

analysed language, referring to the simple objects which constitute the substance of the world (2.02–2.0272, 3.2–3.26). So it looks as though the requirement of determinacy is going to be pivotal, not only for our understanding of the *TLP* idea of analysis, but also for our appreciation of the basis of Wittgenstein's metaphysics.

### (B) Determinacy in *TLP*

Since we are not told explicitly how the requirement of determinacy of *Sinn* is to be understood, we are forced to cast around for indirect evidence. The word 'determinacy' ('*Bestimmtheit*') is the noun formed from the verb 'to determine' ('*bestimmen*'), and related to the adjective 'determinate' ('*bestimmt*'). Each of these occurs at various points in *TLP*. So we might expect either or both of these semantic connections to be of some help to us in interpreting the import of 3.23.

The *TLP* use of '*bestimmen*' does seem to be accurately translated by the English verbs 'to determine' or 'to fix'. For Wittgenstein speaks of the use of a sign determining its logical form (3.327), of a proposition determining a place in logical space (3.4, 3.42), and of determining the truth-conditions of a sentence by determining under what circumstances it should be called true (4.063). If we take this as our guide, then we shall interpret the requirement of determinacy as the requirement that the *Sinn* of any proposition should have been determined (fixed). But this would leave us with a requirement of doubtful significance. For if we remember that the *Sinn* of a sentence is its truth-condition, this would tell us only that we must fix the truth-conditions of our sentences, which seems entirely truistic. We should also be left no further forward in elucidating the argument for *Simple*s, since 3.23 would merely tell us that their existence is presupposed to our having fixed truth-conditions for our sentences, it being left obscure just why this might be supposed to be so.

The *TLP* use of the adjective '*bestimmt*', on the other hand, seems rather closer to the English use of 'certain' or 'particular' in such constructions as 'a certain relation' or 'a particular relation'. This would be a natural reading of 2.031, for instance, where we are told that the objects in a state of affairs stand in a determinate (that is, particular) relation to one another. For this is not very likely to mean that the objects stand to one another in a relation which has been fixed (that is, caused), or that the relation between the objects is fixed (that is, changeless). (See 2.032, 2.14, 2.15, 3.14.) And it is actually forced on us as an interpretation of 4.466, where we are told that determinate logical combinations of *Bedeutungen* corre-

## 5 *Determinate Sinn*

Our discussion of *TLP* has so far been conducted with its associated programme of analysis largely bracketed off. In the present chapter we begin to put this right, with an investigation of the *TLP* requirement that *Sinn* be determinate.

### (A) Preliminaries

As is well known, *TLP* contains a programme for the analysis of ordinary language. In outline, Wittgenstein thinks that any adequate analysis would have to satisfy the following constraints. Firstly, all propositions of ordinary language are to be logically equivalent to truth-functional compounds of a base-class of elementary propositions (5, 5.3). Secondly, these elementary propositions are to consist only of names in immediate conjunction with one another (2.03–2.032, 2.13–2.131, 3.2–3.21, 4.22–4.221). Thirdly, elementary propositions are to be logical pictures of states of affairs (2.1–2.1515, 3.2–3.21). Fourthly, the elementary propositions are to be logically independent of one another (2.061–2.062, 4.211, 5.134, 5.152). Finally, each of the names in an elementary proposition is to stand for a simple necessarily existing object – what I have been calling 'a Simple' for short (2.02–2.023, 2.026–2.0271, 3.202–3.261).<sup>1</sup>

Some of these ideas have already been discussed. Thus the second and third constraints were briefly dealt with in our discussion of the Picture Theory in Chapter 1. The others will receive discussion later. Here we shall consider what promises to be the corner-stone of the whole programme of analysis, underlying the first and last of the above constraints in particular. For at 3.23, in the context of a sequence of remarks on the idea of analysis, we are told that the requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that *Sinn* be determinate. Now the 'simple signs' of *TLP* are the names which would figure in the elementary propositions of a fully

spond to determinate logical combinations of signs; this is immediately glossed with the remark that it is only to uncombined signs that absolutely any combination of *Bedeutungen* (that is, none in particular) corresponds. Then read in this light the requirement of determinacy of *Sinn* would be the requirement that every sentence should be assigned some particular truth-condition. But again it would be left wholly unclear why this should be a requirement worth insisting on, as opposed to just the merest platitude; or why the existence of *Simplex* might be thought to follow from it.

So if we were to concentrate upon the connection between '*Bestimmtheit*' and Wittgenstein's use of the corresponding verb, then we might think of translating (somewhat barbarously) the requirement of the *Bestimmtheit des Sinnes* as 'the requirement of the *fixedness* of truth-conditions'. But concentrating on the connection with the corresponding adjective, we might think of translating it as 'the requirement of the *particularity* of truth-conditions'. There may be something of value in either, or both, suggestions. (Indeed I shall argue as much later.) But it is, to say the least, hardly very perspicuous what the requirement of determinacy would amount to, on either reading.

We might try pushing the connection with the *TLP* use of the adjective '*bestimmt*' – or one of its uses – rather harder. Perhaps we should interpret 2.031 as saying, not merely that in a state of affairs objects stand in some particular relation to one another, but also that they stand to one another in a 'quite particular' relation – that is, a relation which is sharply marked off from any other in which they might stand. For note that Wittgenstein is about to introduce, at 2.061, his doctrine that states of affairs are logically independent of one another. This doctrine would be indefensible if the relations in which objects stand to one another in a state of affairs were to admit of degrees, in such a way that the particular relation in which they do in fact stand is just one of a number of mutually exclusive relations in which they might have stood. Think, for instance, of spatial relations. If the objects in a state of affairs stand in spatial relations to one another, then from the fact that they stand in some particular spatial relation it would follow, *a priori*, that they do not stand to one another in any of the infinitely many other spatial relations.

We might therefore think of taking Wittgenstein's talk of a 'determinate relation' at 2.031 to mean a relation which does not admit of degrees,<sup>2</sup> in consequence taking the requirement of the *Bestimmtheit des Sinnes* to be the requirement that the truth-conditions of sentences should be sharply demarcated. It would claim that a sentence should be associated with a truth-condition which is 'quite particular', in the sense of being sharply marked off from any other possible truth-condition.

Such an interpretation would at least have the advantage of attributing to Wittgenstein a substantive and interesting thesis. Moreover, it would enable us to make some sort of sense of the *TLP* insistence on the existence of simple objects. The idea would be that the truth-condition of a sentence could never be perfectly sharp unless reality were *discrete*. Think, for example, of the colour-spectrum: if this is infinitely divisible, then at whatever level of description you choose to define the boundary between two colours, that boundary will still be vague relative to the further analysis which is still possible. For to define a sharp boundary between yellow and green, say, we should have to lay down which is the last shade of yellow, and which is the first shade of green. But if the spectrum is infinitely divisible there will still be infinitely many distinct shades between these two, about which our explanation would remain silent. Only if there exist atoms of colour, so to speak, will it be possible to draw a sharp boundary. We could then pick on an atom to be the last shade of yellow, and the very next atom would be the first shade of green, there being no atoms in between.<sup>3</sup>

It would obviously be ill-advised, however, to accept this interpretation on the basis of these few textual hints alone. Moreover, Charity militates against it in two ways. Firstly, the resulting argument for the existence of *Simplex* would be extremely weak, as we shall see in Chapter 8. Secondly, Wittgenstein would be committed to the absurd thesis that none of the propositions of ordinary language really do have vague truth-conditions, as we shall see shortly.

Failing, as we have done, to extract an interpretation of the requirement of determinacy of *Sinn* from the text of *TLP* itself, we may turn to *NB* for guidance.<sup>4</sup> For the latter contains a lengthy sequence of passages (roughly 60–70) which discuss the programme of analysis and the demand for *Simplex*, as well as a number of (apparently different) demands on *Sinn*. It not only contains the phrase 'requirement of determinacy of *Sinn*' (*NB* 63), but also speaks of the requirement that *Sinn* be *complete* (*NB* 61, 67), and the requirement that *Sinn* be *clear* and *sharp* (*NB* 67, 68). Although he does not say so in so many words, I think it reasonable to assume that Wittgenstein saw these as being different aspects of (or at least as being entailed by) the requirement of determinacy.

### (C) The principle of sharpness

Not only is the Wittgenstein of *NB* concerned about the vagueness of ordinary language and ordinary concepts, but he seems to have thought that analysis would remove this vagueness, or rather reveal it to be illusory.



Thus at NB 67, having raised the question whether the sentence 'The book is lying on the table' has a complete clear *Sinn*,<sup>5</sup> and having insisted that since we certainly mean *something* by the sentence, as much as we *certainly* mean must surely be clear, he then notes that there may occur cases in which one would be unable to say whether or not the book should properly be called 'lying on the table'. Then at the top of 68 he suggests that this phenomenon may result merely from a certain looseness in expressing what we mean. It may be that in context — with the book lying on the table in front of me — I use the phrase 'lying on' in such a way as to refer to that particular relation in which the book and the table now stand to one another, although I should in other circumstances use that very same phrase to refer to other relations.<sup>6</sup>

The suggestion is, in effect, that vagueness be assimilated to ambiguity. This would enable one to insist that 'what I *mean* must always be sharp' (NB 68). By NB 70 this idea seems to have been positively adopted. There, having insisted that the vagueness of ordinary sentences can be justified, Wittgenstein says that one always knows what — in context — one means by a vague sentence. Although I may not know, in general, what I should be prepared to call 'lying on', in present circumstances I know that I mean *that* relation (pointing to the book lying on the table).

Of course this doctrine is indefensible. It perhaps has some slight plausibility in a case where I am actually confronted by the state of affairs being described. (I imagine Wittgenstein sitting with his book on the table in front of him, saying over and over again 'I mean *that*.') But it becomes absurd as soon as one thinks of descriptions of states of affairs which are not immediately, and have not recently been, before me.<sup>7</sup> Suppose, for example, that I assert 'I had fair hair when I was born.' Is there a sharp line here between what I mean and what I do not? Am I prepared to say precisely what shades I should be inclined to call 'fair'? Am I prepared to draw a sharp line between being born with hair and being born without? (Is being born with just sixteen hairs a case of being born 'with hair'?)

Moreover, the proposal would involve drawing a distinction in almost every case between what I mean and what *the sentence* means, which would make it hard to see how communication could be possible. For if what I mean by 'The watch is lying on the table' is *this* particular relation between watch and table, then how can anyone else know what I mean? Of course they cannot, at least until they themselves can see the position of the watch, by which time my information can be of no rational use to them. Nor can we get around this difficulty by saying that communication does not require knowledge of a speaker's actual meaning, but only that one

should get sufficiently close to it. For this would still leave us with vagueness in the hearer's understanding of the statement. (How close is 'sufficiently close?') And if there is a problem about vagueness, it will surely be equally a problem for hearer's understanding as for speaker's meaning.

We must insist against the Wittgenstein of NB that many of the propositions of ordinary language, and many of the thoughts of an ordinary thinker, are genuinely vague.<sup>8</sup> In which case, there can be no question of removing that vagueness by analysis. For if the vague proposition comes out under analysis into a proposition which has a perfectly sharp truth-condition, then it has not been analysed but replaced by another — different — proposition. It might conceivably be replied that although the propositions of ordinary language are genuinely vague, this vagueness is not an essential part of their sense, but is merely the product of a kind of laziness on our part. So although analysis, in providing us with a sharply defined proposition, would yield a proposition which is in certain respects different from the original, the two propositions may be regarded as essentially the same proposition. Analysis, on this view, would merely tidy up the neglected corners of the language, leaving us with a structure which is, in all essentials, the same.

This response is unacceptable for at least two reasons. In the first place, there will always be a number of distinct but equally acceptable ways of sharpening a previously vague concept. So the resulting sentences will have different — and essentially different — truth-conditions, since there will actually be circumstances in which they differ in truth-value. And the transitivity of identity prevents us from saying that there can be two sentences, whose senses differ essentially from one another, which each have essentially the very same sense as a third (vague) sentence. In the second place, it can be shown that the vagueness of many of our concepts does not result merely from laziness, but on the contrary is essential for those concepts to fulfil our purposes.<sup>9</sup> With colour concepts, for example, we need terms whose applicability will be memorable. So it is crucial that they should not be defined any more sharply than our memories will allow. Similarly, with concepts such as *heap* and *pile* we require terms whose applicability can be taken in at a glance. So once again it is essential that they should not be defined any more sharply than a glance will allow.

In the next chapter we shall raise the question whether a concern to eradicate vagueness survives into *TLP* (remember, we have been offered no evidence of it as yet); and if so, whether there is anything which can be said in Wittgenstein's defence. How could he have been tempted into such

a blind alley? Are there any powerful arguments for thinking that vagueness is strictly speaking impossible? But for the moment we must, in charity to Wittgenstein, see whether we cannot find a textual basis for some rather different interpretation of the requirement of determinacy of *Sinn*.<sup>10</sup>

#### (D) Determinacy in advance

During the discussion of determinacy in *NB*, Wittgenstein demands not only that *Sinn* should be sharp, but also that it must be complete (*NB* 61). This is then glossed by saying that every proposition must be a picture of reality in such a way that what is not yet said in it simply cannot belong to its *Sinn*, which in turn is echoed at *NB* 64, where Wittgenstein writes:

We might demand determinacy in this way too: if a proposition is to have *Sinn* then the syntactical employment of each of its parts must be settled in advance. — It is, e.g., not possible *only subsequently to come upon* the fact that a proposition follows from it. But, e.g., what propositions follow from a proposition must be completely settled before that proposition can have *Sinn*! [Italics in original.]

Now, this passage is by no means easy to interpret. But there is evidence to suggest that it may be of crucial importance. For in *PTLP* it gets included, with only minor alterations, almost immediately after the remark that the demand for simple signs is the demand that *Sinn* be determinate (*PTLP* 3.20101–3.20103). So it may be here in this passage, despite its awkwardness of expression, that we shall find the clue to what the Wittgenstein of *PTLP* really has in mind in requiring that *Sinn* be determinate.

There are two immediate difficulties in interpreting the above passage. The first is to understand what is meant by the 'syntactical employment' of the parts of a proposition. For this phrase is, on the face of it, almost wholly opaque. The second difficulty is to see why Wittgenstein should insist that in order to determine the truth-condition of a proposition it must already have been completely settled what propositions follow logically from it. For since 'P ∨ Q' follows logically from 'P, no matter what 'Q' may be, the effect of this would be to lay it down that no proposition may be said to have a truth-condition until the truth-conditions of all other sentences have been determined.

Such a position would be extremely puzzling in its own right, as well as being quite out of line with Wittgenstein's general approach. For it would mean that there could be no question of a step-by-step construction of language, in which we fix the truth-conditions of a range of atomic propositions first, and then go on to fix on that basis the truth-conditions of

molecular and general propositions. On the contrary, we should somehow have to fix the truth-conditions of all propositions simultaneously. It is doubtful if such a view is even coherent, let alone whether Wittgenstein ever held it. For how could the truth-condition of 'P ∨ Q' be fixed unless the truth-conditions of 'P' and 'Q' have *already* been fixed? Moreover, in *PTLP*, at least, Wittgenstein palpably introduces the senses of the propositional connectives and quantifiers in such a way that the truth-conditions of all elementary propositions must be taken for granted. (See 4.4, 4.51, 5, 6.)

Both of the above difficulties may easily be cleared up if we take the quoted passage in its context in *NB*. It occurs as part of a discussion of the possibility that reality, and the truth-conditions of propositions, may turn out to be infinitely complex. And just a little higher up the page Wittgenstein had written as follows:

But suppose that a simple name denotes an infinitely complex object? For example, perhaps we assert of a patch in our visual field that it is to the right of a line, and we assume that every patch in our visual field is infinitely complex. Then if we say that a point in that patch is to the right of the line, this proposition follows from the previous one, and if there are infinitely many points in the patch *then infinitely many propositions of different content follow LOGICALLY from that first one*. And this of itself shows that the proposition itself was as a matter of fact infinitely complex. That is, not the propositional sign by itself, but it together with its syntactical application. [Italics in original.]

Here we have a pointer to what was meant, in the passage quoted earlier, by the 'syntactical employment' of the parts of a proposition. What Wittgenstein has in mind is the way in which the use of a sentence-part contributes to determining the logical relations between the sentences in which it occurs and others. Note, moreover, that whenever he talks of 'syntax' in *PTLP* (usually 'logical syntax', at 3.327 'logico-syntactical employment'), he seems to have in mind the sense, or kind of sense, possessed by a sign — where possession of a sense may be equated with the way in which that sign is conventionally used. So when he says that the syntactical employment of each of the parts of a proposition must be settled in advance, he is saying that it must be completely determinate, from the senses of the component parts of a proposition, just what exactly its logical consequences are to be.

Our second puzzle may also be cleared up if we assume that when Wittgenstein talks, in the passage previously quoted, of the propositions which follow logically from a given proposition, he is still thinking of an example like that above, where the entailed propositions themselves belong within the truth-condition of the given proposition. In effect he is



thinking specifically about propositions whose truth-conditions are conjunctive in form – in the way that the truth-condition of ‘The patch is to the right of the line’ might be said to take the form ‘This point is to the right of the line, and this point is to the right of the line, and so on.’ So when he expresses the requirement of determinacy by saying that the propositions which follow from a given proposition must be completely settled before that proposition can have *Sinn*, he has in mind only those propositions which themselves belong within the truth-condition of the given proposition, rather than literally all which are its consequences.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that Wittgenstein’s requirement is really this: that the truth-condition of a proposition must be completely settled in advance before that proposition can have a truth-condition. (Hence the exclamation-mark in the first of the above quotations from NB 64!) The substance of this remark then lies in its insistence that the truth-condition of a proposition must have been settled all at once and in advance of its being used to say anything; and in its denial of the converse possibility that one might have occasion to discover, *a posteriori*, that a certain state of affairs is such as to render a given proposition true. I thus see the passage as belonging alongside 4.064, where Wittgenstein stresses that every proposition must *already* have a *Sinn*: since its *Sinn* is just what is affirmed, it cannot be given *Sinn* by affirmation.

The requirement of determinacy which has emerged here may be expressed thus: the truth-condition of a proposition must have been completely fixed in advance, in all its (possibly infinite) particularity, depending only on the sense of that proposition. (So here we have a connection with the suggestion made earlier in this chapter, that what is involved might be a requirement of the ‘fixedness’ and/or the ‘particularity’ of truth-conditions.) Now, this is just an instance of the more general doctrine of logical objectivism, which holds that logical relations generally (including the relation between a proposition and its truth-condition) must be determined in a wholly objective manner by sense alone. The claim is that the relationship between language and the world must be objective, determined *a priori* by the senses of the component expressions in a way that is independent of anything empirical; and in particular, independently of any human belief, capacity or disposition.

We have finally found a requirement to stand alongside the requirement of sharpness, which I propose to call ‘the requirement of determinacy-in-advance’;<sup>12</sup> this is one aspect of Wittgenstein’s logical objectivism. Then since, as we saw in Chapter 4, the latter is a doctrine which can be powerfully supported by argument, we have already gone some way towards

complying with the principle of Charity. It will be the task of later chapters to investigate the role of this requirement within the structure of argument of *TLP*.

### Summary

We have discovered two very different strands to the *NB* discussion of determinacy of *Sinn*: on the one hand there is the requirement that *Sinn* should be sharp, and on the other that *Sinn* should be fully determined in advance of anything empirical. Since the first of these requirements appears to have been a blind alley, whereas the second can be powerfully defended, we have some reason to equate the *TLP* version of that requirement with the latter.