



What of proposition 2.1 after the *Tractatus*? Wittgenstein and the many ways “we make to ourselves pictures of facts”

*E a proposição 2.1 após o Tractatus? Wittgenstein e as
muitas maneiras em que “fazemos para nós mesmos
imagens de fatos”*

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Abstract

In this paper I enquire 1) whether Wittgenstein retains the notion of picture after the *Tractatus* in a way that is more than simply an equivocation, so to speak, an ambiguous use of the term according to multiple meanings or senses; and, if so, 2) what the consequences of this might be for Wittgenstein's understanding of philosophy as an activity of clarification. More precisely, I shall take into consideration three possible interpretations of the *Tractatus*' (use of) 'picture' and adopt the one according to which what Wittgenstein notes in his later writings may be regarded as a further development of and a variation on it. My goal is to show that Wittgenstein's new thoughts on pictures and on the many ways “[w]e make to ourselves pictures of facts” (TLP: 2.1) reveal a certain aspect that is not immediately evident, yet is inherent in the *Tractatus*' notion of picture: pictures lie at root of the

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genesis and (dis)solution of linguistic-conceptual confusions and philosophical dogmatism.

Keywords: Wittgenstein. *Tractatus*. Picture. Model. Clarification.

Resumo

Neste artigo eu pergunto 1) se Wittgenstein mantém a noção de imagem após o *Tractatus* de uma forma que seja mais do que simplesmente um equívoco, por assim dizer, um uso ambíguo do termo de acordo com múltiplos significados ou sentidos; e, se assim for, 2) quais as consequências disto para a compreensão de Wittgenstein da filosofia como uma atividade de esclarecimento. Mais precisamente, levarei em consideração três possíveis interpretações da (utilização de) 'imagem' do *Tractatus* e adotarei aquela de acordo com a qual o que Wittgenstein observa em seus escritos posteriores pode ser considerado como um desenvolvimento adicional e uma variação da mesma. Meu objetivo é mostrar que os novos pensamentos de Wittgenstein sobre imagens e sobre as muitas maneiras em que "[f]azemos para nós mesmos imagens de fatos" (TLPp: 2.1) revelam um certo aspecto que não é imediatamente evidente, mas é inerente à noção de imagem do *Tractatus*: as imagens estão na raiz da gênese e da (des)solução das confusões linguístico-conceituais e do dogmatismo filosófico.

Palavras-chave: Wittgenstein. *Tractatus*. Imagem. Modelo. Esclarecimento.

Introduction

This paper discusses the notion of picture in Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy. In particular, it addresses the question of whether the picture, whose role is undoubtedly central in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*,¹ can be considered a core theme of Wittgenstein's overall philosophical production, and whether it also occurs in his later works, remaining almost unchanged or maybe undergoing major changes in the way it is conceived.²

As is widely known, in the *Tractatus* thoughts and propositions are understood as pictures (*Bilder*) (see TLP: 3, 4.01); and – it is worth noting right from the start – they are envisaged as such not only, or not so much, in some strange or peculiar sense,

¹ Significantly, so-called 'Picture Theory' is often regarded as one of the cornerstones of the *Tractatus*.

² For previous approaches to this question cf. Nyíri 2006, Phillips 2011 and Westergaard 2003.

but “even in the ordinary sense of the word” (TLP: 4.011).³ Pictures, however, also seem to lie at the centre of Wittgenstein’s mature writings (produced from 1929 onwards), where they appear and are evoked in several contexts, in relation to different issues. In particular, pictures acquire a crucial role in connection to Wittgenstein’s so-called metaphilosophy, i.e. to the genesis and possibility of a solution (or dissolution) of the kind of linguistic-conceptual confusion and dogmatism “into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy” (PI: I, § 131). From this perspective, a picture is that “perspicuous representation” (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) which produces understanding – it is the tool enabling “a clear view” (*übersehen*) (PI: I, § 122).

The question to be addressed, then, can more precisely be formulated as follows: is there anything that remains of the *Tractatus*’ reasoning in the way in which the notion of picture is used in subsequent texts, in a certain sense and for certain purposes? Conversely, is there anything in Wittgenstein’s “old thoughts” that appears “in the right light” thanks to his “new ones” (PI: Preface, p. viii),⁴ particularly in relation to the idea of philosophy as an activity of clarification (see TLP: 4.112)?

Tree ways of interpreting *Tractatus*’ ‘picture’ and its fate

It is possible to identify three ways of answering the question of the fate of the topic of pictures in Wittgenstein, coinciding with as many interpretations of what pictures are according to Wittgenstein (that is, the first, but also the second, and possibly third, Wittgenstein), and of what role he assigns them.

³ In a conversation with some members of the *Wiener Kreis*, Wittgenstein apparently acknowledged that, in speaking of propositions as pictures in the *Tractatus*, he had also had the mathematical notion of picture in mind and that “[h]ere [that is, in speaking of propositions as pictures] the expression ‘picture’ is already taken in an extended sense” (WVC: p. 185).

⁴ The topic of pictures can be included among those in relation to which Wittgenstein’s new thoughts “could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of [his] old way of thinking” (PI: Preface, p. viii).

1. First of all, it could be argued that the *Tractatus* makes idiosyncratic use of the term ‘picture’ (certainly, ruling out or forgetting – or despite the fact – that in the *Tractatus* pictures are pictures in a conventional sense). In other words, it could be argued that the *Tractatus* assigns the notion of picture a meaning that stands and falls with this work, and hence that the pictures which Wittgenstein talks about in his later writings are not those of the *Tractatus*, and indeed have nothing to do with them. No doubt, the notion of picture in the *Tractatus* is closely connected to the topic of propositions: one might say that it is specifically introduced to explain the bipolarity of propositions. If this is the case, it is clear that it would be useless to search any further: there cannot be any later developments of this notion because pictures carry a specific sense or meaning in the *Tractatus* – a ‘technical’ sense or meaning, one might say. Let us go down this path for a moment by first attempting to reconstruct the context in which Wittgenstein introduces the notion of picture and by discussing how he defines it and for what purposes.

The notion of picture makes its appearance in the *Tractatus* in a proposition that encompasses all its defining aspects. Let us briefly examine them. For now we shall overlook the possibility of enquiring as to which of these aspects will appear again in the future. The proposition in question is 2.1, which states: “We make to ourselves pictures of facts” (TLP: 2.1). To break this proposition down, we may note that its main aspects are: the ‘we’, the ‘making’, pictures, and facts. Paying attention to the ‘we’, it is possible to read this as a historical-anthropological statement by which Wittgenstein stresses an important human characteristic. As humans, we are picture-making beings and – according to an initial formulation that puts the emphasis on facts – “[f]acts are grasped by us in pictures” (PT: 2.1). But what emerges is also – and especially – a feature of the nature of pictures: pictures are made. The verb ‘to make’ sheds light on an idea that is intrinsic to the German term *Bild*, but which the English ‘picture’ does not really convey: the idea that, for the *Tractatus*, being a picture of facts (or of reality) also means being a model (*Modell*), i.e. being something made. A picture – the *Tractatus* tells us – does not mirror or reproduce reality; it is not a copy or mirror image of it, but rather a model: “The picture is a model of reality” (TLP: 2.12), Wittgenstein writes. Significantly, one of the few names that he mentions in the *Tractatus* is that of Heinrich Hertz (see TLP: 4.04, 6.361), the physician and

philosopher of science who, perhaps more than any other, in the late 19th century, contributed to highlighting the role played by models in science and especially in physics.

According to the *Tractatus*, a proposition is ‘technically’ a picture or model of reality (see TLP: 4.01). Everything that is said about pictures, from proposition 2.1 onwards, anticipates what must be said about propositions (and thoughts). First of all, Wittgenstein states that a picture “is a fact” (TLP: 2.141), “represents a possible state of affairs” (TLP: 2.202), and “agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false” (TLP: 2.21); in other words, it is a model. A proposition is a picture of reality, in the sense of a model,⁵ insofar as it represents reality in a truthful or false way. Furthermore, the idea of a picture as a model is closely related to two aspects which play a significant role in the *Tractatus*. The first is the fact that a picture anticipates, rather than follows, reality, so to speak; this is quite clear from proposition 4.01 where, after claiming that a proposition is a picture of reality, Wittgenstein, to avoid misunderstandings, feels the need to add that “a proposition is a model of reality as we think it is” (TLP: 4.01). The second, closely related aspect is the fact that no pictures (and hence no thoughts or propositions) are true and correct a priori. Wittgenstein repeatedly stresses this point; for example, in proposition 2.225, when talking about pictures in general, he states that “[t]here is no picture which is a priori true” (TLP: 2.225); in propositions 3.04 and 3.05, when talking about thought, he rejects the idea of “[a]n a priori true thought” (TLP: 3.04); and in proposition 4.024, when talking about proposition, he states: “[o]ne can therefore understand it without knowing whether it is true or not” (TLP: 4.024).

In sum, being a picture – in the technical and exclusive sense assigned to the term by the *Tractatus*, according to this first interpretation – means being a true or false representation of something; so it is by stating that a proposition is a picture that the *Tractatus* describes and justifies the bipolarity of propositions. In the analogy according to which each proposition is a picture, the notion of picture is used – and must be understood – in a specific sense, the specific sense assigned to it by the *Tractatus*.

⁵ And indeed “[w]e also say: ‘I understand the picture exactly, I could model it in clay’” (PG: I, § 7).

2. A second way of looking at the notion of picture in the *Tractatus*, so as to assign it a specific yet not exclusive meaning, is to consider whether there is a general idea of picture (coinciding with or approximating the conventional one, and possibly occurring in the later Wittgenstein too, in different ways) of which the *Tractatus* offers one possible sense or use. This is the sense or use of ‘picture’ according to which it makes sense to ask whether a picture is true or false. Propositions, in this case, will be pictures *insofar as* being a picture means representing a possibility – the possibility of being true or false. Thus the propositions of logic (tautologies and contradictions) are not pictures. Not even physics models are pictures: for we do not ask ourselves whether a physics model is true or false, but only – for example – whether it works or not. The same applies to the many different pictures we create or deal with on a daily basis: we do not enquire, or indeed care, about their truth or falsehood. Normally, when I gaze at a painting, say, or watch a film,

I don't believe (imagine) for a moment that the people I see in it really exist, or that there have really been people in that situation (PI: I, § 522).

Truth (or falsehood) is not a relevant or salient aspect, in order for the picture to work as such.

3. A third interpretation (the one that seems the most plausible to me) and corresponding way of addressing the question of what happens to pictures after the *Tractatus* is to acknowledge that this notion is subsequently taken up and enriched. The answer to our question then becomes that Wittgenstein's later writings lend little support to the claim that the topic of pictures fades away after the *Tractatus* and that the importance assigned to it in this text should be included among those “grave mistakes” (PI: Preface, p. viii) mentioned in the *Preface* to the *Philosophical Investigations* and which Wittgenstein attributed to his early work. If we read the *Investigations* and other texts by the second Wittgenstein, we soon realise that he continues to speak of pictures. As already noted, in the *Tractatus*, using a proposition with a strongly practical-constructive connotation, Wittgenstein states that “[w]e make to ourselves pictures of facts” (TLP: 2.1). And in later works he has little or nothing to object to this. The difference, compared to the *Tractatus*, rather lies in the kind and range of questions that he now raises in an insistent, almost obsessive, way.

Likewise, the idea that the features assigned to pictures in the *Tractatus* are later lost or completely redefined finds little support. As we shall see, it is certainly true that, after the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein acknowledges that pictures can sometimes serve as a good term or object of comparison (see PI: I, § 130) for propositions. “The picture was the key. Or it *seemed* like a key” (Z: § 240) to him,⁶ but this is not enough to conclude – with the *Tractatus* – that propositions *are* pictures: to do so would be a sign of the kind of dogmatism “into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy”, and which consists in taking a term of comparison “as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond” (PI: I, § 131); moreover, it is true that the critical remarks which Wittgenstein formulates after the *Tractatus* often concern the attempt to assign pictures – particularly mental ones – a quasi-magical role and power that they do not and cannot have. But while all this is true, it is equally true that such critical remarks do not dismiss pictures completely, but only acknowledge that there are various other things that we call – and can call – ‘a picture’, ‘the making of a picture’, ‘the recognising of a picture as the picture of...’, and so on.

Besides, ‘making to ourselves a picture’ entails making many different things. For example, it means adopting the most suitable medium, thereby anticipating in a way the reality of which we are making a picture. The picture of a brawl at the marketplace may be made up of words (if we describe the brawl), of lines and colours on paper (if we draw it with crayons), etc. But it also means selecting the medium of representation in accordance with the aims and interests that guide us. Perhaps there is no need for colours to draw the brawl – a black pencil may suffice. However, on other occasions we cannot do without colours: for example, when we use a strip of coloured cloth to show what colour the fabric we wish to purchase should be. On other occasions still, what we need are objects that can stand in a mutual spatial relationship (right-left, above-below, etc.), as when an architect or urban planner crafts (or used to craft, before the spread of computer technology) a polystyrene model of a building or neighbourhood. For example, the fact that the polystyrene is

⁶ Cf. “The word ‘picture’ has one advantage: it has helped me and many other people to make something clear by indicating a common feature and pointing out: ‘So that is what matters!’ We then have the feeling, ‘Aha! Now I see, a proposition and a picture are of the same kind’” (WVC: p. 185).

not coloured, but left blank, does not mean that the building or buildings will all be white, once they have been constructed. Or let us consider the case of photography. It seems evident that a photograph – for example, the photograph of an Alpine landscape – comes after the reality it represents, so to speak. However, it may be argued that it anticipates it, in the sense that the resulting photograph will depend on many preliminary things – for instance, and primarily, from the choice of photographing the landscape rather than painting it, from the frame, and from the film (a colour or black & white one).

The fact that we make to ourselves pictures of reality does not mean that we can make the pictures we want or how we want them or in whatever way strikes our fancy. For instance, once we have chosen to craft the model (the picture) of a neighbourhood using polystyrene cubes, we are bound to this “form of representation” (TLP: 2.151). As we read in the *Tractatus*,

[t]he picture can represent every reality whose form it has.
The spatial picture, everything spatial, the coloured, everything coloured, etc. (TLP: 2.171).

As is widely known, Wittgenstein describes those pictures that are not bound to any specific form of representation (e.g. spatial, chromatic, etc.) as “logical” (TLP: 2.181). As we have already seen, thoughts and propositions are logical pictures. For example, in the proposition “On the brown table there is a book with a red cover”, the word ‘table’ is not written in brown ink and the word ‘cover’ is not written in red ink – nor is the word ‘book’ spatially located above the word ‘table’. Yet, according to the *Tractatus*, that proposition is a (non-spatial and non-chromatic) picture that is not true a priori, but only if on the brown table there is a book with a red cover.

In texts written after the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein gets back to pictures at least in the following ways or cases: a) he again enquires as to what makes a picture a picture; b) he stresses our nature as human beings who make pictures and c) pictures as models; d) he acknowledges that there are various different kinds of pictures; and e) takes into consideration the proposition (as a picture) that says that a proposition is a picture. In doing so – I would argue – Wittgenstein unleashes the possibilities intrinsic in his early idea that *Bild* can coincide with *Modell*. Let us see how.

Picture after the *Tractatus*

Let us start by saying that the pictures which Wittgenstein deals with after the *Tractatus* are: misleading pictures (on the methodological and metaphilosophical level); mental images; and (specifically in *On Certainty*) the *Weltbild*.⁷

Following J. Beale (2019), we can identify various kinds of misleading pictures – according to Beale there are five; I would essentially divide them into two groups: there are misleading pictures which have to do with language, in the sense that they originate and lay in the use of language⁸ or in the sense that they say something misleading about language; and there are misleading pictures which mislead us on a level other than language, that is, on the level of application of concepts (as when we confuse formal concepts with proper concepts, for example; see TLP: 4.126). There are misleading pictures in which the aspect of being a *Bild*, in the sense of a painting, is predominant: metaphorical pictures, analogies, similes, and other kinds of “figurative (*bildliche*) employment of the word” (PI: II, xi, p. 215). In other misleading pictures, the model aspect is predominant: these are forms of representation or paradigms, i.e. pictures to which the question posed in § 122 of the *Investigations* applies: “Is this a ‘*Weltanschauung*?’” (PI: I, § 122) – or a *Weltbild*? We can take *Weltanschauung* (world-view) and *Weltbild* (world-picture/picture of the world)⁹ as concepts that are akin, insofar as they are both a (respectively, consciously held and more unconscious) way of representing the world or reality.¹⁰ It may be argued that

⁷ As recalled by L. Perissinotto (2021: p. 230), the term, which occurs seven times in *On Certainty* (see OC: §§ 93-95, 162, 167, 233, 264), appears only twice in Wittgenstein’s earlier texts: namely, in N: MS 108, 152 [2] and in N: MS 111, 18 [3]-19 [1].

⁸ Wittgenstein stresses this, for example, by remarking: “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (PI: I, § 115), and: “An entire mythology is laid down in our language” (BT: § 93).

⁹ English translations use both these expressions indiscriminately (for example, in OC: § 94 and § 95) – and incidentally they do away with a distinction between *Weltbild* and *Bild der Welt*.

¹⁰ As L. Perissinotto (2021: p. 230) stresses, the notion of *Weltbild* occurring in *Manuscript 108* (and that’s the term’s first appearance in Wittgenstein’s texts) closely resembles the one of *Weltanschauung* to be found in § 122 of the *Investigations*. Indeed, Wittgenstein states: “Whatever I write, it’s fragments, but the one who understands will draw || see from them a closed world-picture || sehen” (*Was ich auch immer schreibe, es sind Fragmente, aber der Verstehende wird daraus ein geschlossenes Weltbild entnehmen || ersehen*) (N: MS: 108, 152 [2]).

this classification emerges the moment in which Wittgenstein sets out to reflect on pictures by engaging with the *Tractatus*, with himself in the years of the *Tractatus*, which is to say: when he asks himself whether there was something wrong in his old way of understanding pictures and especially in his conceiving of propositions as pictures. Here two points emerge: what had been posited as an identification (between proposition and picture) turns out to be nothing but a picture as model or paradigm; and in certain respects (primarily in relation to what makes it dogmatic) this picture may be misleading – it may be a misleading picture of the linguistic kind, in the second sense: it may mislead on the level of language and with regard to it. Although in the *Investigations* we find no reference to propositions as pictures, it is clear that Wittgenstein also has this misleading picture in mind when, with regard to his *Tractatus*, he writes:

(Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 4.5): “The general form of propositions is: This is how things are.”—That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it (PI: I, § 114).

Besides, in the *Big Typescript* he poses the question quite openly:

In what sense can I say that a proposition is a picture? If I think about it, I’m inclined to say: It has to be a picture so that it can show me what I am supposed to do, so that I can be guided by it. But then all you really want to say is that you are guided by the proposition *in the same sense in which you are guided by a picture. A picture is a description.*

Is every picture a proposition? And what does it mean to say, for example, that every picture can be used as a proposition?

[...] Saying that the proposition is a picture emphasizes certain features in the grammar of the word ‘proposition’ (BT: § 21).

Making a proposition a picture, then, is simply a way to highlight or emphasise certain features of the word ‘proposition’. Furthermore, what we have is not just the kind of picture whose features allow us to say that a proposition is a picture, but different kinds of pictures. In an annotation from 1937 whose first part came to be included in *Zettel*, Wittgenstein writes:

As can be seen, although there are some reasons to say that *Weltbild* and *Weltanschauung* are not exactly the same, clearly they both have something to do with a form of representation (see Perissinotto 2021: p. 233).

“Propositions serve to describe how things are”, we think. The proposition as a picture. And that is pretty nice, but there are still lifes, portraits, landscapes, mythological depictions, ornaments, maps, diagrams etc., etc. (“Sätze dienen ja dazu, zu beschreiben, wie sich alles verhält”, denken wir. *Der Satz als Bild. Und das ist recht schön, aber es gibt doch Stilleben, Portraits, Landschaftsbilder, mythologische Darstellungen, Ornamente* | | *Ornamentik, Landkarten, Diagramme, etc., etc.* (N: MS 116, 223 [4]-224 [1]; see Z: § 244).

Given all this, it is necessary to emphasise at least the three following points. The first is that, both in the *Tractatus* and in subsequent writings, Wittgenstein uses the term ‘picture’ to refer to a wide range of different things: sketches, thoughts, paintings, propositions, drawings, mental images, mathematical and architectural models, photographs, maps, diagrams, etc., acknowledging that “a picture, whatever it may be, can be variously interpreted” (Z: § 236).

The second point is that Wittgenstein sees no significant difference – or no difference in principle – between *material* pictures and *mental* pictures, so to speak; indeed, one of his main concerns is to rule out that the latter, insofar as they are mental, may do something that the former, in their materiality, cannot do. In this respect, we might argue not only that one of Wittgenstein’s recurrent polemical targets is the ‘mythology’ of the mental process – however and in whatever guise it may present itself – but also that his whole analysis of mental processes neither presupposes nor justifies any sort of substance dualism between the material and the mental, between body and mind. Certainly, in relation to logic, but also meaning and linguistic understanding, Wittgenstein does not assign any weight or relevance to pictures understood as Frege’s *Vorstellungen*, i.e. envisaged as mental episodes that are essentially subjective (in the sense of essentially private) and associated with what we say or what we hear others say. At the time of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein, like Frege, opposed psychologism and he continued to uphold this stance in subsequent decades. Certainly, he does not dispute psychology’s right to study these *Vorstellungen* or other mental episodes; nor does he ever seek to deny that what we say or hear others say is often associated with mental images. But ‘often’ does not mean always. It follows that, if we can understand the order “Open the window!” without associating it with any specific image, our understanding of this order neither depends on nor derives from the (possible) mental images associated with or accompanying it. This conclusion is further confirmed by the fact that, even when what we say or hear others say is

associated with images, these may vary hugely and – most importantly – may be quite unrelated to what we say or hear others say.

The third point is that, in various respects, much of what Wittgenstein about pictures in texts written after the *Tractatus* (between 1929 and 1951, the year of his death) may be regarded as a further development of and a variation on topics and motifs already found in his first work – this is the case, for example, with the practical-constructive or ‘modelling’ character of pictures, especially emphasised in his remarks on the foundations of mathematics (see for instance RFM: II, §§ 22-24). But it is especially true of Wittgenstein’s stress on the related motif that, at least to some extent, lay at the basis of his old idea of the proposition as a picture: a picture (a painting, a photograph, etc.) is such – i.e. functions as a picture – if and insofar as it allows us to forget it. According to Wittgenstein, it is primarily in relation to this aspect that we are justified in saying that a proposition is (like) a picture. For instance, when someone tells me “It’s raining”, I normally look out of the window, rather than at this person.¹¹ Likewise, when I am gazing at a painting and someone asks me what I see, I don’t usually answer “A painting”, less still “Some pigments applied to a canvas”; rather, I will answer something along the lines of “A port city” – even though I obviously know the difference between gazing at the painting of a city and gazing at the same city from the window in my room. Clearly, there are some circumstances in which I would answer “A painting”: for example, if I were a mover who has been entrusted with taking the painting from one museum to another. The same is true for “It’s raining”. If someone who is checking my hearing says “It’s raining” and then asks me “What did I say?”, my answer will not be “You said that it’s raining”, but “You said: It’s raining”. This point is neatly illustrated by an annotation in *Zettel*, where Wittgenstein points out that the people portrayed in a black & white photograph are not black & white, so to speak:

Let us remember too that we don't have to translate such pictures into realistic ones in order to 'understand' them, any more than we ever translate photographs or film pictures into

¹¹ Obviously, there are certain circumstances in which I would probably look at the person speaking to me or pay attention to the way he/she has addressed me. For example, if I were dealing with someone who I know does not speak a word of English, I might look at him/her in surprise, should he/she suddenly say “It’s raining”.

coloured pictures, although black-and-white men or plants in reality would strike us as unspeakably strange and frightful. Suppose we were to say at this point: "Something is a picture only in a picture-language"? (Z: 242).

From the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein also borrow – albeit with significant variations – the idea that no pictures are true or correct a priori, and that a picture is such even if – as in the case of a genre painting – I do not believe or think that what it represents truly exists. Even in such cases, the picture has a hold on me: for example, I can describe what I see, and what I see and describe can bring me pleasure or keep my mind busy (see PI: I, § 524). Wittgenstein clearly explains this point in a passage I have already quoted, but which it is worth examining again:

When I look at a genre-picture, it 'tells' me something, even though I don't believe (imagine) for a moment that the people I see in it really exist, or that there have really been people in that situation. But suppose I ask: "What does it tell me, then?" (PI: I, § 522).

The answer which Wittgenstein feels he should give to the question at the end of this passage is "What the picture tells me is itself" (PI: I, § 523). As he immediately goes on to explain, this answer amounts to saying that "its telling me something consists in its own structure, in *its* own lines and colours" (PI: I, § 523). As should be evident, Wittgenstein here is not telling us, in a reductionist vein, that the picture is nothing more than its shapes, colours, etc.; on the contrary, he is inviting us not to assume that the shapes and colours in the picture are something accessory (or unessential) with respect to what the picture is. We might put it thus: what the picture tells me coincides with my recognising it as a picture. For example,

[h]ow do I know that this picture is my image of the *sun*? — I *call* it an image of the sun. I *use* it as a picture of the *sun* (RFM: I, § 129).

In this sense, there is nothing mysterious in the picture. There is no need for some magic to turn shapes and colours into a picture. If I wish to make a sketch of a hill, I will grab a pencil and a sheet of paper, and start drawing. Then a picture will appear. However, we cannot stop here. What Wittgenstein is suggesting, somewhat hesitantly, is that perhaps we should say that "[s]omething is a picture only in a picture-language" (Z: § 242). Something is a picture because many other pictures exist,

of all sorts (paintings, sketches, photographs, models, diagrams, etc.), and because they have been taught to us and we have learned to make very different, albeit variously connected, things with them: to paint from real life, to tell a photograph from a painting, to visit picture galleries and stop to look at the paintings, to ask ourselves questions like “What does it represent?” or “Is this a fictional representation or a real event?”. Clearly, this is not to say that I need to worry about all this when I draw a landscape or gaze at a painting – I don’t; just as I don’t need to worry about what language I am speaking and how I have learned it when I am reading a story:

Certainly I read a story and don’t give a hang about any system of language. I simply read, have impressions, see pictures in my mind’s eye, etc. I make the story pass before me like pictures, like a cartoon story (Z: § 243).

Finally, it is worth stressing what I believe to be a particularly significant point. As already noted, it is a defining feature of pictures (and propositions) that they cause us to forget them. This is a very delicate point which is highlighted by a distinction that clearly illustrates our relationship with pictures. I am referring to the distinction between living *in* the picture or *inside* it and the act of considering it *from outside*, so to speak. Those living inside a picture become immersed and ‘lose themselves’ within it; those gazing at a picture from outside will instead see it as something lifeless and isolated (Z: § 233). How can lifeless, inert marks accomplish what pictures do? How can ink marks on paper ‘contain’ human beings, cities, mountains, oceans, stories, feelings, and so on? How can a city arise out of “mere patches on a canvas” (Z: § 233)? Our complete adherence to a picture, our feeling perfectly “at home (*heimisch*)” (Z: § 234) with it, to the point of forgetting that it is a picture and of living within it, stands in contrast to the possibility that this same picture might suddenly strike us as ‘lifeless and isolated’ – as something we gaze at from outside. But what is it, then, that breathes life into the picture or smothers it so as to make it alive or dead for us?¹² Wittgenstein’s answer is that a picture is significant for us, i.e. serves as the picture *of* something, when we understand it in a certain way, whereby we do not

¹² Of course, this reflects a metaphor of Wittgenstein’s. In the *Investigations*, suggesting that we see the meaning of a sign in its use, he writes: “Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life?” (PI: I, § 432). ‘Life’ here translates the German word *Atem*, which more precisely means ‘breath’.

concern ourselves with its further interpretability.¹³ As long as we dwell in what Wittgenstein calls “the space of intention”, “we exist [...] among the pictures [...] as well as with real things” (Z: § 233). It thus seems that, if we wish to deal with pictures, we must be able to be simultaneously inside and outside them; we must be able to forget them, without forgetting that we are forgetting them, so to speak; we must – to use one of Wittgenstein’s favourite examples (see Z: § 233) – live in the pages of a book or in a film, while at the same time being aware that we find ourselves sitting in our armchair or in a theatre hall.

Furthermore – and this is the point I wish to stress – as Wittgenstein notes on several occasions in his later writings, it is precisely this elusiveness of the picture which lies at the origin of the kind of dogmatism we so easily fall into if “[w]e predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it” (PI: I, § 104). This is one of the senses – perhaps, the primary sense – in which a picture can draw us in and “h[o]ld us captive” (PI: I, § 115). To put it somewhat differently, we have been captivated by a picture when we mistake it for reality, forgetting that it is a picture. In all such cases, one believes that

one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature [...] and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it (PI: I, § 114).¹⁴

It seems evident, then, that according to the later Wittgenstein it is in the picture itself that philosophical dogmatism finds its origin. If a picture does not allow itself to be forgotten, then it does not function as a picture; but in allowing itself to be forgotten, a picture can give rise to that exchange between picture and reality which, as repeatedly noted, is the defining feature of philosophical dogmatism. The final remark I now wish to make concerns precisely the role of pictures in Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophy.

¹³ There is no interpretation here and what happens is not that the picture “cannot be further interpreted, but: I do no interpreting” (Z: § 234). It is interesting to note, with R. Wilmet, that “among the possible marks of having found the solution to a ‘puzzle picture (Vixierbild)’ [...] the notions of ‘feeling at home in’ and ‘being familiar with’ (*wohl kennen, das ist mir bekannt*) are widely used” (1990: p. 208).

¹⁴ As already noted, Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledges that this is what had happened in the *Tractatus*.

Picture and philosophical clarification

Both in the *Tractatus* and in the *Investigations* (and other later works) Wittgenstein envisages philosophy as an activity of clarification. According to the *Tractatus*,

[t]he object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.
Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. [...] The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical propositions', but to make propositions clear (TLP: 4.112).

We find something very similar, twenty years later, in the *Investigations*:

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. [...] One might also give the name 'philosophy' to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions (PI: I, § 126).

We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. [...] The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language (PI: I, § 109).

However, while the *Investigations* explores the topic in depth and through many various examples, the *Tractatus* does not so much describe this activity by means of concrete examples, as evoke it. It is conceivable that, since Wittgenstein could not resort to the idea that pictures, as models, can clarify or confuse things, it was difficult for him to see and illustrate what philosophical clarification consists in and where the confusions to be clarified or dogmatism to be avoided originate. It may be argued, then, that one of the possibilities offered by pictures or by the use of the notion of picture springing from Wittgenstein's reflections on the topic after the *Tractatus* is to shed some light on his way of understanding philosophy. This is precisely what Wittgenstein's emphasis on propositions as pictures and on the potentially ensuing dogmatism does. By 'liberalising' the notion of picture, so to speak, by employing it in heuristic terms, instead of exclusively binding it to truth and falsehood, it is possible to get a concrete idea both of the genesis of conceptual confusion (when we exchange a model for what it stands for, a picture for that of which it is a picture, thus being held captive by the picture) and of the solution to this confusion, i.e. of what the philosophical work of clarification consists in (knowing that one is dealing with a

model, living within the picture with the awareness that it is a picture). So that “see[ing] the world rightly (*richtig*)” (TLP: 6.54) prescribed at the end of the *Tractatus*, and enriched by Wittgenstein’s subsequent reflections on pictures and on having “*a clear view*” (PI: I, § 122), can be interpreted in the following terms: seeing the world rightly (with its ethical connotation) means making to ourselves the right pictures knowing that they are pictures.

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