged. The meaning of 'possible' which interests us here must be gathered from the way Wittgenstein uses the term when introducing the subject of facts and elementary propositions. After stating that a fact is a specific collection of objects, he adds *that if an object occurs in a fact the possibility of it occurring in that fact lies in the object.* (See 2.012). There are two observations to be made. One is trivial, the other will demand further attention. First, I say, for example, that if the object before me is a blotter, then it is possible there are blotters. In short, if I have a true existence statement about an object, then it is possible there is such an object. This is the perfectly trivial part, found in Wittgenstein's assertion that if an object occurs in a fact, the possibility of it occurring in that fact lies in the object. Wittgenstein wants to say more than this. He wants to say that every possibility lies in the object; that is to say that some given object '*O*' enters into a perfectly determinate number of facts. 'If I know an object then I know all the possibilities of its occurrence in atomic facts... A new possibility cannot subsequently be found.' (2.0123). Since a fact contains nothing more than its objects – which constitute the fact by hanging together in a determinate way – Berkeley's God needs know only all the objects to know all the atomic facts. We humans judge possibilities by attempting to determine whether a given object can combine with other objects to produce what is pictured by the proposition. If it can, then the elementary proposition whose names name the objects and whose form shows the connexity has a sense.

One last point of interpretation. Wittgenstein sometimes writes as though any object in a fact is on all fours with every other object in the fact, and, on the side of elementary propositions, all names are of equal status. 'The elementary proposition consists of names. It is a connection, a concatenation, of names.' (4.22). At *other* times he would seem to have it that there are different sorts of facts which on the linguistic side would make the distinction between names and property terms.

'Every part of a proposition which characterizes its sense, I call an expression (a symbol).... Expressions are everything – essential for the

sense of the proposition – that propositions can have in common with one another... An expression presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions... It is therefore represented by the general form of the propositions which it characterizes. And in this form the expression is *constant* and everything else *variable*.' (3.31, 3.311 & 3.312).

The two possibilities are offered, for while I don't see that either interpretation saves Wittgenstein from the objections I am about to offer, it is just possible that the view that a property is not a property of an object but of *complexes* of objects *can* meet my objections.

Now let us take an example of what seems to be an elementary proposition. I glance to my left and note something next to something else. I write, *a* is next to *b*, where *a* and *b* are names. I turn to my right and note that something is next to something else and write, *c* is next to something *d*. These have the common form *A(x, y)*. We cannot judge whether this has sense, for it lacks names. The names *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* are absent and no names are supplied in their stead. We can judge the sense of *A(a, b)* and we can judge the sense of *A(c, d)*. It is not really significant to ask whether each of these has a sense; each was constructed for the fact *of which* it is a picture. We might *write A(e, f)* where *e* and *f* are name signs. But since they name nothing, we cannot judge the sense of *A(e, f)*. Rather, it does not have a sense, at least it does not until 'e' and 'f' are used as names. But then this shows that we cannot consider a 'new' elementary proposition and pass judgment on whether it has a sense. Wittgenstein was concerned to point out that two elementary propositions could not be contradictories. Consider a point in space and the claim that the point is red and that it is blue. For Wittgenstein, this is impossible. 'For two colors, e.g. to be at one place in the visual field, is impossible, logically impossible, for it is excluded by the logical structure of color... ...The assertion that a point in the visual field has two different colors at the same time is a contradiction.' (6.3751). Some philosophers have denied that this is impossible; others have used this assertion in the *Tractatus* for other problems, but it is clear to me that if such propositions are impossible, they are so for the naming difficulty which the person making the two propositions faces. Following this it seems clear that while elementary propositions can be false, they are false by intention, e.g.,

an object which I name *a* is claimed to be next to some other object named *b* which I know to be on an opposite wall in the room. Knowing this I wilfully assert, *a* is next to *b*. Or, elementary propositions might be false due to a defective recall of what my names named. But there are no interesting elementary propositions which could be false, and the difficulty does not arise from the solipsism in the *Tractatus*. We might allow solipsism as not being a defect at all, and still assert that there are no interesting false elementary propositions. And since the difficulty does not evaporate with solipsism, we are not aided by the later distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. The difficulty is found in the claim that names, according to Wittgenstein, are names of bare particulars and *bare particulars do not have a history*. If no interesting elementary proposition can be false, none can be verified. If a proposition can be verified, it can not be an elementary proposition.

Let us suppose we have a proposition whose names name objects in which we can see the possibility of their entering the putative fact pictured by the proposition. Such might be, Brutus kills Caesar. But this would deny Wittgenstein's doctrine that names do not picture anything and that they name bare particulars. So, Brutus kills Caesar, is not an elementary proposition. Taken from a slightly different vantage point, an elementary proposition implies no other proposition. A given elementary proposition *p* can occur in vacuous implications such as $p \supset p$, but no others. If an elementary proposition implied another proposition, it would not be elementary, but a logical construct, a truth function compound of other propositions. This would be the case even if we used a not further analysable predicate such as, next to, and used names of complex entities or continuents to construct a proposition, as for example, John is next to Mary. The objects named by 'John' and 'Mary' have a history; they cannot name bare particulars.

In brief summary, not only is Wittgenstein's method for determining whether an elementary proposition has sense at odds with the nature of these propositions, but it is difficult to see how an elementary proposition can be both false and determined to be false. While the matter of verification as found in the *Tractatus* might be taken to have only historic interest – since later and more adequate views on the subject give attention to the nature of the admitted predicates (as with Acquaintance) [1],

[1] Here the reader is referred to the works of Prof. Gustav Bergmann.

and not instances and quantifiers – the subject of the relation of the simplest unit of assertion to what is asserted does not so obviously have the benefit of later research. So I explain and defend my present concern and interest in what I understand Wittgenstein has offered us in this area. I am not convinced an interpretation of what he has written on elementary propositions which overcomes my objections cannot be found. But I have not discovered such an interpretation, and fail to see how one can be found.

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