

SOME COHERENTIST STRANDS IN WITTGENSTEIN'S TRACTATUS

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The *Tractatus* may rightly be said to contain a correspondence theory of (propositional) truth. Direct support for such an attribution is provided by thesis 2.21:

Das Bild stimmt mit der Wirklichkeit überein oder nicht; es ist richtig oder unrichtig, wahr oder falsch.

Application of this general correspondence formulation of pictorial correctness to the particular case of linguistic pictures yields a formulation of the usual correspondence theory for propositional truth.

This, however, will be of no help when we ask what it means, in a Tractarian context, for a philosophical system such as the *Tractatus* to be correct. The work as a whole is clearly not a linguistic picture, nor, indeed, are its individual theses; the truth provided in 2.21 is not applicable to the non-propositional 'higher nonsense' of philosophy. Yet the *Tractatus* is prefaced with an expression of extreme confidence as far as the basic correctness of its thoughts is concerned. Wherein does this correctness consist and whereon is Wittgenstein's confidence founded? The *Tractatus* itself contains no direct answer to these questions, but enough hints can be found among its theses that point in the direction of an answer.

A number of theses where the word 'richtig' occurs uses it in the same way as in 2.21 quoted above. In these cases a picture is "richtig" if the *Sachverhalt* obtains. In certain other depicted passages, though, it is clear that propositional truth (= pictorial correctness) cannot be what is meant. Among these 4.1213 is of chief interest:

Jetzt verstehen wir auch unser Gefühl: dass wir im Besitze einer richtigen logischen Auffassung seien, wenn nur einmal alles in unserer Zeichensprache stimmt.

Pears and McGuinness translate '*alles...stimmt*' as 'everything is all right', but 'everything fits' might be a more apposite choice.¹ Thus 4.1213 would run:

Now, too, we understand our feeling that we have a correct logical doctrine once everything fits in our signlanguage.

A signlanguage in which every single detail, no matter how minute, is in order and fits in with the rest, is a mark of a correct logical doctrine. This, perhaps, might best be viewed as a two-tier explanation. First the correctness of the signlanguage is clearly entailed by a correct logical doctrine and, secondly, if a signlanguage is correct, then everything has to fit together. Thus, ultimately, the harmony of the signlanguage will serve as a mark of a correct logical doctrine. Needless to say, the coherentist correctness-criterion of 4.1213 can properly be applied only to substantial logical signlanguages such as Frege's *Begriffsschrift* or the language presented in *Principia Mathematica*. No doubt it is possible, but not altogether easy, to give syntactically impeccable formulations of, say, propositional or predicate logic, but these languages are too impoverished to allow for any substantial claims concerning the correctness of the logical doctrine in question.

The coherentist correctness-criterion of 4.1213 can also be applied negatively: a signlanguage where some details are not in order, such as that of *Principia Mathematica* with its defective formation-rules (3.331) or that of Frege, where his attempts to account for the referentiality of its wellformed expressions fail, is a sign of a faulty logical doctrine.² Indeed, Wittgenstein is repeatedly at pains to hammer home the point that the logic of *Principia* is incorrect owing to its syntactic deficiencies, e.g. at 4.12721.

Another mark of a correct signlanguage, and hence also of a correct logical doctrine, is a certain comprehensive uniqueness and universality. In 3.343 we learn that any correct signlanguage must be translatable into any other correct signlanguage by means of definitions. Thus all correct signlanguages have the same expressive powers. A correct signlanguage must also be *universal*, in the sense that it can express everything which is at all sayable: anything which can be said at all can be said in some correct signlanguage, but then, owing to the definitional intertranslatability just remarked upon, it can be said in every correct signlanguage.

Both these marks, harmony and universality, may appear applicable, not only to correct signlanguages, but also to philosophical systems as a whole where they would function as

marks of a correct *philosophical* doctrine. In particular they seem applicable to the *Tractatus* itself and would then serve to account for Wittgenstein's firm conviction that his work is basically correct. The elaborate hierarchial arrangement of the work and its ensuing extreme internal cohesion bear ample witness to Wittgenstein's attempt to provide a whole 'in which everything fits'. The universality, on the other hand, is best seen in the deliberate effort to cover the whole gamut of philosophy from the (then) most novel questions in technical logic to perennial philosophical questions in ethics and concerning the meaning of life. Also, as he points out in his Preface, if one wants to solve the problems of philosophy, one has to come up with essentially the same solution as his. The only leeway lies in the style of formulation, but the content must be fundamentally unchanged. Thus Wittgenstein's solution to the problems of philosophy must, on his own view, be translatable into any other solution to these problems.

The term 'richtig' is also used in an holistic way in thesis 5.45, with its supplementaries 5.451 - 5.4541, where a correct logic (or a correct logical doctrine using a correct signlanguage?) must reveal the proper role of such logical *ursigns* as there may be. This theme is elaborated in 5.451 and 5.452 looks back to 3.343 - *Principia Mathematica* does not present a correct signlanguage. The coherentist line of thought culminates in 5.4541 with its demand for simplicity within the realm of logic. As a final example of an holistic use of 'richtig' we may offer 6.112 where it is held that one mark of a correct explanation of the propositions of logic is that they should be assigned a unique position among all propositions.

The above coherentist interpretation of Wittgenstein's views concerning the correctness of logic is confirmed by 5.473:

Die Logik muss für sich selber sorgen.

.....

If Logic has to take care of itself, then, indeed, there can be no external standard with which it has to be compared or with which it has to agree.

The correctness of logic rests within logic itself, in the circumstance that every single detail fits in the logical signlanguage used.

In conclusion we should observe that these views concerning coherentist correctness do not originate with Wittgenstein. Schopenhauer, an author Wittgenstein knew well, is quite explicit on this point:

Das Ganze der Erfahrung gleicht einer Geheimschrift, und die Philosophie der Entzifferung derselben, deren Richtigkeit sich durch den überall hervortretenden Zusammenhang bewährt. Wenn dieses Ganze nur tief genug gefasst und an die äussere die innere Erfahrung geknüpft wird; so muss es aus sich selbst *gedeutet, ausgelegt* werden können.³

Whether Wittgenstein got his logico - philosophical holism directly from Schopenhauer we do not know. Another possible source is Tolstoy, who greatly inspired Wittgenstein and who himself was deeply indebted to Schopenhauer. In the preface to his *Kurze Auslegung des Evangeliums*, which Wittgenstein carried with him during the Great War, we find:

Der Hauptbeweis für die Richtigkeit dieser Auffassung liegt vielmehr in der Einheitlichkeit, Klarheit, Einfachheit und Vollständigkeit der Lehre und ihre Übereinstimmung mit dem inneren Gefühle eines jeden Menschen, der die Wahrheit sucht.⁴

Indeed, now we understand Wittgenstein's feeling that our logical doctrine is correct once we have a signlanguage which is uniform, clear and simple ('in which everything fits') and which is complete (universal in the sense that it can express everything which is at all expressible).⁵

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1. As Brian McGuinness suggested in conversation.
2. *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, Jena 1893, §§ 29-31.
3. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* II: 1, Ch. 17.

B. Magee, *The philosophy of Schopenhauer*, O.U.P. 1983, ch 2 is useful here.

4. German translation by F.W. Ernst, Hugo Steinitz Verlag, Berlin 1891, p.12
5. I wish to thank Mr. Martien Wijers for helpful comments.