

Wittgenstein's Tractatus as a work on initiation into silence

Paulo Roberto Margutti Pinto

Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy and Theology, Brazil

ABSTRACT:

The paper attempts to show that Wittgenstein's Tractatus may be interpreted as a work on initiation into silent mystical contemplation, by means of a process involving two ladders. The first one is the logical ladder which is represented by the critique of language. The climbing of such ladder leads to silent conceptual clarification with respect to language's essential incapacity to say what can only be shown. The second one is the ethical ladder which is represented by Wittgenstein's enlisting as a volunteer in the Austrian army and putting his life at a great risk. The climbing of such ladder leads to the mystical contemplation of the world's essence. It will be argued that both ladders involve processes of death and rebirth which complement each other in a complex initiation ritual.

I. Introduction

The word *initiation* stems from the Latin *initiatione* and includes, among its several senses, the idea of *an introduction to the knowledge of mysterious or unknown things*, or the idea of *a preparatory ritual to introduce someone into the mysteries of a religion or a doctrine*. In general, the initiation ritual involves two complementary processes. The first one is the *death* of the initiated, which stops being what she was by means of a traumatic experience; the second one is the *rebirth* of the initiated, which becomes different and better by means of the same traumatic experience. In the present text, I shall argue that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* may be interpreted as a complex work on initiation, involving both

the experiences of death and rebirth within the two complementary domains of logic and ethics. This means that the appropriate understanding of the work is not exhausted by merely reading it: a radical change of attitude with respect to the world is also required.

In order to reach my goal, I shall take five steps. Firstly, I shall expound the tractarian underlying world view through the analysis of its connections with certain predominant philosophical ideas at the time, linked to mysticism and analysis of language, which seem to have greatly influenced the young Wittgenstein. Secondly, I shall show the main results of the Tractarian philosophy concerning the logical analysis of language. Thirdly, I shall expound the main results of the Tractarian philosophy concerning ethics. Fourthly, I shall reveal how can logic and ethics be articulated in order to yield an initiation experience. Fifthly and finally, I shall expound the main conclusions which may be extracted from the path followed.

The present paper was originally published in Spanish, as a book chapter.¹ After that it has been translated into Portuguese and published in the review *Filosofia*, from Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos).² It has been also published as a chapter of the book *Wittgenstein no Brasil*.³ It is now translated into English, with minor alterations. The text constitutes simultaneously a synthesis and a small expansion of the main results presented in my book *Iniciação ao Silêncio (Initiation into Silence)*, which constitutes an analysis of the *Tractatus* as an argumentative piece and was published in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1998, by Loyola Publishers.⁴ Taking into consideration that my main objective is to divulge my interpretation of the *Tractatus* to a larger public, I shall privilege here the presentation of the main results of my analysis, leaving their detailed justification to the relevant passages in my book.

¹ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. El Tractatus de Wittgenstein como obra de iniciación al silencio. In: Flórez, A., Holguin, M., Meléndez, R. *Del Espejo a las Herramientas. Ensayos sobre el Pensamiento de Wittgenstein*. Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, Un. Nacional de Colombia, Pontifical Un. Javeriana, 2003, p. 15-36.

² MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. O Tractatus de Wittgenstein como obra de iniciação. *Filosofia Unisinos*, vol. 5, nº 8, 2004, p. 81-104.

³ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. O Tractatus de Wittgenstein como obra de iniciação. In: Dal'Agnol, D. (Org.). *Wittgenstein no Brasil*. São Paulo: Escuta, 2008, p. 289-314.

⁴ See Margutti Pinto, P. R. *Iniciação ao Silêncio. Análise do Tractatus de Wittgenstein*. S. Paulo: Loyolla, 1998.

II. The Tractatus' underlying world view

Although notoriously difficult, the *Tractatus* may be better understood on the basis of a reconstruction of its intellectual atmosphere and its motivating problem. This is so for two main reasons. Firstly, the consideration both of the philosophical ideas of certain authors belonging mostly to the XIXth century's second half and of some aspects which characterize the young Wittgenstein's life allows the construction of a reasonable conjecture about the world view which constitutes the background to the Tractarian philosophy. Secondly, the conjecture not only makes the aphorisms of the *Tractatus* more intelligible, but also allows a perspective of the whole matter which is greatly consistent with the philosophy expressed in the work and with the argumentative strategies used in it.

The authors whose ideas constitute the intellectual atmosphere of the *Tractatus* may be gathered up into three groups. The first of them, formed by James, Tolstoi, Schopenhauer and Weininger, characterizes the ethical-metaphysical tendency, in which mysticism is emphasized as the most significant human experience. These Authors' ideas converge towards assuming the existence of the mystical experience, which consists in the blissful contemplation of a higher reality that can only be attained through an inner revolution. In Weininger, this revolution appears as demand stemming from within, as a sort of categorical imperative to be obeyed by anyone who wants to live as an authentic human being.⁵

The second group is formed by Hertz, Boltzmann, Frege and Russell, which characterize the logical-scientific tendency. All these thinkers believe that most of the scientific and philosophical problems may only be solved by logical analysis of language. The latter allows pointing out the false problems generated by the illegitimate uses of linguistic

⁵ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Iniciação ao Silêncio*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1998, p. 53-80. See too: JAMES, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. Ed. with an introduction by M E. Marty. N. York: Penguin Books, 1985; SCHOPENHAUER, A. *O Mundo como Vontade e Representação*. Porto: Rés-Editora, no date; TOLSTOI, L. N. *Abregé de l'Evangile*. Texte présenté, établi, traduit et confronté avec l'Édition synodale et la Bible de Jérusalem para N. Weisbein. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1969; WEININGER, O. *Sex and Character*. Authorised Translation from the sixth

signs. All Authors of this group share the belief that scientific language is capable of describing the world in a logical way.⁶

The third group is formed by only one thinker, Mauthner, and is characterized by the radical perspective of the critique of language. Such a critique is understood as a scrupulous observation of language by means of language itself. Mauthner's most important claim is that reality is always beyond linguistic expression. Thus, language will never succeed in reaching reality, no matter how hard we may struggle with words. From this standpoint, the mystical experience is indescribable and science of nature is impossible. Mauthner defends an extreme form of skepticism, according to which we should stop asking questions and searching for answers. The critique of language involves an attitude simultaneously suicide and redeemer that leads towards the only available solution in philosophy: total silence.⁷

Now I think some ideas stemming from the above mentioned Authors have been combined into the world view which underlies the Tractarian philosophy. In other words, I find reasonable to suppose that Wittgenstein already had some important philosophical convictions by the time immediately preceding the composition of the *Tractatus* and that such convictions find their origins in some of the ideas defended by the Authors belonging to the three above groups. From this point of view, the *Notebooks* and the *Secret Diaries* provide very good indications regarding Wittgenstein's convictions. From the ethical-metaphysical

German Edition. London: W. Heinemann; N. York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.

⁶ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 81-107. See too BOLTZMANN, L. *Escritos de Mecánica y Termodinámica*. Ed. de F. J. O. Ordóñez Rodríguez. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986. FREGE, G. *Begriffsschrift und andere Aufsätze, mit E. Husserls und H. Scholz' Anmerkungen*. Herausgegeben von Ignacio Angelelli. Dritte Auflage. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buch-gesellschaft, 1977. FREGE, G. *Os Fundamentos da Aritmética*. In: Peirce, C. S. (1980). *Escritos Coligidos*. Seleção e trad. de A. M. de Oliveira. Gottlob Frege. Sobre a Justificação Científica de uma Conceitografia. Os Fundamentos da Aritmética. Seleção e trad. de L. H. L. dos Santos, 2 ed. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1980. Col. Os Pensadores. FREGE, G. *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of G. Frege*. Edited by Geach, P. & Black, M. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1966. FREGE, G. *Lógica e Filosofia da Linguagem*. Seleção, introdução, tradução e notas de P. Alcoforado. S. Paulo: Cultrix/EDUSP, 1978. HERTZ, H. *The Principles of Mechanics Presented in a New Form*. Preface by W. von Helmholtz. Transl. by D. E. Jones & J. T. Walley. Introduction by R. S. Cohen. New York: Dover Publications, 1956. RUSSELL, B. "On Denoting", in Marsh, R. M. (ed.) *Logic and Knowledge, Essays 1901-50*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1956, p. 39-56. RUSSELL, B. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. 11th impression. London: Allen & Unwin, 1963. RUSSELL, B. *Mysticism and Logic*. 4th impression. London: Allen & Unwin, 1976.

⁷ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 107-120. See too MAUTHNER, F. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*. Stuttgart and Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger. Zweite Auflage, 1912. Zweiter Band. Zweite Auflage, 1913. Dritter Band. Dritte Auflage., 1921. Erster Band. For a brief of this paradoxically prolix work, see MAUTHNER, F. *Contribuciones a una crítica del lenguaje*. Trad. de J. M. Villa. Mexico: Juan Pablos Editor S. A., 1976.

point of view, we may see in these works that he already believed in the Tolstoian Christianity, according to which the meaning of life lies in the blissful contemplation of the eternal present, reached by means of a victory of spirit over flesh. We may also see that this Christianity was understood in a Schopenhauerian perspective, in which the *spirit* corresponds to the *transcendental subject*, located in a domain outside space and time, and the *flesh* corresponds to the *empirical subject*, a mere phenomenon belonging to space and time. The transcendental subject and the phenomenal world are both transcendently complementary manifestations of the same principle of the whole reality, viz., the will. Such a perspective was complemented by a rigid Weiningerian-type ethics, involving one's inner duty of being authentic with oneself in order to find the meaning of life.

Although Wittgenstein believed in these ideas in the period that immediately precedes his writing of the *Tractatus*, the Tolstoian experience of contemplating the eternal present which would turn him into a man in the full sense of the word was still missing in his life. This fact would fill him with some kind of existential anguish, since his rigid moral convictions relentlessly required him to discover the meaning of life or else to commit suicide. Probably, this whole situation would strongly impel him towards creating in his own life the favorable circumstances for experiencing the inner revolution.⁸

From the logical-scientific point of view, everything indicates that Wittgenstein believed in the possibility of a scientific description of the world by means of a model theory which would be similar to Hertz's and Boltzmann's. Such a theory might be complemented by the techniques of logical analysis created by Frege and Russell. But this would generate a conflict with Mauthner, for whom language is essentially unable to describe reality, demanding that we should take refuge in mystical silence. On the one hand, Mauthner should have some reason, since the Authors linked to the ethical-metaphysical concerns share the disbelief in the possibility of appropriately describing the mystical experience. On the other hand, Mauthner should be wrong at some point, since the scientific description of the world through logically articulated models seems to constitute a real possibility. If Mauthner was

⁸ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 39-52; 121-40.

completely right, then metaphysics and science could not exist. If, however, the Authors belonging to the logical-scientific tendency were right, then language could still say something meaningful. It was necessary to establish, in a critical manner and from within language itself, what can and what cannot be said. It seems that Wittgenstein felt the need of a new delimitation, which should be done by means of a critique of language still more radical than Mauthner's. If we add to this problem Wittgenstein's ethical concerns, we may suppose that his challenge was bigger. He had to find out a way of framing the logical analysis in his ethical project: in a letter to Russell in the period, he declares that for one to become a logician one has first to become a complete man.⁹

In order to solve his intense existential drama, Wittgenstein seems to have used not only one, but *two* ladders in Mauthnerian sense. We know that one of Wittgenstein's problems was to establish the limits of the sayable by means of the suicidal process of the critique of language. As it will be seen later, such a critique appeals to elements from model theory and mathematical logic for trying to lay down the transcendental conditions of possibility of language. This is the well known "logical ladder", which allows to fix the necessary conditions of the intrinsic limits of the sayable. This notwithstanding, another Wittgensteinian problem – and maybe the most important one – was to obtain the favorable conditions to the blissful contemplation of the eternal present. In a surprising parallel with respect to the critique of language, the solution for such an ethical problem was obtained by means of the suicidal manoeuvre of enlisting as a volunteer in the Austrian army. In this case, the war's extreme circumstances may very well correspond to an "ethical ladder", which prepared the way towards the desired mystical experience. Thus, it seems that an "ethical ladder" may be added to the already known "logical ladder". And the final result of the combination of both ladders is the desired conciliation of the logical research with the ethical convictions, through a peculiar experience on initiation. As we shall be seeing in the next sections, Wittgenstein succeeded in elaborating the Tractarian philosophy by means of the manoeuvre of uniting philosophy and life in a most radical way, in which a extremely painful starting point creates

⁹ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 121-40.

the conditions for a silent clarification.

III – The logical ladder and the critique of language

As I suggested earlier, Wittgenstein takes his inspiration from Mauthner in order to make a radical critique of language. Nevertheless, as opposed to Mauthner, who merely tries to describe language as the subject matter of his critique, Wittgenstein searches for the transcendental conditions of possibility of language, on the basis of the following principles. First, all linguistic expressions are formed from descriptive contents which are used to make statements, give orders, ask questions, express emotions, and so on. Consider, for example, phrases such as *the door is open*, *let the door open*, *the door is open!* and *is the door open?* All of them have in common the same descriptive content, which may be expressed as *the circumstance that the door is open*. Such a content is modalized into a statement, or an order, or a question, and so on. Second, the declarative proposition has a privileged *status* with respect to all the remaining linguistic expressions, since it is bipolar and this constitutes a safe guarantee for the existence of an authentic descriptive content. Consider for example, the proposition *the door is open*. It is bipolar, because it may be true or false, and this is a secure sign that it has an authentic descriptive content which may be used in commands, questions, and so on. Now the “proposition” *the circle is round* is not bipolar, because it is always true and cannot be false. This is a sign that it has not an authentic descriptive content. Third, given the privileged *status* of the declarative proposition, the task of establishing the transcendental conditions of possibility of the various linguistic expressions is reduced to the task of establishing the transcendental conditions of possibility of the former.¹⁰

The main result of the Tractarian critique of language is the transcendental postulate according to which the sense of a complex declarative proposition is determined because it may be analyzed into logical combinations of atomic propositions which are, in turn, logical combinations of simple signs. This is so because there must be only one logical analysis of the

¹⁰ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 143-8.

proposition and such analysis must end at some place. The simple signs do not “exist” as linguistic facts, but “subsist” as conditions of possibility or transcendental coordinates for the linguistic facts. For this reason, we shall never have direct access to the form of simple signs or to the form of their combinations – atomic propositions – in the factual world. Even so, the existence of such signs is a necessary condition for the determinability of sense of the proposition. The simple signs are indivisible and we may say that, taken together, they constitute the “substance” of language, the permanent and immutable basis from which the diversity of the propositions describing the worldly situations is constructed.¹¹

It seems that Wittgenstein appealed to Hertz’s and Boltzmann’s model theory in order to explain the descriptive power of the atomic proposition, revealing the way an articulation of simple signs may be put into correspondence, by means of a projective relationship, with the transcendently necessary references of such signs, that is to say, with the simple objects of which the articulation constitutes an atomic fact. According to this view, the atomic proposition has a sense because it is a – linguistic – fact which is isomorphically projected against another – non-linguistic – fact. This would explain why an authentic proposition is essentially bipolar: as a projection, its truth or falsity may only be established by comparison with the corresponding fact. We cannot, therefore, to determine *a priori* the truth-value of a proposition.¹²

As applied to the world, the critique of language yields what may be called *transcendental atomism*. The principle in which the *Tractatus* is based in order to reach such an atomism is the idea that, since language is capable of describing the world, there must be a strict parallelism between language and world. On the basis of this principle, Wittgenstein establishes that each simple sign must necessarily designate one and only one simple object. The latter must also be indivisible and, associated to the remaining simple objects, constitutes the substance of the world, the immutable and permanent basis upon which the diversity of atomic facts or states of affairs is constructed. In parallel with simple signs, we may affirm

¹¹ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 148-74.

¹² MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 148-74.

that the simple objects do not “exist” as worldly facts, but ”subsist” as conditions of possibility or transcendental coordinates of worldly facts. As part of the substance of the world, each simple object must have a logical form such that all its possible combinations with other simple objects are *a priori* established. If we could know all the simple objects which constitute the substance of the world, we would be able to know at the same time all their possible combinations. These claims are compatible with the idea that the simple objects constitute a transcendental system of coordinates which underlies the world, providing it with a logical foundation.¹³

The combinations of simple objects or states of affairs correspond to the minimal units we can reach through analysis of the world. In this sense, the states of affairs are indivisible and independent facts. The set formed by all possible states of affairs – existent or non-existent – constitutes reality. Subsets of reality constitute situations. The world is the subset of reality which is formed by existing states of affairs. In analogy with complex propositions, the worldly situations are complex facts which may be reduced to combinations of atomic facts.¹⁴

The parallelism between language and world allows the formulation of a series of symmetrical definitions: *language* is the totality of possible propositions, whereas *reality* is the totality of possible states of affairs; *natural science* is the totality of true propositions, whereas the *world* is the totality of existing states of affairs. The following symmetrical results are also allowed: the complex proposition is reduced to a logical articulation of atomic propositions, whereas the complex fact is reduced to a logical articulation of atomic facts; the atomic propositions is reduced to the simple signs which are its constitutive elements, whereas the atomic fact is reduced to the simple objects which are its constitutive elements; the logical form of language and science is *a priori* entailed by the logical form of simple signs, whereas the logical form of reality and the world is *a priori* entailed by the logical form of simple objects; the simple signs form the “substance” of language, whereas the simple objects form the substance of the world. The symmetry between language and reality is possible because

¹³ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 175-90.

¹⁴ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 175-90.

both lie within a *logical space* which transcendently organizes them. In this way, although we may have no direct access to atomic propositions and their respective simple signs, or to atomic facts and their respective simple objects, all of them constitute transcendental conditions of possibility of language and reality.¹⁵

If we accept the postulate concerning transcendental atomism, we shall see that natural language is logically in order. It may be put into correspondence with the language of atomic propositions e for this reason has the same structure as reality. Now it is precisely such a structural similarity that allows the description of the facts of the world. This leads to infer that logic functions as the *essence* of the world. It is the “common cement” which organizes language and reality. Logic functions as a transcendently structuring law for language and reality in two levels. At the level of atomic facts, the logical form is the condition of possibility for the proposition’s ability to portrait isomorphically the corresponding fact. The simple objects, which constitute the substance of the world, as well as the simple signs, which constitute the “substance” of language, are within the above mentioned logical space that determines all their possible combinations. At the level of the logical combinations of atomic propositions among themselves and of atomic facts among themselves, logic is the condition of possibility for the construction of the corresponding complex propositions and complex facts. In the two cases, the possibilities for the combinations are granted by bipolarity: the atomic fact may exist or not; the atomic proposition may be true or false. For example, in the case of atomic propositions, logic determines *a priori* all the possible combinations of their truth-values and all the truth-functions which may be constructed on the basis of such combinations. In this sense, the construction of the complex propositions of our language is made in a purely logical way. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the complex facts of the world.¹⁶

This allows establishing the following aspects concerning the very nature of logic. First, there are no privileged logical propositions. As a matter of fact, if logic transcendently

¹⁵ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 176-8.

¹⁶ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 191-202.

organizes language and world in the manner above described, all logical propositions have the same *status* and all similarly show the essence of the world. Second, logical constants designate nothing. They only indicate logical operations to be effectuated with already meaningful propositions, which are the only ones capable of describing facts of the world on the basis of the transcendental postulate concerning atomic propositions and simple signs. Third, there is only logical necessity. The atomic propositions and the atomic facts they describe are all independent among themselves. This means that they do not entertain any kind of relationship. Thus, the only way to relate them is through logic, to the extent that the later is capable of *a priori* determining all possible combinations of atomic facts among themselves and of atomic propositions among themselves.¹⁷ In this sense, logic is the essence of the world.

The above properties allow the elaboration of a generative process for any complex proposition, on the basis of logical operations effectuated with a subset of atomic propositions. Wittgenstein calls such a process *the general form of the proposition*, and, in order to explain its nature, appeals to Sheffer's discovery that all possible combinations of propositions may be made through the incompatibility operator, $p \mid q$, which may also be expressed by $\sim p \ \& \ \sim q$. As for propositions with quantifiers, they are constructed, at first, independently from truth-value tables, by means of logical prototypes. Next, there is a divide. If the generality of the proposition is necessary, then the proposition has a purely logical nature and the appeal to truth-value tables will always yield the value *true*. It may describe finite as well as infinite domains. In other words, the generalized proposition is a tautology which shows certain aspect of the world's essence, such as, for example, $(x)(Fx \Rightarrow Fx)$. If the generality of the proposition is accidental, then the proposition is reduced to a logical combination of atomic propositions and the appeal to truth-value tables will yield sometimes the value *true* and sometimes the value *false*. In this case, the generalized proposition is a particular case of combinations of atomic propositions, such as, for example, $(x)(Fx \Rightarrow Gx)$, which may be

¹⁷ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 202-206.

explained by the process involving the general form of the proposition.¹⁸

Another important point to be made is the following: if logic is the essence of the world then language, reality and logical space possess the same limits. *Reality* in the technical sense is the existence or non existence of states of affairs, that is to say, it is the domain formed by all possible states of affairs. *Language*, in turn, describes reality and constitutes the domain of all possible descriptions of the states of affairs which constitute reality. Given that both domains are transcendently structured by logic, we may identify their limits with the limits of logical space, which constitutes the domain involving everything that is logically possible. Thus, the three terms mentioned ultimately refer to different aspects of the same domain: *reality* emphasizes that which is described by language; *language* emphasizes that which describes reality; *logical space* emphasizes the transcendental condition of possibility of that which is described (reality) and of that which describes (language).¹⁹

At this point, an important question may be raised: what is the *status* of the propositions belonging to the critique of language, which intends to establish the transcendental conditions of possibility of saying by appealing to the conception of atomic propositions which model atomic facts on the basis of a projective correspondence among simple signs and simple objects? According to my interpretation, the tractarian critique of language intends to be such a radical approach as the Mauthnerian one. In this sense, it has to correspond to a ladder in which every step is destroyed when the next one is reached. In the end of such a radical process, all the ladder will be destroyed, so that the things may be seen in the correct way. In this way, the critique of language will ultimately destroy itself. How this is possible will be explained in the last section.

¹⁸ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 206-17.

¹⁹ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 217-20.

IV - The ethical ladder and mysticism

In order to make explicit the main aspects of the ethical ladder as proposed by my interpretation, I shall now present more details concerning the world view which constitutes the basic assumption of the tractarian philosophy. Initially, it is relevant to remember that, in the *Notebooks 1914-16*, Wittgenstein assumes the existence of what he calls *two godheads*: the world and the independent I. The latter is identified with the *willing subject*, the *Will*, which comes "from outside". The Will functions as a limit to the world, simultaneously presupposing its existence and giving it a sense. The world, in turn, is already given and does not depend upon the Will. It constitutes a basis for the Will, giving it an object. Everything indicates that the *independent I* or *Will* corresponds to something like the schopenhauerian *transcendental subject*, of which the relationship with the world is compared to the relationship between the eye and the visual field.²⁰ In this perspective, in the same way as the eye is *outside* the visual field, the transcendental – or metaphysical – subject is *outside* the world. By trying to make a connection with Tolstoian christianism, I suggest that the transcendental subject corresponds to *spirit*. As such, the transcendental subject is capable of contemplating the world's essence (*quid*), uncovering the *value* which is hidden behind the facts. The contemplation involved yields the feeling of being *absolutely safe*.²¹ The world, in turn, corresponds to *flesh*, in a Tolstoian sense. The world is made only of facts, which tell us *how* things are. The world is the domain of individual will, which leads to *Sorge*, in a Goethian sense. It is reasonable to suppose that the *quid's* contemplation by the transcendental subject, understood as the contemplation of the eternal present, involves an experience of identification of the world with the independent I.²²

²⁰ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Notebooks (1914-16)*. Ed. by von Wright, G. E. & Anscombe, G. E. M. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961, p. 73-4, 79, 84, 87.

²¹ Such a feeling is explicited in the Lecture on Ethics, delivered in 1929. See Wittgenstein, L. A Lecture on Ethics, *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1930): 3-26.

²² Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Notebooks (1914-16)*. Ed. by von Wright, G. E. 16:27 PM Anscombe, G. E. M. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961, p. 77, 83.

The above perspective seems to persist in the Tractarian philosophy, since there is no reasonable motive to suppose that Wittgenstein had changed his mind with respect to such important beliefs in the short period extending from the *Notebooks* and the *Secret Diaries* to the *Tractatus*. In this way, the identification between solipsism and realism, in aphorism 5.64, for instance, echoes the Schopenhauerian identification between transcendental idealism and empirical realism, on the basis of the relationship between the transcendental subject and the world. Furthermore, all Tractarian references concerning the mystical reveal themselves compatible with the Tolstoian transcendentalized christianism. Thus, in 6.45, the *mystical* is defined as the *feeling of the world as a limited whole*, involving the contemplation of the world *sub specie aeterni*. The mystical is not *how* the world is, but *that* the world is. The solution of the enigma of life lies within an experience which is "outside" space and time.²³ Besides, ethics and logic are both characterized as *transcendental*.²⁴ It is reasonable to assume that this is so because both belong to the domain of the transcendental subject, which lies in the limit of the world and therefore is "outside" the world. Logic structures the world as a limited whole within logical space and ethics is connected with the "triggering" of the transcendental subject in order to contemplate the world's essence. One may assume that logic and ethics are somehow mixed in the mystical feeling: logic constitutes the essence of the world as a manifestation of the Will in a Schopenhauerian sense, and ethics puts into action the transcendental subject as another manifestation of the same Will. And the resulting mystical experience involves a feeling of absolute safety which overcomes any fear with respect to mundane facts such as pain, suffering, or death.

The above world view, which is compatible both with the Tractarian philosophy and its context, allows to understand more adequately Wittgenstein's paradoxical "statements" concerning the nature of ethics. Firstly, he affirms that all propositions have equal value.²⁵ This is so because, as mentioned before, the propositions are only capable of describing the facts of the world. This means they cannot include values. Furthermore, if there were values in

²³ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, 6.44-6.45.

²⁴ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, 6.13, 6.421.

the world, they would turn into facts and thus would lack any value. In this way, all propositions have the same value because they have no value whatsoever. Secondly, Wittgenstein affirms that the meaning of the world must lie outside the world.²⁶ As a matter of fact, if the world has any value whatsoever, this value must be outside the accidental flux of facts. If the value cannot be accidental, it must be outside the world. The value belongs, therefore, to the realm of the transcendental subject, which constitutes a limit of the world without belonging to the world. Thirdly, as already shown, the propositions of ethics are impossible, precisely because they attempt to describe something that lies outside the world and therefore is not a fact. Fourthly, the good or bad exercise of the will may only alter the limits of the world, not the facts.²⁷ Actually, the exercise of the will in an ethical sense is connected to the transcendental subject, which finds itself in the limit of the world. While the will is incapable of altering the facts of the world, it is capable of altering - in an inexpressible way - the limits of the world, and, by doing this, it ends up altering the very world. Fifthly, the ethical "action" connected to the transcendental subject must involve some kind of reward or punishment, although not in the usual sense.²⁸ The reward or punishment must belong to the "action" itself, which is in the limit of the world. In virtue of this, there are no scales in the evaluation of the ethical "action": the good exercise of the will is connected to happiness; the bad exercise of the will is connected to unhappiness. From this point of view, there are only two types of men - the happy one and the unhappy one. The happy man masters his individual will, the empirical subject, and is able to contemplate the meaning of life through the transcendental subject. The unhappy man is dominated by his individual will, the empirical subject, and cannot find the meaning of life. Their respective worlds are entirely different, not on account of the facts, but on account of the values involved. In sixth place, the uncovering of the meaning of life consists in the blissful contemplation of the eternal present. One who lives

²⁵ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.4.

²⁶ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.41.

²⁷ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.43.

²⁸ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.422-6.43.

in the present is one who lives eternally - in the sense of *a-temporally*.²⁹ And the blissful contemplation of the eternal present, which is connected to one's feeling absolutely safe, constitutes the aesthetical experience *par excellence*. Hence the Tractarian identification of ethics with aesthetics.³⁰

This is why the solution of the problem of life in space and time lies paradoxically *outside* space and time. In this case, the solution is also *outside* language, since the latter is a spatio-temporal phenomenon. Within the worldly domain of the empirical subject, one may deal effectively with anything involving the description of facts. The very questions of science are solved on this basis. If, however, all possible scientific problems were solved, this would occur within the spatio-temporal domain of the empirical subject and one would not have even touched the crucial question concerning the meaning of life, which belongs to the domain of the transcendental subject and cannot be put into words. The solution of the problem of the meaning of life is the blissful and silent contemplation of the eternal present by the transcendental subject in the limit of the world.

V - The convergence of the ladders in the experience of initiation

I have now reached the point in which it is possible to reveal how logic and ethics are articulated in the Tractarian philosophy so that they may yield a peculiar initiation experience. In order to understand the articulation of the logical and the ethical ladders, I shall return here to the crucial question concerning the *status* of the propositions of the critique of language, by means of which I have been so far describing the transcendental conditions of possibility of saying. Is one allowed to use an essentially descriptive language in order to describe the transcendental conditions of possibility of any description? Is it possible to speak about the transcendental subject as a limit to the world or about logic as the essence of the world? Wittgenstein's answers to those "questions" is negative. In order to clarify his position,

²⁹ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.4311.

³⁰ Cfr. Wittgenstein, L. *Op. cit.*, 6.421.

consider the Tractarian approach to solipsism. The Mauthnerian critique of language states that solipsism is logically irrefutable, but mentally insane. According to Mauthner, although the feeling of the self constitutes an effective reality, the science about it is not representable.³¹ In a striking parallel with respect to these results, the Tractarian critique of language states in aphorism 5.62: “what the solipsist means is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest”.³² Wittgenstein’s reference to solipsism is understandable, because it corresponds to a fundamental belief in his schopenhauerian-like philosophy, which assumes the transcendental subject as the limit of the world. Now I think the illuminating statement about solipsism in 5.62 may be extended to all Tractarian propositions. By means of a paraphrase of the aphorism in question, we may say: what the Tractarian propositions mean is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest – to the transcendental subject. Language can either describe the world through declarative propositions or provide their descriptive content to make questions, give orders, and express emotions. Anything beyond that surpasses the logical limits of language and turns into nonsense.

This is what happens with metaphysics, which attempts to talk about the essence, the *quid*, whereas language can only deal with facts, with *how* things occur. Although the essence constitutes the condition without which the world would not be possible, the propositions about it do not possess any descriptive content. In fact, the propositions about the world’s essence involve such general conditions that they cannot be described by language. This is the reason why Wittgenstein appeals to what he calls *formal concepts* in order to refer to the expressions connected with these conditions, such as *language, reality, world, fact, state of affairs, thought, proposition, general form of proposition*, and so on. These expressions correspond to the *x* variable of the universal quantifier. If we attempt to formalize, for example, aphorism 1, according to which *the world is everything that is the case*, we shall realize with surprise that *the world* corresponds to *everything that exists*, or any equivalent. As a result, *the world* has

³¹ See Mauthner, F. *Beiträge zur eine Kritik der Sprache. Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie*. Dritte Auflage. Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, erster Band, 1921, p. 668-9.

³² See Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.62.

the expression *for all x* as its logical form. The expression *everything that is the case*, in turn, corresponds to *everything that happens*, or, what is the same, to *everything that exists*. As a result, *everything that is the case* has the expression *for all y* as its logical form. In this case, aphorism 1 would be reducible to only two universal quantifiers, with no authentic predicate involved, and should be formalized as *for all x is for all y*. Now this is nonsense. There is no descriptive content which may be assigned to the aphorism. Similar results may be extended to most of the remaining Tractarian propositions, which attempt to describe the essence of the world and of the language by appealing to formal concepts and fail because they do not possess the required descriptive content which yields the authentically factual propositions. Most of the Tractarian aphorisms speak vacuously about the *x* variable.³³

An analogous thing occurs in the case of ethics, which attempts to speak about values in an *absolute sense*, whereas language can only deal with values in a *relative sense*, which corresponds to nothing more than a list of facts. The world contains only facts; values belong to the transcendental subject, which is beyond facts, in the limit of the world. When we say, for instance, *someone is a good person*, we should understand this statement in a relative sense, of which the descriptive contents involves a list of facts concerning what we believe constitutes a good person: to be responsible, to be respectful with respect to other people, to care for other people, to take care of the family, and so on. If we attempted to understand the same statement in an absolute sense, meaning that this person somehow participates of the *absolute goodness*, the above proposition would lose its descriptive content and become nonsense, because there is no list of facts which might be associated to the expression *absolute goodness*. Thus, we either utter meaningful propositions concerning values taken as lists of relative facts or utter sheer nonsensical propositions concerning values taken as absolute entities, without the corresponding descriptive content which is given by the lists of facts.³⁴

In the two cases, the difficulty is the same: what metaphysics and ethics mean is quite correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest. But how is it possible for something

³³ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 246-52; 343-46.

³⁴ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 238 ss.

to be simultaneously quite correct and unsayable. The most plausible answer to this question is: something may have at the same time such properties as long as it belongs to the domain of the transcendental subject, which, as we know, is not in the world, but constitutes a limit to the world. This problem is related to the Wittgensteinian distinction between *saying* and *showing*, which echoes the Schopenhauerian distinction between *abstract knowledge* and *intuition*. Everything indicates that *saying* is a worldly fact, submitted to the laws of the world, whereas *showing* belongs to the limit of the world and is beyond its laws. In the *Preface* to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein affirms that he intends to draw a limit not to *thought*, but to the *expression* of thoughts. In this perspective, the Tractarian distinction between *saying* and *showing* seems to be an attempt to reformulate the Schopenhauerian distinction, releasing it from psychologist features. In fact, we might establish a parallel between *saying* and *abstract knowledge*, on one side, and between *showing* and *intuition*, on the other. This would reveal that the psychologism which is hidden behind the notion of *intuition*, involving some sort of action of the subject in order to contemplate the object, would disappear in the notion of *showing*, involving the pure manifestation of the object to the contemplating subject. Given this, we might assume that, from the point of view of the transcendental subject, which is “outside” the world and contemplates it as a limited whole, *thinking* involves not only *saying*, but also *showing*, and that the merely mundane dimension of *saying* is incapable of expressing the higher aspects belonging to the transcendental and more important dimension of *showing*. If we now turn to the point of view of the empirical subject, which is nothing more than a set of facts of the world, we might assume that *thinking* involves only *saying*, and that its individual will blocks the access to the higher dimension of *showing*.³⁵

Now the task Wittgenstein sets to himself in the *Tractatus* is precisely to draw the limit between the mentioned dimensions. He succeeds by means of the non-orthodox, although inevitable, procedure known as *critique of language*. The latter corresponds to the failed attempt to say what can only be shown, a desperate fight against the limits of the expressible in order to overcome them. Although the attempt fails, it reveals itself to be indispensable for

³⁵ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 348 ss. For the meaning of the distinction between *saying* and *showing*, from the

conceptual clarification: one must attempt to say what cannot be said, one must run against the boundaries of language in order to realize its effective limits. From this point of view, the Tractarian propositions are nothing but nonsensical. When uttered, they reveal not only their inability to say what they mean, but also the total inability of language to reach anything beyond plain descriptive content. A similar experience is described in *A Lecture on Ethics*, which was given in 1929. In this text, Wittgenstein affirms that his attempts to say what cannot be said in ethics lead him to realize, in a flash, that the resulting nonsensical propositions do not stem from his difficulty in finding the correct expression, but from an essential inability of language itself.³⁶ Now it seems clear to me that the expression *in a flash* is related to the conceptual clarification propiciated by the process of showing. This reinforces my hypothesis according to which it is precisely through the attempt to say what cannot be said that Wittgenstein succeeds in pointing to what can only be shown: each failed attempt gives its contribution to the desired conceptual clarification, as in the act of climbing up a ladder. In the Tractarian ladder, every step is eventually recognized as nonsensical and abandoned as nonsensical. The process simultaneously involves a partial defeat concerning the act of *saying* and a partial advance concerning the “experience” connected with *showing*. In the end, the whole ladder is abandoned as nonsensical because one finally recognizes – in a flash – language’s essential inability to express the unexpressible. The process has an important counterpart: by climbing up and abandoning the ladder, one realizes that one has reached a “position” which is beyond the ladder, allowing one to see the world correctly – in silence. In this way, one “transcends” the Tractarian propositions. Although running idle by uttering nonsensical propositions which lead to the “death” of *saying*, the *Tractatus* gradually reaches the formidable effect of yielding a “rebirth” by means of *showing*. The ultimate clarification occurs when the empirical subject and his discourse are annihilated, so that the transcendental subject may be “triggered” and silently contemplate what can only be shown. In his *Introduction* to the *Tractatus*, Russell reveals his misunderstanding concerning the initiation mechanism involved, because he criticizes Wittgenstein for managing to *say* many

point of view of the Tractarian argumentation, see p. 328-32.

things about that which cannot be said, whereas the Austrian thinker is managing to *show* many “things” about that which cannot be said by means of the very failed attempt to say that which cannot be said. Anyway, the “death” and “rebirth” involved by the process make it clear that this is all about a complex initiation experience, in which logic and ethics complement each other. From the Tractarian perspective, logic shows that the attempt to describe that which can only be shown is irrational and ethics shows that succumbing to the temptation to do so is immoral.³⁷ This explains why Wittgenstein affirms that the most important part of the *Tractatus* is the one that is not written.³⁸

If, according to my interpretation, there are two ladders involved in the process, then the conclusion follows that the *Tractatus* describes Wittgenstein’s experience mainly from the point of view of the critique of language, that is, of the logical ladder which questions the foundations of saying. But this is not enough to solve the problem of finding the meaning of life. Such a problem requires assuming a radical stance, concerning the ethical ladder which complements the radical questioning by the critique of language. And Wittgenstein succeeds in this domain by enlisting as a volunteer in the Austrian army.³⁹ By putting his life at risk, he reveals the hard way he has chosen to perform the required radical critique of the meaning of life. The fundamental lesson given by the Tractarian text is complemented by the example of life given by the young Wittgenstein himself. In this way, the adequate understanding of the Tractarian philosophy involves not only the clarification concerning the limits of language, but also a radical change in the reader’s attitude towards life.

³⁶ See Wittgenstein, L. A Lecture on Ethics, *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1930), p. 11.

³⁷ As Mauthner says, anyone can talk, but to be silent depends on the man’s character. See Mauthner, F. *Beiträge zur einer Kritik der Sprache. Erster Band. Sur Sprache und zur Psychologie*. Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, dritte Auflage, 1921, p. 81.

³⁸ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 350 ss.

³⁹ MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. *Op. cit.*, p. 352-56.

VI – Final remarks

At the end of this itinerary, I expect to have made clear the relevance of considering the intellectual atmosphere which preceded the writing of the *Tractatus*. With the help of such an atmosphere, it is possible to understand the *transcendental christianism* and the *categorical imperative* which give a basis to the Tractarian philosophy. It is also possible to recognize the two ladders to which Wittgenstein appeals. In the case of the logical ladder, it is possible to see that it leads to the realization of language's essential inability to describe its own transcendental conditions of possibility, all of them connected to the limits of the world of facts. In the case of the ethical ladder, it is possible to see that it leads to the realization that the meaning of life is in the denial of the individual will and in the contemplation of the eternal present by the transcendental subject. Both ladders converge in direction of an experience of initiation, in which the death of saying and of the individual will are compensated by the rebirth connected to the conceptual clarification and by the contemplation of the eternal present. Although the *Tractatus* describes predominantly the experience concerning the critique of language, involving both the failure in the attempt to say what cannot be said and the resulting showing of the conceptual clarification, it remains clear that the experience to which the whole work refers requires from the reader something beyond the mere understanding of the "real meaning" of its nonsensical propositions: one is required, above all, to put one's life radically into question in order to be able to silently contemplate its authentic value.

References⁴⁰

- BOLTZMANN, L. *Escritos de Mecánica y Termodinámica*. Ed. de F. J. O. Ordóñez Rodríguez. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1986.
- FREGE, G. *Begriffsschrift und andere Aufsätze, mit E. Husserls und H. Scholz' Anmerkungen*. Herausgegeben von Ignacio Angelelli. Dritte Auflage. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buch-gesellschaft, 1977.
- FREGE, G. *Os Fundamentos da Aritmética*. In: Peirce, C. S. (1980). *Escritos Coligidos*. Seleção e trad. de A. M. de Oliveira. Gottlob Frege. *Sobre a Justificação Científica de uma Conceitografia*. Os Fundamentos da Aritmética. Seleção e trad. de L. H. L. dos Santos. 2 ed. São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1980. Col. Os Pensadores.
- FREGE, G. *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of G. Frege*. Edited by Geach, P. & Black, M. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1966.
- FREGE, G. *Lógica e Filosofia da Linguagem*. Seleção, introdução, tradução e notas de P. Alcoforado. S. Paulo: Cultrix/EDUSP, 1978.
- HERTZ, H. *The Principles of Mechanics Presented in a New Form*. Preface by W. von Helmholtz. Transl. by D. E. Jones & J. T. Walley. Introduction by R. S. Cohen. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.
- JAMES, W. *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature*. Ed. with an introduction by M E. Marty. N. York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- MAUTHNER, F. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Zur Sprachwissenschaft*. Zweite Auflage. Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1912. Zweiter Band.
- MAUTHNER, F. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Zur Gramatik und Logik*. Zweite Auflage. Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1913. Dritter Band.
- MAUTHNER, F. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie*. Dritte Auflage. Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1921. Erster Band.
- MAUTHNER, F. *Contribuciones a una crítica del lenguaje*. Trad. de J. M. Villa. Mexico: Juan Pablos Editor S. A., 1976.

⁴⁰ Part of the references are either in portuguese or in spanish because my book has been written originally in portuguese.

- MARGUTTI PINTO, P. R. M. *Iniciação ao Silêncio: Análise do Tractatus de Wittgenstein*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1998.
- RUSSELL, B. On Denoting, in Marsh, R. M. (ed.) *Logic and Knowledge, Essays 1901-50*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1956, p. 39-56.
- RUSSELL, B. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. 11th impression. London: Allen & Unwin, 1963.
- RUSSELL, B. *Mysticism and Logic*. 4th impression. London: Allen & Unwin, 1976.
- SCHOPENHAUER, A. *O Mundo como Vontade e Representação*. Porto: Rés-Editora, s/d.
- TOLSTOI, L. N. *Abregé de l'Evangile*. Texte présenté, établi, traduit et confronté avec l'Édition synodale et la Bible de Jérusalem para N. Weisbein. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1969.
- WEININGER, O. *Sex and Character*. Authorised Translation from the sixth German Edition. London: W. Heinemann; N. York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Notebooks 1914-6*. Edited by von Wright, G. E. & Anscombe, G. E. M. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. B. Russell, F. R. S. - Introdução. Trad., apres. e ensaio introdutório de Luiz Henrique Lopes dos Santos. S. Paulo: EDUSP, 1995.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Transl. by D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness. With the Introduction by B. Russell. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. A Lecture on Ethics. *The Philosophical Review*, 1930, 74: 3-26.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Diarios Secretos*. Ed. de Wilhelm Baum. Trad. de A. S. Pascual. Madrid, Alianza Editorial, S.A.. 1991.