Goddard and Judge on Tractarian Objects[*]

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ABSTRACT

I discuss the idea that the objects of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are propertyless bare particulars, defended by Leonard Goddard and Brenda Judge in their monograph, *The Metaphysics of the Tractatus*. I present the difficulties that Goddard and Judge raise for this construal concerning the idea that Tractarian objects have natures that determine their possibilities of combination, and I assess the solution they propose. I offer an alternative construal of the notion with which these difficulties can be overcome.

KEYWORDS Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Metaphysics, Objects, Facts, Ontological categories, bare particulars

1. How to read the *Tractatus*

The Metaphysics of the Tractatus, by Leonard Goddard and Brenda Judge, was originally published in 1982. Four decades later, this work seems to speak to us from a more innocent time, before resolute readings of the *Tractatus* started to make us feel self-conscious about trying to find truth and illumination in the philosophical doctrines that Wittgenstein's book appears to propound. To my mind, this adds to the appeal of Goddard and Judge's contribution. Innocence, in this case, was good, and we should never have lost it.

Vindicating innocence doesn't require disagreeing with resolute readers about the goal of the *Tractatus*.[1] Suppose we share their view that, appearances to the contrary, Wittgenstein's ultimate goal was not to put forward philosophical doctrines, but to promote a form of therapy that would cure us of the pathological urge to ask philosophical questions. When Wittgenstein appears to be putting forward philosophical theories, on this account of his goal, he is actually supplying props for this therapeutic programme. And if the therapy works, we will come to the realization that the sentences in which he had seemed to present his philosophical theories, and those in which we appear to formulate philosophical problems, are actually plain nonsense. I maintain that accepting this conception of Wittgenstein's intentions is perfectly compatible with treating the *Tractatus* as a straight-up piece of philosophy, as Goddard and Judge do. In fact, serious engagement with the *Tractatus* as philosophy is *required* by this account of Wittgenstein's agenda, so long as we are prepared to accept that at least one of the ways in which Wittgenstein expected his readers to free themselves from the urge to philosophize was by coming to the realization that the very rules of philosophical activity contain the seeds of its own destruction. On this account of the method of the *Tractatus*, the reader is expected to come to see (or to seem to see), first, that the book offers the only viable account of how we represent the world in mind and language, second, that it follows from this account that there are restrictions on what we can represent in mind and language, and third, that an account of how we represent the world in mind and language would be possible only if these restrictions weren't in place. Through this route, the reader/patient would come to see that

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[1] For resolute readings, see [Diamond 1991, 2000; Conant 2000].

the appearance that the *Tractatus* succeeds in presenting an account of how we represent the world in mind and language has to be deceptive—and more generally that she should abandon the enterprise of trying to provide such an account.[2]

An additional reason for taking the *Tractatus* seriously as a piece of philosophy is that we surely can't rule out the possibility that Wittgenstein was wrong in thinking that his account of how we represent the world in mind and language is self-undermining in the intended way. He might have failed to show, that is, that it follows from this account that the conditions of its own possibility are not satisfied. Then the *Tractatus* would actually contain an account of how we represent the world in mind and language, and this account might be, after all, a valuable contribution to the enterprise that Wittgenstein intended unsuccessfully to discredit. And we shouldn't be surprised if what Wittgenstein intended to use as mere props for a therapeutic programme turn out to be illuminating philosophical doctrines. Everything we know about the evolution of Wittgenstein's ideas indicates that he once regarded the philosophical enterprise as perfectly legitimate, and thought he had made important discoveries in this area. He may have later come to see these putative discoveries as pieces of nonsense to be recycled as props for his therapeutic programme, but I'm suggesting that he might have been mistaken in this denigration of their value.

2. Tractarian Objects as bare particulars

Goddard and Judge's main concern is to understand the character of the basic items of Tractarian ontology: atomic facts[3] and Objects[4]. I'm going to focus here on some difficulties that they discuss in the first few pages of their book concerning Wittgenstein's conception of Objects. The problems they consider arise from a disparity between the world as we encounter it in everyday experience and the sparse Tractarian account of the ultimate constituents of reality. The world appears to us to contain individuals that instantiate properties and bear relations to one another. All this, however, according to the metaphysical picture with which the *Tractatus* starts, has to ultimately consist in Objects and their combinations in atomic facts. Goddard and Judge's problem is how so much can come out of so little. And it is very little indeed, as Goddard and Judge accept the conception of Tractarian Objects defended by Irving Copi, as 'bare particulars, having no material properties whatever' [Copi 1958]. It hard to see how the individuals of everyday experience could be identified with Tractarian Objects, but we can assume that the former can be somehow construed as collections of the latter. Properties, however, appear to pose a more formidable challenge:

> How can a simple—propertyless in itself—yield properties when united with other equally propertyless simples? […] Again, the problem is: how do properties begin? How do we move from no properties at all in individuals *per se*, to properties in collections of individuals? [Goddard and Judge 1982: 11]

Thus, for Goddard and Judge, Wittgenstein's metaphysical starting point are bare particulars, with no material properties. They accept, however, that Tractarian Objects have properties of a different

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[2] I defend this interpretation of Wittgenstein's strategy in [Zalabardo 2015: 1–7]. See [Diamond 2018] for an attack on this reading and [Zalabardo 2018] for my reply.

[3] 'Sachverhalte' in the original. 'Atomic facts' is Ogden's translation, which Goddard and Judge use, and I'll follow them in this here [Wittgenstein 1922]. Pears and McGuinness render it as 'states of affairs' [Wittgenstein 1974b].

[4] I shall follow Goddard and Judge in writing Object with a capital O when referring to Wittgenstein's technical notion.

kind—which Wittgenstein calls *internal* and *external* properties. Could the material properties of everyday objects emerge from the internal and/or external properties of Tractarian Objects?

One crucial point of Tractarian exegesis that Goddard and Judge get right is that, for Wittgenstein, internal or formal properties are about possibilities of combination:

> [A]ll three concepts—internal property, form and essence—are cashed out in terms of possible combinations with other Objects. [ibid.: 6]

But for Goddard and Judge the claim that Tractarian Objects have internal properties in this sense is in tension with the claim that they are bare particulars. They consider two possible construals of internal properties. According to the first, the internal properties of a Tractarian Object determine which combinations it can enter into and hence which combinations are possible. According to the second, the internal properties of a Tractarian Object are identical with the set of possible combinations into which it can enter.

Goddard and Judge argue that the first construal can't be right. It requires that Tractarian Objects are of different kinds, so that what relations a Tractarian Object can enter into can be determined by what kind of Object it is. But Tractarian Objects, Goddard and Judge maintain, cannot be of different kinds, as this is ruled out by their character as simple bare particulars:

> But Wittgensteinian Objects are not of different kinds in this sense. They are all equally simple; and they all lack properties (qualities) in the ordinary sense. [ibid.: 8]

And it follows from this, according to Goddard and Judge, that there isn't a multiplicity of relations that Tractarian Objects can bear to one another:

> It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that the relation which holds between Objects is always the same and is always the featureless 'combination' or 'configuration'. For the only correlative property which can be inferred from this relation is that of being combined (with other Objects) in an atomic fact; but that is no property at all. And indeed, one might well conclude that combination is not an ordinary relation. [ibid.: 8]

This leaves the second construal of internal properties as the only option: the internal properties of a Tractarian Object have to be identical with the set of combinations it can enter into. But according to Goddard and Judge, if internal properties are construed in this way, they can't be used to explain the emergence of the material properties of the objects of everyday experience:

> But then internal properties are not features that the Object has of itself. They are not, that is to say, qualities of the Object. In the sense of 'property' which excludes relations, Objects have no properties on this view—not merely no perceptible properties, but no properties at all. [ibid.: 9]

Therefore, on either construal of the internal properties of Tractarian Objects, they don't sustain the emergence of the properties we encounter in everyday experience.

How about external properties, then? If we construe the internal properties of a Tractarian Object as the set of combinations it can enter into, its external properties have to be construed as a subset of this—the set of combinations the Object actually enters into. However, although Wittgenstein suggests that material properties arise from combinations of Tractarian Objects, it would be wrong, according to Goddard and Judge, to identify external properties with material properties:

Thus, the external properties of an Object are identical with the set of actual combinations into which it enters, and material properties (presumably of ordinary objects) arise out of these combinations; but external properties do not, any more than internal properties, characterise Objects as such. [ibid.: 10–11]

However, for Goddard and Judge, it's just not possible for the material properties of ordinary objects to arise out of combinations of Tractarian Objects:

But how can a mere piling up of simples into combinations (atomic facts) yield the properties which simples alone do not have? [ibid.: 11]

In fact, the problem for them is not simply how this metaphysical picture can explain the emergence of the properties of ordinary objects. The metaphysical picture seems to descend into incoherence:

How can there be a difference in the actual combinations that an Object is combined in, if all Objects are equally propertyless simples? And if this is so what can we make of the notion that an Object's form is defined by the set of all its possible combinations with other Objects? Why, indeed, should some combinations be possible and not others? [ibid.: 11]

3. The starting point of analysis

Goddard and Judge find the solution to these riddles in another important exegetical insight of theirs:

According to Wittgenstein, in contrast to Russell, when we try to understand the nature of the world we cannot *begin* with the simples […]. Nor could we individuate combinations of Objects in atomic facts, because we still have no reference points in a universe of simples. We must begin at the level of ordinary perceptible data, which provide reference points, co-ordinate systems etc., and work downwards. [ibid.: 14]

I think they are exactly right about this. In the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, atomic facts are, as Goddard and Judge put it, the 'basic viable units' [ibid.: 13]. When we analyse atomic facts downwards, the items that we find, the Tractarian Objects, are not 'viable units'. They can be 'posited by an inference, but they cannot be described or picked out as individuals, or used as basic building blocks' [ibid.: 13]. This gloss turns the 'unviability' of Tractarian Objects into an epistemological point—our inability to grasp them, but I've argued elsewhere that the primacy of atomic facts in the *Tractatus* is decidedly metaphysical. What we think of as their constituents are not ontologically more basic items whose combination produces atomic facts. They are instead common features shared by atomic facts, with no independent ontological standing, reached by a process of abstraction [Zalabardo 2015: 111–29].[5] I'm not attributing this version of the thought to Goddard and Judge, but their claim that atomic facts are the 'basic viable units' of Tractarian metaphysics is unquestionably a step in this direction.

But Goddard and Judge don't take atomic facts as Wittgenstein's absolute starting point either. They are themselves reached by a process of analysis that starts with everyday objects and facts. On this point, I think, they are also faithful to the *Tractatus*. I maintain that the analysis of everyday propositions into elementary propositions, and of ordinary facts into atomic facts, is guided by what we take to be the logical relations between everyday propositions, and between ordinary facts. These logical relations between propositions (their 'logical syntactic application' [3.327]) are the only

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[5] For this reading of the *Tractatus*, see also [Skyrms 1981; McCarty 1991].

reality to which our analysis is answerable. Very roughly, it's not that A follows from B and C and both B and C follow from A because A is the conjunction of B and C. Rather, A should be analysed as the conjunction of B and C because A follows from B and C and both B and C follow from A [Zalabardo 2010; 2015: 205–16].

By taking the objects and facts of everyday experience as their starting point, Goddard and Judge claim to have overcome the conceptual difficulties attending the idea that reality ultimately consists of propertyless particulars and their combinations. In the rest of the book, they address the question whether reality could actually satisfy this characterisation. In Chapter 2 they find that the Tractarian characterisation of ultimate reality, on their reading, has a model in geometry, with points playing the role of Objects and lines in the role of atomic facts. In Chapter 3, they develop a Hertz-inspired notion of 'particles *qua* vectors', and suggest that these might be seen as playing the role of Tractarian Objects. From this analogy they conclude:

> At the least we can say that an appropriate ontology for particle physics has some features in common with the ontology presented in the *Tractatus*. [Goddard and Judge 1982: 59]

I'm not going to discuss here this aspect of Goddard and Judge's work. What I want to focus on is the question whether the difficulties that Goddard and Judge raise for their conception of Tractarian Objects can be successfully handled, as they suggest, by taking the objects and facts of everyday experience as our starting point. As mentioned above, I agree with them that this is the right starting point. What I can't see, however, is that adopting this perspective helps us solve the problem they are concerned with. It might seem that taking ordinary facts and objects as our starting point makes the problem disappear. We are no longer tasked with explaining how ordinary facts and objects can be generated using Tractarian Objects as our only building blocks. On the view that Goddard and Judge ascribe to Wittgenstein, ordinary facts and objects are not built from atomic facts, and atomic facts are not built from Tractarian Objects. However, the problem remains, in a different form. The analysis of everyday facts into atomic facts, and of these into Tractarian Objects, is supposed to leave no remainder, and for this to be the case every feature of the analysandum has to be recoverable from the analysans. If we can't explain how the material properties of ordinary objects could emerge from combinations of simple bare particulars, the analysis of the former in terms of the latter is unsatisfactory.

Their position also leaves us with no explanation of why, when we analyse atomic facts into their constituents, 'properties drop out'. They discuss at length why there have to be atomic facts as well as ordinary facts, but they offer no explanation of why Wittgenstein would think that the constituents of atomic facts are bare particulars with no material properties.

4. Possibilities of combination

If, as I'm suggesting, Goddard and Judge's solution to these difficulties doesn't work, we are left with an interpretation of Wittgenstein's metaphysics exhibiting important shortcomings. Can we do better? I shall approach this question by concentrating on one of the more serious disadvantages of this interpretation—its inability to accommodate some of Wittgenstein's central claims about the form of Objects, expressed in the following passages from the 2.01s:

> 2.011 It is essential to a thing that it can be a constituent part of an atomic fact.

> 2.012 In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing *can* occur in an atomic fact the possibility of that atomic fact must already be prejudged in the thing.

2.0121 […] If things can occur in atomic facts, this possibility must already lie in them. […]

2.0123 If I know an object, then I also know all the possibilities of its occurrence in atomic facts.
(Every such possibility must lie in the nature of the object.)

These possibilities of combination of an Object, as Goddard and Judge saw clearly, are what Wittgenstein refers to as the form of the Object:

2.0141 The possibility of its occurrence in atomic facts is the form of the object.

These passages leave no doubt that, for Wittgenstein, Objects have natures that determine which combinations with other Objects produce possible atomic facts. And this is his explanation of the source of the contrast between collections of Objects that can be combined into an atomic fact and collections for which this is not possible:

2.0124 If all objects are given, then thereby are all *possible* atomic facts also given.

However, as we have seen, Goddard and Judge's reading can't accommodate this feature of Tractarian Objects. I want to consider what alternative conception of Tractarian Objects would enable us to avoid this problem.

I'll start by proposing a perspicuous formulation of the features of Tractarian Objects that we should aim to preserve. I'm going to do this by translating to atomic facts a notion that Wittgenstein introduces for propositions:

3.315 If we change a constituent part of a proposition into a variable, there is a class of propositions which are all the values of the resulting variable proposition.

A *variable proposition* is the result of replacing a constituent of a proposition with a variable. Wittgenstein is thinking of it as a function, taking propositional constituents as arguments and yielding propositions as values—the image of a propositional constituent under this function is the proposition produced by plugging in the constituent for the variable in the variable proposition—i.e. by replacing with the new constituent the one that had been taken out. However, it's clear that Wittgenstein is not thinking of a variable proposition as a *total* function on the class of propositional constituents. There will be propositional constituents that cannot be plugged in for the variable to produce a proposition.

I want to propose that we translate the operation of replacing a constituent with a variable from propositions to atomic facts. The result will be a *variable atomic fact*. Like their linguistic correlates, variable atomic facts will be functional in nature, taking Tractarian Objects as arguments and yielding atomic facts as values. The image of a Tractarian Object under this function will be the atomic fact produced by plugging in the Object for the variable in the variable atomic fact. Once again, Wittgenstein would not be thinking of variable atomic facts as total functions on the class of Tractarian Objects. For every variable atomic fact, there will be Objects that don't have an image under the corresponding function—no atomic fact would be produced by plugging in the Object for the variable. Let's say that an Object *fits into* a variable atomic fact just in case the Object has an image under the variable atomic fact.

Notice that making sense of talk of variable atomic facts doesn't require treating them as separate items in our ontology. All we need to presuppose is a relation that two atomic facts bear to one another when they are identical except that the position occupied by an Object in one is occupied by a different Object in the other. If F is an atomic fact and Object a is a constituent of F, we can think

of the variable atomic fact that we obtain by replacing a in F with a variable as the class of atomic facts that differ from F at most in that some other Object occupies in each of them the position that a occupies in F. This class defines a function whose domain is the class of Objects that occupy in some atomic fact in the class the position that a occupies in F. The image of an Object under this function will be the atomic fact in which the Object occupies the position that a occupies in F.

We can use the notion of a variable atomic fact to provide a construal of the possibilities of combination of a Tractarian Object that are supposed to lie in its nature. For each Object, there will be a class of variable atomic facts that the Object fits into. This class of variable atomic facts represents the Object's possibilities of combination into atomic facts—the images of the Object under these variable atomic facts are the atomic facts in which the Object can figure.

We can now formulate some claims concerning Wittgenstein's conception of Objects that I regard as fundamental. I'm not going to provide arguments for these attributions, but it seems to me that they are fairly uncontroversial—that these are features that Wittgenstein wanted his Objects to have, and the claim that Tractarian Objects lack these features can only be defended by arguing, as Goddard and Judge do, that they are incompatible with even more fundamental features of the notion.

First, I want to claim that, for Wittgenstein, it's not the case that all Objects have the same possibilities of combination:

> A.   It's not the case that all Objects fit into the same variable atomic facts.[6]

Second, I claim that, for Wittgenstein, Objects have 'natures' that determine which variable atomic facts they fit into and which they don't fit into.

> B.   Which variable atomic facts an Object fits into is determined by the nature of the Object.

It seems to me that there is no plausible construal of the 2.01s on which claims A and B don't come out true, and I think Goddard and Judge would agree that accommodating these claims is a desideratum for an interpreter of the *Tractatus*, even if their overall construal of Tractarian Objects can make no room for them.

Before we consider what conception of Tractarian Objects could accommodate these claims, I want to present one more claim to add to these. Notice that as far as A and B go, there might be no pattern to which variable atomic facts each Object fits into. In particular, different Objects might share some but not all of their possibilities of combination.

I don't think Wittgenstein's conception of Objects allows this. On the contrary, I think that, for Wittgenstein, any two Objects either fit into exactly the same variable atomic facts or there are no variable atomic facts into which they both fit, i.e.:

> C.   For any two Objects, if there is a variable atomic fact into which both fit, then for every variable atomic fact either both Objects fit into it or neither does.

It follows from claim C that the class of Objects is partitioned into *combinatorial families*, where all members of a combinatorial family fit into exactly the same variable atomic facts, and for two Objects different combinatorial families there is no variable atomic fact they both fit into [Zalabardo 2015: 135–36].

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[6] On the character of Wittgenstein's commitment to this claim, see footnote 9, below.

We can now present the source of Goddard and Judge's difficulties with these claims. It follows from A and C that there are multiple combinatorial families. But members of different combinatorial families have different possibilities of combination. Hence, by claim B, they must also have different natures. It follows that different Tractarian Objects sometimes have different natures. This is the source of the conflict between claims A–C and Goddard and Judge's construal of Tractarian Objects. According to them, all Objects belong to the same ontological category—they are all bare particulars. It follows that they can have different natures only by exemplifying different properties, but since bare particulars are all there is at the ground level, bare particulars can't have properties. Therefore, all Tractarian Objects must have the same nature, and claims A–C have to be rejected.

On this characterisation of the difficulty, its source is the view that all Tractarian Objects belong to the same ontological category. If we abandon this view, the features of Tractarian Objects expressed by claims A–C fall naturally into place. This enables us to identify the nature of an Object with the ontological category it belongs to. Then the possibilities of combination of an Object into atomic facts will be determined by the ontological category it belongs to. Notice that on the traditional conception of ontological categories, the link with possibilities of combination is perfectly natural. What, for example, determines whether an item can combine with a particular in a subject–predicate state of affairs, in the standard non-Tractarian sense, is whether this item is a first-level property. On this approach, the combinatorial family a Tractarian Object belongs to would be determined by its nature, i.e. by the ontological category it belongs to. Objects of different ontological categories would share no possibilities of combination, and Objects of the same ontological category would share all their possibilities of combination.[7]

5. The ontological categories of Tractarian Objects

By endorsing Copi's conception of Tractarian Objects as bare particulars, Goddard and Judge are taking sides in the traditional dispute between nominalist and realist readings of the *Tractatus*. According to nominalist readings, all Tractarian Objects are particulars; according to realist readings, Tractarian Objects include universals (properties and relations) as well as particulars.[8] If these are the only available options, maintaining that Tractarian Objects belong to multiple ontological categories would place us firmly on the side of realist interpreters. However, there are reasons for thinking that neither side provides an accurate representation of Wittgenstein's position. Colin Johnston has argued persuasively that Wittgenstein didn't think it was possible to say a priori what forms of elementary proposition, logical categories of names or ontological categories of Objects there are [Johnston 2009]. Any attempt to achieve this would lead, Wittgenstein tells us, 'to obvious

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[7] The account I've offered in this section of the features of Tractarian Objects that Goddard and Judge fail to accommodate is close to the excellent account offered in [Bradley 1987]. My main qualm about Bradley's account is his treatment of the idea that, for Wittgenstein, 'there is an ontological ground for the logico-syntactical employment of names in propositions' [ibid.: 52]. On Bradley's reading, Wittgenstein makes room for 'propositions without sense'—those whose constituents are combined with one another in ways that are not possible for their referents. These propositions would be expressed by syntactically impermissible sentences. But this picture is at odds with Wittgenstein's account of how his views differ from Frege's: 'Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed [...]' [5.4733]. For Wittgenstein, names have natures that determine their possibilities of combination, and the possibilities of combination of a name match those of its referent (on this point, see section 6, below). A proposition, according to the picture theory, is a fact. A proposition without sense would have to be a fact whose constituents are combined with one another in ways in which it's not possible for them to combine. This is not syntactically impermissible, as Bradley suggests, but impossible.

[8] For the nominalist reading, see [Griffin 1964]. For the realist reading, [Stenius 1960; Allaire 1966; Hacker 1986; Hintikka and Hintikka 1986].

nonsense' (5.5571). These enterprises do not belong to logic, but to its application, and the answers to these questions will only be reached as a result of analysis (5.557).[9]

On this reading, Wittgenstein would not be taking sides in the traditional dispute between nominalism and realism. Nor would he be assuming that once analysis is completed, either the nominalist or the realist would be shown to be right about the catalogue of ultimate entities. In fact, he seems to expect that the catalogue of ontological categories of Tractarian Objects will not correspond to traditional metaphysical classifications. This is suggested by his engagement with a kind of nonsense to which he devoted considerable attention. We find an example of this phenomenon in the *Prototractatus*:

> If '*A*' is used to mean a person, the proposition, '*A* is sitting', is admissible, but not if '*A*' signifies this book. [Wittgenstein 1971: 3.201412]

A similar example is considered in the *Notebooks*:

> If, e.g., I call some rod "A", and a ball "B", I can say that A is leaning against the wall, but not B. [Wittgenstein 1979: 70]

These issues have direct correlates concerning the situations that propositions represent as obtaining, including atomic facts, if we pretend that the propositions we are dealing with are elementary. On this pretence, since the proposition 'this person is sitting' is admissible, there will be an atomic fact that the proposition represents as obtaining—the fact of the person sitting, whose constituents would be the person and the property of sitting, which, on our pretence, would be Tractarian Objects. If we replace the person with a variable in this atomic fact, we obtain the variable atomic fact *x is sitting*. And the metaphysical correlate of Wittgenstein's observation is that this book doesn't fit into this variable atomic fact—there is no atomic fact in which this book occupies the position that this person occupies in *this person is sitting*. Similarly, there is no atomic fact in which the ball occupies the position that the rod occupies in *the rod is leaning against the wall*.

From this, we would have to conclude that the person has possibilities of combination that the book doesn't share, and the same goes for the rod and the ball. And in light of Claim C, this entails that the person and the book (or the rod and the ball) don't share *any* possibilities of combination, as they belong to different combinatorial families. Hence, while it might have seemed that there was a single ontological category including the book and the person (or the rod and the ball), this line of reasoning suggests that this isn't the case—that analysis will reveal that the ontological categories to which the ultimate constituents of reality belong are much more fine-grained than those of traditional metaphysics.[10]

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[9] Even with respect to claim A, above, our final verdict will have to wait until analysis is completed. Analysis might conceivably yield the result that there's only one kind of Object, and Wittgenstein's commitment to A has to be treated as a revisable expectation that things won't turn out like this. On this point, see Ramsey's remark: 'We cannot even tell that there are no atomic facts consisting of two terms of the same type' [Ramsey 1990: 417]. If this possibility isn't ruled out, then we should also be open to the possibility that analysis reveals that every Object fits into every variable atomic fact, or that any collection of Objects can be combined into an atomic fact. See [Johnston 2008] for an insightful discussion of this range of issues. However, I don't think these considerations are sufficient for undermining the attribution of claim A to Wittgenstein. If all Objects had the same possibilities of combination, the idea that Objects have natures in which their possibilities of combination lie would be rendered entirely vacuous.

[10] On the fine-grained character of form, see [Kannisto 1986: 105].

This approach faces important challenges. The person and the book do seem to share some combinatorial possibilities. They both fit, for example, in the variable atomic fact *x is slender*. But claim C wouldn't allow this. It would force us to say that if we replace the book with a variable in *the book is slender* and we replace the person with a variable in *the person is slender*, we obtain different variable atomic facts, whose constituents belong to different combinatorial families. And this line of reasoning would soon lead to a proliferation of combinatorial families and ontological categories that would call into question the usefulness of these notions [Zalabardo 2015: 176–79].

In any case, Wittgenstein seems to have felt an enduring attraction to the idea that logical and ontological categories are more fine-grained than we might have thought. We still find it expressed in 1929, where it is supported by the same line of reasoning that we found in the *Prototractatus* and the *Notebooks*:

> It is of course absolutely false to speak of *one* subject–predicate form. In reality there is not *one*, but very many. For if there were only one, then all nouns and all adjectives would have to be intersubstitutable. For all intersubstitutable words belong to one class. But even ordinary language shows that this is not the case. On the face of it I may say 'This chair is brown' and 'The surface of this chair is brown'. But if I replace 'brown' by 'heavy', I can utter only the first proposition and not the second. [Waismann 1979: 46][11]

This text comes from a period when Wittgenstein was already starting to revise the views that he had presented in the *Tractatus*, so we must treat it with caution as a source for his earlier views. But it suggests, at the very least, that Wittgenstein had considered developing his views in this direction.

6. Formal facts?

I'm attributing to Wittgenstein a conception of Objects according to which they belong to multiple ontological categories, which may or may not coincide with those of 'surface' grammar or traditional metaphysics. Which ontological category an Object belongs to would determine its possibilities of combination, and two Objects would share either all their possibilities of combination or none. This construal of Tractarian Objects enables us to accommodate the features expressed by claims A–C, thereby avoiding a substantial shortcoming of the construal advocated by Goddard and Judge.

However, one of the problems encountered by Goddard and Judge's construal also poses a threat to the conception of Tractarian Objects I'm recommending. We saw that Goddard and Judge had trouble with the idea that there could be different kinds of Objects. If at the ground level there's nothing but bare particulars, we don't seem to have the resources for sustaining facts to the effect that different Objects belong to different kinds. These facts would have to ultimately consist in a combination of bare particulars, and it is hard to envisage how they could take this form. It can be argued, however, that the problem doesn't depend on the claim that Objects are bare particulars, but is a problem that afflicts the very idea of an ontological category, if reality ultimately consists of Objects and their combination into atomic facts. The problem is that, on this picture, the fact that an Object belongs to a certain ontological category, like any other fact, would have to emerge from atomic facts in which the Object is combined with other Objects. But this would result in a vicious circle, since which combinations with other Objects a given Object can appear in is determined precisely by which ontological category it belongs to.

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[11] See also [Wittgenstein 1974a: 205; 1975: 119].

I want to argue that this is a serious problem for the metaphysical picture that I'm attributing to Wittgenstein, but not a reason for rejecting the attribution. On the contrary, one would expect the correct interpretation of Wittgenstein's ideas to render them vulnerable to this problem, as Wittgenstein accepted that, on his position, the status of facts about ontological categories was far from straightforward. I want to end with a brief discussion of this issue.

Wittgenstein is explicitly concerned with the possibility of *speaking about* the instantiation of formal properties and relations by Objects and atomic facts. He tells us that *in a certain sense* we can do this:

> 4.122 We can speak in a certain sense of formal properties of objects and atomic facts, or of properties of the structure of facts, and in the same sense of formal relations and relations of structures.

However, the sense in which we can speak about these things is problematic, since we can't do this with propositions that represent these facts as obtaining. He makes this point in the same section, after telling us that he will refer to structural properties and relations as *internal*:

> The holding of such internal properties and relations cannot, however, be asserted by propositions, but it shows itself in the propositions, which present the facts and treat of the objects in question.

This passage makes a positive point and a negative point. It tells us first that there can be no propositions representing these facts as obtaining. Then it presents the alternative sense in which it is possible to speak of these facts—they show themselves in propositions representing the relevant atomic facts, and for Objects, in propositions representing (non-formal) atomic facts in which they figure. Here I'm going to be concerned with the negative point, focusing on the case of Objects—no proposition can represent the instantiation of formal properties and relations by Objects. First, I'm going to consider why Wittgenstein thinks that there cannot be propositions representing these facts.[12] Then I'm going to argue that the difficulty doesn't affect merely propositions representing these facts, but the very idea that there are facts of this kind.

I think Wittgenstein's argument invokes a claim concerning the possibilities of combination of Objects that we haven't considered yet:

D. All the variable atomic facts an Object fits into are of the same form.[13]

This claim is a source of serious difficulties for Wittgenstein's position,[14] and I can't see that he offers a cogent defence of it, but it plays a crucial role in some of his arguments in support of claims concerning what propositions can't say, not only in connection with the instantiation of formal properties and relations, but also, crucially, in his argument for the claim that 'no proposition can say anything about itself' [3.332], and the resulting treatment of Russell's paradox.[15] I think that with claim D in place his conclusions can be validly derived from other views he uncontroversially holds,

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[12] See [Zalabardo 2015: 166–73].

[13] In [Zalabardo 2015: 128–29] I formulate this as the claim that the ultimate constituents of facts and propositions are maximally specific with respect to form.

[14] The difficulties afflict primarily particulars, which seem capable of figuring in facts of different forms. See [Zalabardo 2015: 126–29].

[15] In the absence of claim D, the following is a *non sequitur*: 'If, for example, we suppose that the function $F(fx)$ could be its own argument, then there would be a proposition "$F(F(fx))$", and in this the outer function F and the inner function F must have different meanings; for the inner has the form $\phi(fx)$, the outer the form $\psi(\phi(fx))$' [3.333]. I discuss this point in [Zalabardo 2015: 152–59].

and I can't see how this could be achieved in its absence. I offer this circumstance as my main piece of evidence for attributing claim D to Wittgenstein.[16]

I want to reconstruct Wittgenstein's reasoning by focusing on a specific example. Let a be an Object, and let Fx be a variable atomic fact, and assume that a fits into Fx—i.e. Fa is an atomic fact. According to Wittgenstein, there cannot be a proposition representing a as fitting into Fx. Why is this?

On Wittgenstein's pictorial account of propositional representation, a proposition is a fact—an actually obtaining fact, that represents items in the world as combined with one another in the same way in which the constituents of the depicting fact are combined with one another [Zalabardo 2015: 46–68]. It is a corollary of this account of propositional representation that a propositional constituent has to have the same possibilities of combination as its referent [Zalabardo 2015: 141].[17] Assume that the constituents of the fact that a fits into Fx are a, Fx and the *fits into* relation. So a proposition that represents a as fitting into Fx would have to be a fact in which propositional constituents referring to a, Fx, and the *fits into* relation are combined with one another in the way in these items would have to be combined with one another in order for the fact to obtain—in order for a to fit into Fx.

Let P be a proposition with which we try to represent a as fitting into Fx. P will have to have a constituent, 'a', that refers to a. If we replace 'a' in P with a variable, in the process described in 3.315, we obtain a variable proposition Gx. Now P can be represented as G'a'. Notice that Gx will have two constituents, one of which refers to, and hence has the same form as, Fx. It follows that Gx itself can't have the same form as Fx.

We now have everything we need for an argument for the conclusion that P doesn't succeed in representing a as fitting into Fx:

1. 'a' fits into Gx (premise)
2. Gx is not of the same form as Fx (premise)
3. 'a' doesn't fit into Fx (from 1 and 2 by claim D)
4. a fits into Fx (premise)
5. 'a' doesn't refer to a (from 3 and 4, by the picture theory)
6. P is not about a (from 5)
7. P doesn't represent a as fitting into Fx (from 6)

I think this argument provides the most plausible rendition of Wittgenstein's reasons for thinking that no proposition can represent a as fitting into Fx. I also think that the argument validly derives its conclusion from its premises.

Wittgenstein's explicit claims regarding the instantiation of formal properties and relations by Objects and atomic facts in section 4.122 concern in the first instance the sense in which we can say that these facts obtain—there can be no propositions representing these facts as obtaining, but

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[16] As with claim A, Wittgenstein's commitment to claim D can only be treated as a prediction on what analysis will discover. However, in light of the crucial role that, on my reading, claim D plays in his views, this foundation is worryingly weak. I think this is one of the most vulnerable points of his overall position. See [Zalabardo 2015: 156].

[17] According to Michael Dummett, this aspect of Wittgenstein's thought can also be found in Frege: 'Frege held that what stands for an object, a proper name, is itself an object, a complete expression. What stands for something incomplete, a function, is itself incomplete […]. There is thus a congruence in logical type between the referents of expressions and the expressions themselves' [Dummett 1981: 485].

these facts show themselves to us in propositions representing the atomic facts and, in the case of Objects, in propositions representing the atomic facts in which the Objects figure. This circumstance invites the attribution to Wittgenstein of a position according to which reality includes, not only non-formal atomic facts and the Objects that figure in them, but also formal facts about these, with the only difference between them consisting in our ability to represent facts of each kind. Non-formal atomic facts are represented by (elementary) propositions, while formal facts cannot be represented by propositions, but show themselves in propositions representing the non-formal atomic facts that instantiate the formal facts.

However, I don't think this position should be attributed to Wittgenstein. One reason for this is that the same considerations that enable Wittgenstein to establish that there are no propositions representing formal facts can be easily redeployed to establish that there can be no formal facts. We can see this in particular in our example, with a reductio argument against the claim that there is a fact to the effect that a fits into Fx. Assume towards a contradiction that it is a fact that a fits into Fx, and assume that it is an atomic fact. Then if we replace a in this fact with a variable, the result, *y fits into Fx*, is a variable atomic fact. However, just as Gx, above, and for the same reasons, this variable atomic fact is not of the same form as Fx. Hence, since a fits into Fx, a fits into two variable atomic facts of different forms, which contradicts claim D, as desired. We can conclude that there is no fact to the effect that a fits into Fx. This fact, which, according to 4.122, shows itself in a proposition representing Fa, doesn't actually exist.

I think that this metaphysical conclusion, like the conclusion concerning the representability of formal facts, can be validly derived from principles that Wittgenstein accepts. The question for us is how our assessment of Wittgenstein's position should be affected by this outcome. One possibility would be to try and explain away the tension, but this might turn out to go against Wittgenstein's intentions. As we saw at the beginning, Wittgenstein's ultimate goal might be precisely to exhibit the incoherence of the rules that govern philosophical activity. It might be that Wittgenstein thought that the status of formal facts was one point where this incoherence comes to the surface: there have to be formal facts but there can't be any. In order for this to count as a success in his destructive enterprise, we would need to be convinced that the premises from which the contradiction is derived are designated by the rules that govern philosophical activity as principles we should endorse, and this conviction would have to survive the realisation that these principles lead to a contradiction. I don't think these conditions are satisfied, but it may well be that Wittgenstein thought that they were satisfied, and that he saw the status of formal facts as one of the central props of his therapeutic programme.

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