

plexity of the fully analysed proposition is already there, in some mysterious way, in the ordinary one. His view is simply this: since the two propositions will (if the analysis is accurate) be logically equivalent, and since identity of semantic content is sameness of truth-conditions, both *analysans* and *analysandum* will say the very same thing, and will be (essentially) the very same proposition. There will then be no harm in saying that the ordinary proposition is (that is, has the same truth-condition as) a truth-function of elementary propositions (see 5). And we can use the fact that the one clearly complies with the requirement of determinacy-in-advance as an explanation of how the other does.

### Summary

Analysis, in *TLP*, is to fulfil two distinct functions. On the one hand it is to provide notations which are philosophically and semantically perspicuous. And on the other hand it is to demonstrate how thought reaches right up to reality: showing how unspecific propositions can be made true by specific states of affairs, consistent with logical objectivism.

## 8 *Sense-data and solipsism*

In this chapter we shall consider, and reject, a phenomenalist interpretation of the *TLP* programme of analysis, the main evidence for which is provided by Wittgenstein's apparent endorsement of solipsism.

### (A) Preliminaries

There is a long tradition, championed especially by the Logical Positivists in the thirties but revived again recently, of taking the 'simple objects' of *TLP* to be the data of immediate experience – sense-data.<sup>1</sup> Now it is certainly true that Wittgenstein began to play around with phenomenism and its associated verificationism soon after his return to philosophy in the late twenties (perhaps responding to the interests of the Vienna Circle), and that he often thereafter seems to have thought of his early work in broadly phenomenalist terms.<sup>2</sup> But in line with the general interpretative strategy adopted throughout this book, I propose to ignore this later evidence as being of doubtful reliability. (Given the forward-looking nature of Wittgenstein's intellect, it would be entirely natural that once stimulated to an interest in verificationism he should throw himself wholeheartedly into developing his old thoughts in this new direction, even to the extent of losing touch with their original significance.) We shall confine our attention to our primary sources: *TLP* and (cautiously) *NB*.

No doubt some have read *TLP* through the prism of Russell's 'Lectures on Logical Atomism', which he says reflects what he learned from his conversations with Wittgenstein in the period leading up to the Summer of 1914,<sup>3</sup> allowing themselves to be guided by the fact that the programme of analysis envisaged in the 'Lectures' is clearly phenomenalist, as had been Russell's earlier publications. But in reality the evidence provided by the 'Lectures' is negligible. Notice firstly, that even if they were an accurate record of Wittgenstein's pre-1914 thinking, there are still

four full years to elapse before the completion of *TLP*, leaving much scope for development and changes of mind. Notice secondly, that Russell nowhere claims that the 'Lectures' are intended to be a record of Wittgenstein's thought. The views expressed are his own, with due acknowledgment of Wittgenstein's influence. It may then be that this influence is confined to the logical matters which take up the bulk of the 'Lectures', Russell merely slotting his own phenomenism into this framework.

Now, of course Russell's phenomenalist programme of analysis was motivated by considerations of an epistemological nature. Indeed, the same is true of phenomenism generally. The project of reducing all ordinary talk to descriptions of sense-data (and experience-based universals) only really makes sense as part of an attempt to show how our common-sense items of knowledge can be adequately justified on the basis of our experiences. It is then a powerful argument against a phenomenalist reading of *TLP* that Wittgenstein treats epistemological questions disparagingly, identifying the theory of knowledge with the philosophy of psychology, where psychology is said to be no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science (4.1121). Indeed, theories of knowledge seem to play no role whatever amongst the main doctrines and arguments of *TLP*, Wittgenstein's major concerns being logic and semantics, and the nature of representation generally.<sup>4</sup> Since there is then a strong presumption against a phenomenalist reading of *TLP*, it will require explicit textual evidence to overcome it.

### (B) Phenomenal objects

What are the simple objects of *TLP*? Is there any reason to think that they are sense-data? The evidence that they are is extremely thin on the ground, mostly being provided by Wittgenstein's apparent endorsement of solipsism (5.62), together with some related remarks. These will be discussed in the next section. Some have thought to find evidence in Wittgenstein's remark at NB 45, that as examples of simple objects he always thinks of points in the visual field.<sup>5</sup> But against this can be set many remarks which pull in a contrary direction. For example, just a few pages later he describes parts of space (note, *not* visual space) and spatial objects as 'things' (NB 47). And then later again he is to be found treating the material points of physics as examples of genuinely simple things (NB 67, 69).<sup>6</sup> The truth seems to be that at this early stage his ideas were extremely fluid and unformed.

One direct objection to a phenomenalist interpretation of *TLP* is pro-

vided by the doctrine that elementary propositions are logically independent of one another (1.21, 2.061–2.062, 5.134). For if they were to take the form 'There is a red sense-datum at such-and-such a point in my visual field', then this would of course be incompatible with a wide range of other elementary propositions, for example 'There is a green sense-datum at that same point in my visual field.' However, I do not wish to press this objection too hard. For as we shall see in Chapter 14, it is by no means obvious that we cannot devise a system for describing sense-data which would enable us to comply with the independence requirement.<sup>7</sup> (Rather than employing names for sense-data it would employ names for the lines in a system of coordinates imposed upon the various sense-fields.) In fact it will turn out that a phenomenalist interpretation of *TLP* can be maintained without identifying simple objects with sense-data. Nevertheless, I shall continue to focus on such an identification for the remainder of this section. For the argument I am about to present against it can be developed in such a way as to apply to the other form of phenomenism also, as we shall see in Chapter 14 when it comes to be explained.

The main objection to identifying Simplex with sense-data is provided by the doctrine that simple objects have necessary existence. How could they be sense-data, if they are supposed to exist at all times in all possible worlds? For it is surely certain that sense-data do not have necessary existence. On the contrary, such things as pains and sensations of red exist extremely fleetingly: on the most natural view, no longer than our awareness of them.

However, in reply it might be said that Wittgenstein nowhere explicitly commits himself to the necessary existence of Simplex. He says that they make up the substance of the world (2.021), and that they exist in all possible worlds (2.022–2.023).<sup>8</sup> And he says that they are unalterable and changeless, since it is their changing configurations which are responsible for changes in the world (2.027–2.0272). But none of this actually implies that they exist at all times in all possible worlds. For their changelessness is consistent with their existence having a beginning and an end in time. And they may exist in each and every possible world merely in the sense in which Moses exists in our world: that is, existing for a while at some time or other within it.

The following interpretation would therefore be consistent with the text.<sup>9</sup> Simplex are fleeting experiences, or sense-data. However, all talk, and all thought, is built upon references to individual sense-data, in such a way that every conceivable world must consist of recombinations of those very same experiences which actually exist at some time or other in the real



world. (This would be implied by the fact that elementary propositions contain references only to *Simples*, and that each possible world is described by a complete assignment of truth-values to the set of elementary propositions – see 2.0124, 4.22, 4.26, 5.) Since all thought is built upon references to the sense-data which actually occur, there is no possible world which does not contain those very items. We can conceive of a world in which these sense-data are differently arranged, but we cannot think of a world in which they do not exist, or in which others exist instead of, or in addition to, them.

Although this interpretation is consistent with what Wittgenstein actually says, it produces a reading which is intrinsically very implausible. For example, suppose that I have just trodden on a drawing-pin and experienced pain. Then on the above account it would be logically impossible that I should never have felt that sensation. For there is supposed to be no possible world in which that pain does not exist. It hardly needs to be said that this is counter-intuitive. For we believe very firmly that undergoing the individual experiences which we do is a contingent matter: I believe that if I had not stepped on that drawing-pin, I should not have felt that pain. Similarly, if we suppose that I suffer from exactly sixteen migraines during the course of my life, then on the above account it would be logically impossible that I should ever have had more. Again this is highly counter-intuitive.

Plausible assumptions about the conditions for sense-data identity reduce the scope for contingency still further, rendering the above account even less acceptable. It is natural to think that the time at which an experience occurs (indeed the time at which any event occurs) is essential to its identity. Then if I had stepped on the drawing-pin five minutes later, it would not have been that individual pain which I felt, but another similar one. If this assumption is granted then the above account will imply that my life must contain exactly the experiences which it does, occurring at times when they do. The only scope left for contingency would concern the relative positioning of my experiences within the various sense-fields. And even this may be limited. For it is by no means obvious that the very same sensation of red which is currently in my left visual field might have occurred in my right. Nor is it obvious that the pain in my foot might have occurred in my back. If these things are not possible, then it will not even be possible that I might now have had a pain in my back rather than my foot (that is, had I lain on the drawing-pin rather than stepped on it).

These doctrines are so intrinsically counter-intuitive that anyone wishing to attribute them to Wittgenstein had better provide at least one of the

following two things: either some seemingly powerful argument for their truth, or some unambiguous textual evidence for their presence in *TLP*. The arguments will have to wait until the next chapter, where we begin to consider the various possible reasons for believing in *Simples*. But it will turn out that there is no real support for such draconian restrictions on contingency. The main textual evidence, on the other hand, is provided by Wittgenstein's supposed solipsism, to which we now turn.

### (C) Solipsism

Wittgenstein's remark at 5.62, that what the solipsist means is quite correct, certainly seems to support a phenomenalist reading of *TLP*. For solipsism, as ordinarily understood, is the doctrine that the world consists of my mental states, only my experiences being real. Now, of course, there is nothing in the above remark by itself to show that Wittgenstein understands solipsism in the usual way. But additional evidence can be adduced. For he goes on almost immediately to say that the world and life are one (5.621), which certainly makes sense if the world is supposed to consist in my experiences. And then later he says that at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end (6.431). This can only be taken literally if the world consists of my conscious states.

In fact a phenomenalist reading of 5.621 seems explicitly to have been excluded by Wittgenstein, at least when it was originally written into his notebooks.<sup>10</sup> At *NB 77* he writes:

The World and Life are one. Physiological life is of course not 'Life'. And neither is psychological life. Life is the world.

In saying that psychological life is not what he understands by 'Life', Wittgenstein is at least denying that life (and the world) might consist in the set of his experiences. But quite what he does mean is left almost wholly obscure. I shall return to it later.

As for the remark about the world coming to an end at death, there is simply no way of taking this literally except as an endorsement of solipsistic phenomenism. But then there is no particular reason why we should take it literally, since it occurs within a sequence of remarks in which metaphor and hyperbole are rife. (For example, it occurs immediately after the claim at 6.43, that the good or bad exercise of the will causes the world to wax or wane as a whole!) We could take it as saying merely that at death the world as represented from a particular point of view

(mine) comes to an end. This idea will be explained in the discussion which follows.

The main difficulty for a phenomenalist interpretation of the *TLP* endorsement of solipsism is the claim that it coincides (when strictly thought out) with pure realism (5.64). For realism, as normally understood, is the doctrine that there is a real world of objects and states which exists independently of our experiences. And this is just flatly inconsistent with the claim that the world consists of nothing but my experiences (solipsism). We therefore have no alternative but to seek another interpretation. In particular, Wittgenstein must be understanding either 'solipsism' or 'realism' in something other than their standard sense.

When Wittgenstein says at 5.62 that the element of truth in solipsism makes itself manifest, he immediately goes on to say:

The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world. [Italics in original.]

This suggests very strongly that he understands solipsism to be encapsulated in the slogan 'The world is my world.' It is also clear that he is equating the limits of his world with the limits of what he is capable of representing in language. Indeed, throughout the 5.6s when he talks either of 'the world' or 'my world', it is clear that he has in mind a set of possible, not actual, states of affairs. What is at issue are possibilities, not actualities — see in particular 5.61.

The limits of the world are thus the set of metaphysically possible states of affairs, whereas the limits of *my* world are the set of possible representations. The claim that the two coincide is then the claim that metaphysical possibility (real world) and conceptual possibility (my world) are one and the same: it is the 'great mirror' doctrine once again. So part of the point of 5.62 is to insist upon a realist attitude to the logic/metaphysics relationship, of the sort we outlined and defended in Chapters 2 and 3.<sup>11</sup> This is one reason why there is truth to be found in solipsism: for in saying 'The world is my world' the solipsist in fact utters something correct, since the set of real possibilities coincides with what it is possible for me to represent in language. But it is also part of the reason why solipsism coincides with pure realism (5.64): for the realist too says something correct in stating that there is a set of real possibilities existing independently of our representations. This is what I understand Wittgenstein to mean by saying that the world and life are one (5.621): not that the actual world coincides with the set of my actual experiences (solipsism as it is standardly understood), but

that the set of possible states of affairs is correlated one to one with the set of possible representations.

It is easy to understand why Wittgenstein should insist that the limits of the real world and the limits of possible representation are one and the same. For this is none other than the 'great mirror' doctrine. But why should he introduce the self at this point? Why should he choose to express this idea by equating the world with *my* world, identifying what is objectively possible with what it is possible for *me* to represent? I believe the answer lies in the Kantian idea that it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations.<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein is struck by the fact that the world can be represented from a particular point of view: his. (See 5.631, 5.6331.) All actual facts can be represented in terms of their temporal and spatial distance from himself, and even all possible facts can be expressed by saying not 'This is possible', but rather 'I think this is possible.' Indeed, I take it that this is the further truth which he thinks can be discerned behind the statement 'The world is my world': that all possible states of affairs can be represented from his particular point of view, as it were positioning himself at the centre of the universe.<sup>13</sup> It is this which is supposed to find a place for the self (the metaphysical subject) within philosophy (5.641), as I shall now try to explain.

#### (D) The metaphysical subject

When Wittgenstein says that solipsism coincides with realism (5.64), part of what he means is that the world which I am capable of representing is the real world — there is nothing possible in the world which cannot possibly be thought.<sup>14</sup> But he also means that there is a sense in which the 'I' — that thing from whose point of view everything else can be represented — is not itself an item in the world (5.641). It is not something which we are acquainted with in experience (5.631), nor can its existence be inferred from the nature of our experience (5.6331). It is rather a 'limit' of the world: identifiable with the inexpressible 'myness' of the point of view which I take towards the world and my own experiences (5.64–5.641).

Wittgenstein is concerned to show that the metaphysical self (the supposed subject of thoughts and experiences) is not really an item in the real world (5.631). All that really exists is the bundle of representations which the 'I think' accompanies. Hence his criticism of Russell's theory of belief and judgement in the 5.54s. According to Russell, belief is a relation between the believing subject and a possible state of affairs, a report of the form 'A believes that p' stating the existence of such a relation, just as it



appears to. This then places the thinking subject very firmly within the world. Wittgenstein claims, on the contrary, that the report really has the form 'p' says p' (5.542). It states a relation between a structured arrangement of signs (an act of thinking) and a possible state of affairs.<sup>15</sup> So all that really exists in the world are the thoughts of the thinking subject, not the thinking subject itself. In effect he is endorsing a version of Hume's bundle-theory of the self, at least as regards the self-in-the-world: all that exists is a particular bundle of thoughts and representations (5.5421, 5.63–5.631).

Whilst endorsing a Humean view of the empirical subject, Wittgenstein nevertheless seems to want to find room somehow for the metaphysical subject – only not as part of the world, but as its limit (5.641). How is this to be understood? We might try interpreting it as a version of the Kantian doctrine of the transcendental unity of apperception. Wittgenstein would be saying that although we cannot *know* of any unifying subject of our own experiences, we can nevertheless *think* it. Yet this would run up against the fact that he places the subject outside the world; that is: outside the realm of the thinkable (5.61, 5.641). Moreover, it ignores the fact that the truth in solipsism is somehow supposed to be *shown* by the world's being my world (5.62, 5.641), since what can be shown cannot be said (4.1212), or thought (if I am right that Wittgenstein regards thinking and speaking as activities essentially on a par).

Wittgenstein's idea is best explicated as follows. Imagine a complete objective description of the world and its contents ('objective' in the sense of being given from no particular point of view). It describes all physical objects, together with their properties and distributions. It also includes a description of all thoughts, experiences and perceptions of the world, and states which of these representations is possessed by which physical objects (human beings). Included in such a description, of course, would be mention of that body which is in fact my own, together with a description of those thoughts and experiences which are in fact mine. But they would not be described as such. Indeed, the one fact which would not be conveyed in such a description would be which of all the various experiences and perspectives is my own. One can thus imagine exclaiming, with a shock of recognition when one finally succeeds in working the matter out, 'And those experiences and thoughts must be mine!' I believe it is this 'myness' of a given perspective which Wittgenstein thinks is the truth to be found in solipsism, over and above the 'great mirror' doctrine.

Notice that this 'myness' of thoughts and perceptions is incommunicable. For the most that I could convey to anyone else by saying 'And those experiences are mine' is that they are the ones possessed by the human

being who makes the assertion. But if my hearers too have been provided with the above complete description, then they will know this already. The 'myness' of a given perspective must be something over and above the relation between a particular set of thoughts and experiences and a particular human body. Yet of course it does not consist in a relation to a particular metaphysical subject either, since Wittgenstein denies that we know of the existence of any such thing; and in any case this would still leave room for the shock of recognising that I am that subject. So it is incommunicable; and because incommunicable, necessarily unique: I can form no conception of what it would be for there to exist some other 'myness' in the world. (This is not to deny that I have knowledge of other experiences and perspectives; on the contrary, this is given to me in the complete description.) And because it is incommunicable, it is also unthinkable, and hence outside (or at least at the limit) of the world. Yet for all that it does seem to be real: for there would be something which I should have failed to know if I had not realised which out of all the experiences and perspectives on the world was mine.

What emerges is that, so far from endorsing solipsism as traditionally understood ('Only my experiences are real'), Wittgenstein is making two rather different claims. Firstly, that one element of truth in the slogan 'The world is my world' is that the set of metaphysical possibilities coincides with what it is possible for me to represent. And secondly, that the only way of finding a place for the metaphysical subject of thoughts and experiences is to identify it with the ineffable 'myness' of the point of view from which these representations are formulated. Since neither of these claims either entails or is even especially closely connected with phenomenalism, we have found an interpretation of Wittgenstein's 'solipsism' which is fully consistent with a generally realist reading of *TLP*.

### (E) Can we be charitable?

We saw in Section B above how a phenomenalist interpretation of *TLP* would force us into attributing to Wittgenstein some extremely counter-intuitive doctrines. We have now found our way to an interpretation of Wittgenstein's solipsism which enables us to avoid any such consequence. But we have yet to raise the question whether this, in its turn, is perhaps equally counter-intuitive. Or does Charity, as well as Textual Fidelity, also favour the reading suggested?

Of course the 'great mirror' doctrine has already been shown in Chapter 3 to be capable of powerful defence. But is anything of significance

manifested by the fact that 'the world is my world' beyond this? In particular, is the 'myness' of the point of view from which I represent the world a real but incommunicable feature of it? I believe not. Although the position is by no means a foolish one (indeed, it can seem quite plausible, as I hope I have managed to bring out),<sup>16</sup> it is nevertheless incorrect. For the 'myness' of an experience is just the difference between knowing in the abstract that a certain experience is taking place, and being directly aware of it. It is not a further (but incommunicable) feature of that experience, but a distinctive mode of knowledge of it. Quite how this point should be expressed will depend upon one's favoured theory of self-knowledge. But one plausible account would have it that awareness of an experience is a belief caused by the presence of that experience, which is then apt to enter into the causation of the behaviour of the subject whose experience that is (where 'subject' here means 'human being').<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the 'myness' of my perspective on the world is not a peculiar sort of ineffable fact, but rather consists in the way my modes of presentation of the world (my thoughts and perceptions) facilitate bodily action. Put differently, what I should lack when I have not yet worked out from the complete objective description of the world which of the described perspectives is my own is an ability to employ that knowledge in action. It is only when I know where *I* am, and which are the things which *I* am seeing, that my knowledge of the world can become practical. But this is not to say that there is some further fact which I have to learn. It is rather that I have to connect the facts which I have been told with my current perceptions in such a way as to generate action.<sup>18</sup>

### Summary

A phenomenalist reading of *TLP* has much to be said against it. Nor does Wittgenstein's endorsement of 'solipsism' provide any real evidence for it. For part of what he means is that there is no distinction between what can be represented in my thoughts and what is possible in reality. And the rest of what he wishes to say – that the 'myness' of the point of view from which I describe the world is an unsayable aspect of it (a 'limit') – is equally consistent with realism.

## 9 *Simples: weak arguments*

In this chapter we begin our consideration of the various possible arguments for the existence of *Simples*, concentrating on those which seem particularly weak.

### (A) Preliminaries

As is well known, the early sections of *TLP* advance a number of metaphysical theses about the nature of the objects (*Gegenständen*, *Dingen*) which make up the world. They are said to be simple, as opposed to complex (2.02), and all complex entities are said to consist, ultimately, of some combination of *Simples* (2.0201). They are the referents of the 'simple signs' (names) with which the analysis of ordinary propositions must terminate (3.2–3.25). They are unalterable and changeless (2.0271). And most importantly, they make up the substance of the world, being common to all logically possible worlds (2.021, 2.022–2.023, 2.024). The *Simples* of *TLP* are thus simple and changeless, and exist in all possible worlds.

Besides these explicit claims in the text, we may also add the interpretation defended briefly in Chapter 1, that *Simples* are individuals, not including properties and relations. We also have our argument from the last chapter that they do not merely exist in all possible worlds, but at all times within those worlds: that they exist necessarily. We shall carry these two additional claims forward into the discussions which follow, subject to reassessment if required. (Hence we shall need to ask ourselves whether the arguments we consider would be more convincing if one or other of these features of our interpretation were dropped. But given the strength of the case in their support, the answer would have to be a very powerful affirmative to force a change on us at this stage.)

Clearly the thesis of simplicity is entailed by the thesis of necessity (and