

Citation for the published version:

Balaska, M. (2019). Seeing the Stove as World: Significance in the Early Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ph.in.12218>

Document Version: Accepted Version

This is the peer reviewed version which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/ph.in.12218>

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

General rights

Copyright© and Moral Rights for the publications made accessible on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners.

Please check the manuscript for details of any other licences that may have been applied and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. You may not engage in further distribution of the material for any profitmaking activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute both the url (<http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/>) and the content of this paper for research or private study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, any such items will be temporarily removed from the repository pending investigation.

Enquiries

Please contact University of Hertfordshire Research & Scholarly Communications for any enquiries at rsc@herts.ac.uk

Seeing the stove as world: significance (Bedeutung) in the early Wittgenstein

Maria Balaska

Abstract

What is it to see a stove as world (als Welt) and why does the early Wittgenstein use such a curious example to describe what it means to see something as significant (Bedeutend)? I argue that Wittgenstein's odd choice can be best understood in the light of a conceptual relation between value and semantic meaning. To that purpose, I draw attention to his use of the word *Bedeutung* to denote value, and to the direct connection he draws between seeing as world and seeing with the whole logical space. To see a stove as *Bedeutend*, I conclude, is to see it in the background of the propositional contexts in which a stove figures meaningfully.

My topic is the relation between semantic meaning and value. By value I do not mean arithmetical value, nor monetary value, but the significance or importance that things can come to have for us. Although this kind of value often appears as aesthetic, or moral, or both, and although it can be useful to distinguish between these aspects (such as, for instance, when the aesthetic value might contradict the moral), the distinction is not relevant for my purposes. In order to articulate and discuss my question I will turn to Wittgenstein's early writings on value, and more specifically to certain remarks from his *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, that suggest a conceptual relation between semantic meaning and value, but which have not, to the best of my knowledge, been read that way so far.

Turning to Wittgenstein to explore the relation between semantic meaning¹ and value might sound odd at first, given that the early Wittgenstein draws a clear distinction between facts and value, hence between propositional content and value. According to Wittgenstein, facts are valueless: they all stand at the same level, so to speak. If facts make up the world, and value is not about facts, then it seems that value can, presumably, not be a part of the world. Furthermore, since propositions are facts (that represent facts), it seems that value cannot be expressed in language either. Hence there cannot be any propositions that express value; such propositions would have to be able to express something higher, which is impossible since propositions only represent (valueless) facts.

Here is the relevant passage in the *Tractatus*²:

All propositions are of equal value.

¹ Throughout the text, when I speak of meaning I always refer to semantic meaning, even if I do not add the word semantic or linguistic.

² Wittgenstein, L. (1986), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C.K. Ogden (trans.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, §6.4–6.42

The sense (*Sinn*) of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists – and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.

So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics.

Propositions can express nothing that is higher.

At first sight, Wittgenstein's propositions seem to exclude any straightforward relation between the realm of meaning and that of value. Coupled with his perplexing references to the viewpoint '*sub specie aeterni*' (the viewpoint from eternity), and its relation to the mystical³, these propositions might, instead, give rise to the idea that value in the early Wittgenstein is ineffable⁴ and thus not dependent on the realm of meaning in any way.

However, there have also been readings that have understood these Tractarian propositions to mean not that value is ineffable but that it calls for a different kind of expression, not as a subject matter but rather as what penetrates a proposition⁵, our words and utterances as a whole⁶. These interpretations 'take seriously Wittgenstein's statement that there is nothing in a proposition that can express the higher'⁷, but instead of inferring an ineffability thesis from it, they propose 'that the sign for the ethical is any sign', and that 'what makes [an utterance] ethical does not reside in any of its internal features but our own ethical use of such language'⁸. Trying to clarify what this 'ethical use' means (and perhaps to avoid the danger of circularity), James Conant writes: 'what makes a proposition ethical (we might try saying) is its "point" (not its subject matter); and what gives it a specifically ethical "point" is that ... and now what are we to say? We can try to go on and say things like: ... that it seeks "to express", "to give voice to", "a way of living in", "a way of looking at", "an attitude towards", "the world"⁹.

But, in my view, this reply, although correct in its direction, is also dangerously abstract and does not say much about the relation of that ethical point to language. What is this way of living or looking that is not expressed in a particular subject matter but that can still be expressed? In this paper, I

³ Wittgenstein, L. *ibid.*, §6.45, 6.522

⁴ See Hacker, P.M.S. (2000), 'Was he trying to whistle it?', In A. Crary and R. Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 353–387; Russell, B. (1918), *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London: Green and Co.; McGuinness, B. (1966) The mysticism of the *Tractatus*, *The Philosophical Review*, 75, pp. 305–328.

⁵ See Diamond, C. (2000) 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *The New Wittgenstein*, *ibid.*, pp. 149–173, p. 153

⁶ Like logic, ethics is distinguished from a representational activity in the early Wittgenstein. 'Ethics does not treat of the world. It must be a condition of the world, like logic'. Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, p.77.

⁷ Donatelli, P. (2005) 'The problem of the higher in the *Tractatus*'. In D.Z. Phillips and M. von der Ruhr (eds.), *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, London: Routledge, pp. 11–38, p.3

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁹ Conant, J. (2005) 'What Ethics in the *Tractatus* is not'. In D.Z. Phillips and M. von der Ruhr (eds.), *Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy*, London: Routledge, pp. 39–88, p.70

explore this question, and furthermore argue that the emergence of value not only *can* be expressed, but also it involves an opening to the realm of meaning (the realm of language in use and embedded in our practices). My questions, then, are what role meaning plays in what Wittgenstein calls seeing something as significant, and whether/how this way of seeing involves our concepts, especially given Wittgenstein's sharp distinction between value and propositional facts.

I will argue that, for the early Wittgenstein, value or significance involves an attentiveness towards the multiplicity of the realm of meaning. This attentive way of seeing has been given different descriptions by Wittgenstein, such as seeing as world (*als Welt*), seeing with the whole world as background, seeing *sub specie aeternitatis*, seeing with the whole logical space. Although some of these ways of seeing could again tempt us to think of the ascription of value as something that happens in a transcendent way and cannot arise through language, I draw attention to what seeing through the logical space means and use this phrase to understand the rest of the descriptions. Seeing with the whole logical space can make the connection to the realm of meaning more prominent. I put that connection to the test, as it were, by using it to understand a curious remark from the *Notebooks*, one where Wittgenstein describes the case of a stove as being significant (*bedeutend*), which presents a difficulty because of Wittgenstein's curious choice of example. The paper's central idea that significance involves recovery of possibilities of meaning qua recovery of our practices can help us make sense of the example.

***Sinn* and *Bedeutung* qua significance**

To begin with, I want to draw attention to the fact that in his early work Wittgenstein very often uses the words *Sinn* (sense) and *Bedeutung* (meaning) to refer to value. In the *Notebooks*, for example, he writes that 'good and evil are somehow connected to the meaning of the world (*Sinn der Welt*)', and two entries later he links God to the meaning (*Sinn*) of life: 'To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning'. Elsewhere he uses *bedeutend* for valuable: 'as a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant (*unbedeutend*); as world each one equally significant (*bedeutend*)', and *Bedeutung* for significance: 'Things acquire "significance" ("*Bedeutung*") only through their relation to my will.'¹⁰ This is not restricted to the *Notebooks* but also appears in the *Tractatus*, where, for example, if we go back to the previously quoted propositions, Wittgenstein treats the sense of the world and value synonymously: 'the sense of the world (*Sinn der Welt*) must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists.'

This phenomenon of polysemy (and synonymy) is not restricted to Wittgenstein's own choice of the same words, nor to the German language: we often, in many different languages, speak of things as

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Notebooks*, *ibid.*, pp. 7, 74, and 83 respectively.

being meaningful when they have some value for us. This, I think, is seen or used by Wittgenstein as a case in which grammar can teach us something about the terms involved, namely, it can teach us that there is a conceptual relation between the two. There are at least two reasons to think so and not to dismiss Wittgenstein's choice of words as a case of random polysemy. First, the words *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* play a very central and very particular role in Wittgenstein's early work, and they are not just words that come up every now and then and can be used lightly. One of the main issues (if not the main issue) in the *Tractatus* is how propositions can have sense and words can have meaning, and, given Wittgenstein's commitment to clarity, it is highly unlikely that he would use the same words to denote something different unless he thought that there was some conceptual connection between them. Second, this seeming connection, through his choice of the same words to denote meaning and value, is further strengthened by certain other remarks in the *Notebooks* in which a conceptual relation is straightforwardly suggested.

For example, one of the above-quoted remarks in the *Notebooks* continues as follows: 'If good and evil willing affects the world it can only affect the boundaries of the world, not the facts. The world must so to speak wax or wane as a whole. As if by accession or loss of meaning (*Sinn*).' Also, in the remark that immediately precedes his remark on seeing as *bedeutend* (significant), we read: 'each thing modifies the whole of logical world, the whole of logical space, so to speak. The thought forces itself upon one, the thing seen *sub specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space'¹¹.

In the first remark, Wittgenstein seems to relate a change in whether the world is a significant world, with whether there is more or less (linguistic) meaning in it. And while this first remark's 'as if' could tempt us to think that Wittgenstein is merely drawing a metaphor between the world changing as a whole (becoming a good world) and a change in the status of linguistic meaning, the second remark is much more radical. It draws a direct relation between the realm of linguistic meaning and that of value. Let me explain why: the notion of a viewpoint '*sub specie aeterni(tatis)*' is used in Wittgenstein's early work to describe a way of seeing something as valuable, as (aesthetically and ethically) good. It is the view from eternity that allows us to see the world as a whole and gives rise to a mystical feeling (§6.45). Given that this concept appears in the 6.4 series of the *Tractatus*, which begins with the above-quoted 'all propositions are of equal value', the view '*sub specie aeternitatis*' is the only way to contemplate the world as valuable. Besides, in the same remark from the *Notebooks* right before he introduces the concept of logical space, he writes: 'The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics.'¹²

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *ibid.*, p.83

¹² *ibid.*

Furthermore, in the early Wittgenstein ‘logical space’ is the realm of possibilities that allows for a mere sign to be a symbol, the space that allows for signification, or, as the later Wittgenstein would put it, the space of grammar. In other words, as will be discussed below, the logical space is a central concept for Wittgenstein’s account of meaning and sense. In Tractarian terminology, logical space is the space of all possible connections between facts, and therefore between states of affairs and objects, which can only be opened up (shown) through the process of analysis of propositions, and which, as I discuss below, is a process of paying attention to the symbol, namely, to the way signs are used intelligibly.

However, the claim remains radical. For how could the accession or loss of meaning, the logical space or the opening of a space of possibilities of meaning have anything to do with the emergence of value, if value is distinct from propositional facts, and therefore cannot be expressed in propositions? A contradiction seems to lurk here: on the one hand, with the 6.4 section Wittgenstein seems to suggest that value cannot be part of linguistic meaning; on the other hand, a strong connection between the realm of linguistic meaning and significance is also put forward. I will pursue these questions through the following remark from the *Notebooks*, where Wittgenstein uses the word ‘*bedeutend*’ to denote valuable/significant. In this remark Wittgenstein offers us a rather odd example of what it means to see something as *bedeutend* (meaningful).

As a thing among things, each thing is equally **insignificant** (*unbedeutend*); as world each one equally **significant** (*bedeutend*). If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove, IT was my world, and everything else paled by contrast with it. For it is equally possible to take the bare present image as the worthless momentary picture in the whole temporal world, and as the true world among shadows.¹³

This remark appears often in the literature on Wittgenstein’s concept of ethical and aesthetic value, but, to the best of my knowledge, none of the interpretations or commentaries of the remark have explained why he chooses to use the example of a stove instead of a work of art¹⁴.

The remark has usually been understood as highlighting the importance that ‘seeing’ or ‘contemplating’ has for value, and more specifically the difference between seeing through a perspective of facts and seeing through a perspective of significance. Seeing a thing ‘as a thing among things’ is the perspective of facts, in which, as we also see later in the *Tractatus*, there is no value. Value or significance is not about something other than facts – as if I were to change my object of

¹³ *ibid*, translation modified, my emphasis

¹⁴ See for example Appelqvist, H. (2013) ‘Why does Wittgenstein say that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same’, in P. Sullivan and M. Potter (eds), *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 40–58; Tilghman, B.R. (1991) Wittgenstein, *Ethics and Aesthetics: The View from Eternity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

sight and start looking at something else – but about a different way of contemplating facts: it is about seeing the same thing differently.

Wittgenstein juxtaposes seeing as world to seeing something as a thing among things, namely, to the perspective of the particular. From the perspective of the particular, the stove has certain qualities that are similar to, or different from, other qualities, and if it got our attention, it would be by virtue of such qualities. For example, as a thing among things the stove might be bigger than the teapot, more useful than the pan, less decorated than the vase, etc., and, depending on our needs, we would look for it, deem it important or invest our attention and time on it. However, this is not quite where significance emerges. For the perspective of significance must arise, Wittgenstein says, beyond the particular and the contentful, when there is no comparison between things. This clear distinction between the emergence of value and any particular set of properties or facts also comes up later in the *Lecture on Ethics*¹⁵ in which Wittgenstein juxtaposes absolute value to relative value, namely, to value that stems from particular facts about a thing, or particular reasons why one case is better than another – reminiscent, perhaps, of the Kantian distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. Significance does not mean the superiority of one thing over another; it is not a matter of qualification. Hence the use of the word ‘*bläss*’ (paled)¹⁶ in the above passage (‘everything else would be *bläss* by contrast to the stove when the stove becomes significant’). Paled does not mean valueless. It is not that the stove becomes significant by comparison to other things, but rather that when the stove becomes significant (or part of what it means for this to happen is that) one becomes absorbed in it, in such a way that the rest recedes into the background. A helpful example here could be when one is absorbed by an activity, say playing the piano, in which case other noises, or the fact that people may

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, L. (1965). ‘A Lecture on Ethics’, *Philosophical Review* 74.

¹⁶ I think that Donatelli is wrong to attribute the importance to the word *bläss* that he does. He follows the translation ‘colourless’ of the word *bläss* and seems to read this reference to colour quite literally, as if Wittgenstein was saying that the stove has colour but all things around it do not, and he seems to infer from his reading that this is a case of nonsense where an object (a concept) is cut off from its logical connections with other things. As he writes, ‘We want to say, for example, that the colour of a leaf is the true colour and that the colour of things around it is not really colour in comparison to it. We want to cut off colour-description from its ordinary environment and imagine at the same time that there is a meaning assigned to the notion of a green leaf (while on the contrary this assignment depends upon the context of meaning which has been imaginatively abolished). There needs to be both the notion of colour as it is meant in ordinary contexts (in which a meaning is assigned to such a word) and the same word as being cut off from such ordinary contexts: a colour as being compared to a world in which there is no colour around it. [...] This wonder comes from wanting to see both that object as it is identified through its ordinary connections with things and language and as it is cut off from such connections’ (in Donatelli, *ibid*, p.19). Donatelli’s conclusion is very different from what I argue for in this paper. I argue that value arises not when a thing is cut off from ordinary connections with other things, but rather in the very recovery of these connections. I think that he is mistaken to draw the conclusion he does, and one of the reasons for this mistake can be remedied if we are more careful with the translation of the German word *bläss*. *Bläss* does not mean ‘colourless’ but rather ‘pale’; the German word for ‘colourless’ would be *farblos*. Eli Friedlander is right when he chooses to translate *bläss* as ‘paled’ instead of ‘colourless’ (See Friedlander, E. (2017), ‘Logic, Ethics and Existence in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus’, in R. Agam-Segal, E. Dain (eds), *Wittgenstein’s Moral Thought*, London: Routledge, p. 42). Wittgenstein, then, is here using a metaphor to say that things become unimportant, they recede into the background just as when a colour loses its intensity and is paled.

be around, can go unnoticed; they become faded, like background noise or images.

So far, so good. Most interpretations of the passage (and of the overall Wittgensteinian approach to value) see in it a clear rejection of an account of value as stemming from predicating properties. This is partly why this passage is usually understood as referring to a work of art, even though ‘curiously it is not an example that [Wittgenstein] explicitly connects with art’¹⁷. Seeing something as world or seeing something in holistic terms has traditionally been applied to works of art, where none of the parts of the work of art play a particular role in its aesthetic value. Indeed, aesthetic perception does not see things as belonging to a certain class, but rather in their own right; it does not consider them as useful for this or that purpose, because of this or that quality, but simply as being. If one is asked why one contemplates an object as a work of art, one will be unable to point to some particular quality of the object. In that sense, the theme of the painting and the specific pigment used by the painter are not relevant to an aesthetic contemplation of a painting. Rather, its aesthetic value lies in it as a whole, in an organic unity. This is, for example, how Benjamin Tilghman understands the Wittgensteinian stove. He treats it as an example of a work of art, and interprets it as follows: ‘the work of art selects an object, a scene, a situation and makes that object stand still to be contemplated and in so doing treats the object as if it were a world unto itself so that it becomes my world and a representative of the whole’¹⁸. But what is this whole, of which a stove becomes representative? Is Wittgenstein just saying to us that if a stove was in a museum then its value would no longer lie in the fact that we can use it to cook, or in its black colour, or in the material it is made of?

Although this interpretation (that reads the stove as a work of art) pays *some* justice to Wittgenstein’s insistence that value is not about particular facts, it still fails to do two things. First, it does not address what I have presented here as Wittgenstein’s suggestion that value is related to linguistic meaning. Correct as it might be that value is to be distinguished from the predicating of particular properties, and should be, instead, connected with a view as world, it is still unclear how seeing something as world relates to the realm of meaning, if not through particular facts or concepts. Second, it fails to address Wittgenstein’s peculiar choice of example. Wittgenstein did not choose the example of a work of art, and it is highly unlikely that what he had in mind was a stove à la Duchamp’s urinal. Why didn’t Wittgenstein use the example of a work of art?

These two unaddressed issues are, I think, partly responsible for Tilghman’s confusion regarding the way logical space relates to significance in the case of an everyday object when he says, ‘To see a particular thing together with the whole logical space suggests that it can only be considered as one thing, one fact, among all others. As such it can have no importance or significance. This surely will

¹⁷ See Tilghman, *ibid.*, p. 53

¹⁸ *ibid.*

not do as an account of a work of art'¹⁹.

This does not sound right. Wittgenstein does not need to introduce a distinction between a particular thing seen with the whole logical space and a work of art seen with the whole logical space. Rather, I argue that seeing with the whole logical space offers us, as it were, the basis for significance, which can take different forms (aesthetic, moral, religious, etc.).

I will now explain what 'logical space' amounts to in Wittgenstein's early work and how it relates to meaning. Then I will address Wittgenstein's 'curious' choice of example, and use it to show how seeing something as significant relates to recovering possibilities of meaning.

Logical space and possibilities of meaning

What is seeing with the whole logical space? Tilghman offers the following explanation: 'The figure of logical space is a metaphor for logical possibility. The coordinates, as it were, of logical space are *Tractatus* objects and the space that they define is thus the range of all possibilities and the locus of all possible states of affairs. A state of affairs, a fact, can be said to occupy a point in this logical space. To see the world under the aspect of eternity is to see it together with logical space. And this, in effect, is to see its essence. The essence of the world is that it consists of just these logically independent facts amongst all the logically possible states of affairs'.²⁰

This way of characterising logical space, though correct in some aspects, does not allow us to understand what its recovery really amounts to. Rather, it sounds too abstract and runs the risk of sounding closer to metaphysical reflections, or to a mystical view of the world, than to our common everyday world – to which a humble stove belongs.

Tilghman is right to say, as previously mentioned, that logical space is the space of possibilities of meaning. But I think that when one sees something together with the whole logical space one does not see logically independent facts; rather, one brings out the dimension of what the *Tractatus* calls the symbol (or expression), namely what the various propositional facts have in common, the semantic and logical relations between them.

Let me try to explain why (although it is extremely hard to summarise Wittgenstein's account of meaning and logical space in a paper, let alone in a part of it, especially given the various different interpretations of the issue). Several interpretations²¹ have stressed that meaning is use already in the

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ See Conant, J. (1998) 'Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use', *Philosophical Investigations* 21:3 July 1998; Floyd, J. (1998) "The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" In L. Rouser (ed.), *Loneliness*. Notre Dame, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Religion; Friedlander, E. (2001) *Signs of Sense, Reading Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Ishiguro, H. (1969) 'Use and Reference of Names'. In P. Winch (ed.). *Studies in the*

early Wittgenstein and can be recovered through paying attention to the ways we use language. There are indeed parts in the early Wittgenstein in which meaning and sense are clearly understood to presuppose a context of use, such as: ‘A sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logico-syntactic employment’²², and ‘Only together with their syntactic use do [name signs] signalise one particular logical form’²³.

Meaning in the *Tractatus* belongs to a realm of form and possibilities that is given by objects (world) and names (language) as what underlies the realm of facts (propositions are also facts). Facts are in logical space (the facts in logical space are the world), and logical space is a metaphor for the realm of possibilities, according to which objects come together and form facts. Objects in the world are correlates of names in language, and in order to open up the realm of form or logical space that surrounds and makes facts possible, one needs to be attentive to the various ways a sign is used, or, to put it differently, one has to pay attention to the various ways in which a sign functions as a symbol. For Wittgenstein, a symbol (or expression) is an essential feature of the sense of a proposition, one that a proposition has in common with other propositions. In other words, to know the symbol one needs to pay attention to a variety of propositions, not just a single one: ‘Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression [a symbol] ... An expression presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions’.²⁴

If we keep a reading of the realm of meaning as a realm of form, then to know the meaning of the verb ‘to be’ one needs to pay attention to its use as a copula, its role as a sign of identity and its role as the expression of existence. From the interpretative point of view followed here, recovering meaning is not the recovery of some particular referential relation between one object and one name; meaning cannot be regarded apart from a realm of possibilities. On those readings that regard meaning in the *Tractatus* in terms of use as opposed to reference, the Tractarian analysis is not a matter of digging into reality or language to find some basic atomic constituents or ontological anchor points. Recovering meaning is rather the recovery of contexts of use, or, to be more faithful to the Tractarian terminology, it is a recovery of logical forms, and logical space. Clarity is achieved via the Tractarian analysis through a recovery of the symbol, namely, a recovery of the particular ways in which signs signify, given that ‘in the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways – and therefore belongs to two different symbols – or that two words, which

Philosophy of Wittgenstein, London: Routledge, pp. 20–50; Livingston, P. (2004) ‘“Meaning is Use” in the *Tractatus*’, *Philosophical Investigations* 27:1.

²² Wittgenstein, L. (1986), *ibid.* §3.327

²³ Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *ibid.*, p. 53

²⁴ Wittgenstein, L. (1986), *ibid.*, §3.31–3.311.

signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition'²⁵.

Given that Wittgenstein stated clearly in the *Tractatus* that the forms of the elementary propositions cannot be given *a priori* (§5.55), the process of analysis cannot ever have a foreseeable end, and thus *the whole* logical space can never be given in advance, for to do so one would have to know all the facts, thus one would have to occupy what could be called God's perspective. In that sense, the way I read Wittgenstein's remark on seeing something with the whole logical space is not as seeing *the whole* logical space of something, but rather as opening up to a referential whole, namely, to the commonality between the various propositional contexts in which a sign appears meaningfully.

This level of Tractarian form that conditions the production of sense and all facts, is by nature impossible to express as a particular content. If this level of logical space, as a web of meaningful relations between (propositional) facts depends on language as a living organism, and therefore is subject to changes and transformations, it cannot have any specific content attached to it once and for all. This notion of meaning as a realm of possibilities that is to be distinguished from particular factual representation, and that is tied up with language as a living organism, is presented in proposition 4.002 of the *Tractatus*. Here, Wittgenstein draws a distinction between sense-making and recovering meaning, and presents language not as an isolated system of representation but as constitutively bound up with our ways of living:

Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is – just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced. Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it. It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is. Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes. The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated.

To begin with, Wittgenstein says that we can produce sense and communicate without recognising meaning, that is to say, without knowing the conditions under which we can make sense, namely, the range of possibilities that condition representation²⁶. This is a fact about human beings, but it is not the whole picture. On the one hand, we have the activity of representing and producing sense; on the other hand, we have the recovery of the conditions of representing and making sense. In proposition 4.002 Wittgenstein introduces the notion of 'human organism' and seems to present the recovery of meaning as a question of being attentive to the different conventions and contexts of life.

Reading the same proposition (4.002), Russell would understand it as a further indication that

²⁵ *ibid.* §3.

²⁶ See Friedlander (2001), *ibid.*

ordinary language is imperfect and that through analysis we can reach an uncomplicated level of elementary propositions and hence of an ideal language. But it is precisely in the midst of the complications that language, as it is, is in perfect logical order²⁷. The fact that language disguises thought does not mean that there is a level of pure thought underneath that is rendered impure by language, but rather that the form of the body (the body of meaning) will show itself in the way we use our propositions.

This is how we should understand the impossibility of giving the forms of elementary propositions *a priori*, namely, the impossibility ‘to give the number of names with different meanings *a priori*’. To do so, to recover the multiplicity of form, one needs to pay attention to the way we use language rather than imposing an artificial language where the multiplicity is sacrificed. However, this is not easy, Wittgenstein warns, because the outward form of clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body. This is why human beings can make sense without recovering its conditions. Being attentive to it is what allows for significance/value to emerge.

The stove as world

With this understanding of ‘logical space’ in mind, let us return to the example and pay attention to the fact that Wittgenstein chose a surprisingly mundane and strange example. He did not choose something traditionally considered as aesthetically or ethically significant, say a flower, a painting or an act of kindness; he chose an everyday object, one that is furthermore attached to very particular purposes, therefore to the perspective of the particular that he so firmly criticises. This seems to be one of the difficulties with this remark from the *Notebooks*, but by now it should be clearer how to get around it.

If Wittgenstein had used a work of art as an example, it might have tempted the reader to think of the contemplation, or seeing, that Wittgenstein talks about in a more passive, intuitive way, whereas the example of the stove – because of its particular and everyday character – makes more urgent the issue of the role played by meaning. How does the stove become someone’s world? Does the philosopher bestow significance on the stove from her armchair, or do the viewers in an art gallery look at it passively and see it as valuable in isolation?

If one wants to do justice to Wittgenstein’s use of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (concepts originally used for linguistic meaning) to denote value, as well as to his connection between ‘seeing with the logical space’ and ‘seeing as significant’, then the way of seeing described in the remark from the *Notebooks*

²⁷ See Wittgenstein, L. (1986), *ibid*, §5.5563.

cannot be a product of intuition but has to be primarily grounded in understanding.²⁸ I have already proposed to understand this way of seeing as a recovery of possibilities of meaning within human activity, namely, as a recovery of possible contexts of use. Meaningfulness does not arise through passive contemplation but rather through human participation in activities, through what we can call ‘ceremoniality’. To use a later remark from the 1930s: ‘The characteristic feature of the awakening mind of man is precisely the fact that *a phenomenon comes to have meaning* for him. One could almost say that man is a *ceremonial animal*’²⁹.

The idea that language is embedded in human activity and its complications is present throughout the early Wittgenstein, and does not just appear out of the blue after the 1930s. If we apply the centrality of human activity to Wittgenstein’s perplexing remark about the stove, then seeing the stove as world can be understood as seeing it in the background of certain ceremonies or human practices, such as cooking or gathering or warming up, and these practices provide the context in which anything can have meaning. These possibilities of meaning, namely, of the use that a stove can have in our human lives, are what its logical space also amounts to.

If we return to the remark about the stove, we read: ‘If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but now all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial.’ One way to understand this part of the remark is as a clarification that the way of seeing that Wittgenstein describes is *not* that of seeing a thing (a stove in this case) in isolation. It is not the way a philosopher would contemplate a thing, if she were to look for its essence, like Descartes does with his piece of wax, nor is it the way someone focuses on an object when they meditate. Seeing something as significant presupposes recovering the context of a human practice, in which a stove is seen in relation to a world, say the world of a kitchen, or the world of a house..

An objection can be mooted here: if Wittgenstein also states that ‘as a thing among things each thing is equally insignificant’, then does not seeing the stove in relation to the things that make up a world (say of a kitchen) take us back to insignificance? To solve this seeming paradox, one needs to stress the dimension of worldhood in what I have called seeing a stove in a referential context, and oppose this perspective to that of the particular. I had read Wittgenstein’s remark that ‘as a thing among things each thing is equally insignificant’ as the perspective of the particular, namely a case of particular relations between particular things and their traits that can be best expressed in a relation of comparison: when one compares the stove with the frying pot one does so only according to a set of particular traits that interest them (say the size and the colour). However, when one sees a stove in

²⁸ A different view is put forward by McGuinness who, following Russell, understands the mystical as a matter of intuition as opposed to thought and reason. See McGuinness, B. (1966) The mysticism of the Tractatus, *The Philosophical Review* 75, pp. 305–328, and Russell, B. (1918), *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London: Green and Co.

²⁹ Wittgenstein, L. (1993), ‘Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough’, in J. C. Klagge, A. Nordmann (eds.) *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, Hackett, pp. 119–155, p. 129, my emphasis.

relation to (other things as they make up) a world, that relation is not reducible to a relation of comparison, nor to the perspective of the particular. Besides, as noted above, Wittgenstein makes it clear that the view as world should not be confused with a view in isolation when he notes that if all he knew was the stove, then his result would appear trivial. In other words, if the stove were his world, in the sense that he only focused on it in isolation from other things, then this way of seeing would merely describe a narrow, partial view. *This* would take us back to the perspective of the particular. On the contrary, in order to get a perspective of significance one needs to open a referential context. This referential context is the context of our human life and social practices by which we understand anything at all, and it is, as I have tried to show, what the Tractarian logical space can be understood to describe.

A thing can become significant insofar as it carries with it this referential whole, in virtue of which anything has meaning: any contemplation of a thing as significant cannot but lead us to other things, an environment in which they exist, a human practice, yet another human practice, etc. For example, as already mentioned, the stove is related to the environment of a kitchen, and to the practice of cooking. But the practice of cooking refers not only to the practice of eating but also to that of gathering and nourishing others, and perhaps to a manifestation of love. In this sense, a stove could also be regarded as constitutive of what we call a home. Grasping the stove as world might include grasping the loving aspects that the activity of cooking has come to have. In doing so, in recovering these contexts of human activity we open possibilities of meaning, and engage in an imaginative and attentive activity of understanding (active contemplation rather than intuition) that makes the stove significant³⁰. This is an open-ended process because, of course, the referential whole cannot be imagined or grasped in advance. For example, the connection between a stove and the activity of cooking is not a necessary one. We could imagine children using the stove as an iron-made castle, and not caring at all or not having anything to do with its cooking-related properties. Or we could imagine a child being familiar with the stove only through the fairy tale of the Iron Stove by the Brothers Grimm.

Ultimately, if we were to continue the process of opening to possibilities of meaning, or to worlds and activities, then we would finally reach the simple fact that there is meaning. In that sense, the line of interpretation that I have presented here takes the very existence of (semantic) meaning to be what

³⁰ I treat the use made of the *thing* stove as in principle translatable into or describable as the use made of the *word* 'stove'. Hence, a practice in which we use the *thing* stove to cook food for our loved ones can translate into a series of propositions that describe that very practice, such as 'since ancient times the family gathered around the stove', 'the grandmother spent most of her day by the stove, cooking for her loved ones', 'she entered the room and the sight of the food being prepared on the stove, warmed her heart', etc.

allows for significance.³¹

Significance through the relation to my will: willing as acting

The example of the stove can help distinguish attentiveness from a state of being extra-conscious, or mindful, or assigning some particular, subjective importance to an object. What has been described as seeing as world or seeing with the whole logical space is rather an active attunement to the possibilities that the engagement with a thing (for example, a stove) through our human activities entails.

It is important to understand the difference between value as a subjective element that is introduced to a valueless world of facts (a non-cognitivist version of ineffability) and value as what arises from an opening to possibilities of meaning that become available in being attuned to the world. One way to understand the importance of this distinction is to consider how Wittgenstein's remark about the stove differs from the contemplation involved in meditation. Part of what happens in a state of meditation is focusing one's attention on an object so that the object becomes one's world. However, the state of meditative attention does not presuppose any attunement to a realm of meaning, but is restricted to a subjective contemplative attitude. If seeing something as world was just looking at something intensely and focusing one's attention on it, then value would become merely subjective (introduced through the subject's mental or emotional attention).

A similar temptation could in fact arise when Donatelli says that '[according to Diamond] anything in language can be a sign for the ethical because *anything can express an ethical intention*'³². Introducing ethical intention risks making significance a subjective issue, and this temptation could find a strong foothold in the Wittgensteinian remark mentioned earlier in this paper: 'Things acquire "significance" ("*Bedeutung*") only through their relation to my will.' Furthermore, Wittgenstein seems to draw a relation between value and something being my world, or my will. How are we to understand the centrality of the will, and of my-ness, without falling into a trap of subjectivism, given

³¹ My reader might have already suspected a Heideggerian influence in my reading of Wittgenstein's remark. Indeed, what Heidegger calls readiness to hand is ultimately grounded in a reference relation in which there is no further involvement, what he calls 'for the sake of the Being of *Dasein*': '[W]ith this thing, for instance, which is ready-to-hand, and which we accordingly call a "hammer", there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection "is" for the sake of providing shelter for *Dasein*, that is to say for the sake of possibility of *Dasein*'s being'. Heidegger, M. (1962), *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 18: 116. The entirety of all these references, from making something fast, to sheltering for bad weather, is, in Heidegger's work, the world, and according to what I have argued, Wittgenstein's seeing as world involves seeing this referential whole. For a comparative reading of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, see Mulhall, St. (1990) *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*, London: Routledge

³² Donatelli, P. (2005), *ibid.*, p. 18, my emphasis

that in Wittgenstein's work the will is the only place where the subject can be found?³³

Such a conclusion does not do justice to Wittgenstein's account of the will. For, in Wittgenstein's work, the will is clearly distinct from an intention, a wanting, a desire, or anything else that would cause me to act. Willing is just acting:³⁴ 'This is clear: it is impossible to will without already performing the act of the will. The act of will is not the cause of the action but is the action itself. [...] The fact that I will an action consists in my performing the action, not in my doing something else which causes the action. When I move something I move. When I perform an action I am in action'³⁵ But if willing is just acting, rather than wanting or representing, then it is not in relation to the inner states of a subject that *Bedeutung* (significance) emerges. It is rather in relation to the external world, to the human world in which the subject belongs and acts: 'At last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so, on the one side nothing is left over, and on the other side, as unique, the world. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out'³⁶. The 'realistic spirit' of Wittgenstein's account of value or significance consists precisely in the fact that value does not arise through some subjective feeling, wanting, desiring, but rather through being attuned to possibilities of meaning that are given through the context of human activities. To put it differently, seeing something as valuable is possible because we partake in human life through language. Significance arises in relation to my will, namely, in relation to an attitude towards the world that is not mere intuition but active engagement: 'The will is an attitude of the subject to the world. The subject is the willing subject'³⁷ The possibility of seeing things as significant rests on the possibility of being attuned to the world, as opposed to being blind to it or resisting it.

Concluding remarks: aesthetic words and ways of living

In his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Wittgenstein provides further evidence that this attunement to the referential whole is central to his conception of value, when he says that to be clear about aesthetic words you have to describe ways of living. Note that he does not speak of a particular way of living, but of ways of living; it is in bringing forward

³³ The subject in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (the subject of the world is my world) is not a Kantian transcendental subject, not a thinking subject, not a psychological subject but the subject of the will: "The thinking subject is surely merely illusion. But the willing subject exists." In Wittgenstein, L. (1961), *ibid.* p. 80. See also Wittgenstein, L. (1986), *ibid.*, 5.555, 5.631, 5.641

³⁴ As Friedlander explains this does not mean a denial of thinking, but rather an appreciation of thinking qua acting: 'The denial of the separate moment of (mental) representation, does not mean that action involves no thinking, but rather willing is thinking in and through action. An action is one might say the expression of a thought in the medium of reality. (Remember that thinking itself is said to be an *activity* of picturing, of *making* to ourselves pictures of facts)' in Friedlander (2017), *ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁵ Wittgenstein, L. (1961), *ibid.* pp. 87 and 88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.85

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.87

the multiplicity of the form (of the activities and the things we do) that aesthetic words find their place.

I have resisted interpreting the remark about the stove as a remark about a work of art, in order to make clear that the contemplation involved therein is an active contemplation that presupposes an opening to the realm of meaning, and thus a familiarisation with human activities, with ways of living. Furthermore, I wanted to show that seeing as world is more than a description of how ‘the whole is greater than its parts’, which has traditionally applied to the aesthetic pleasure that a work of art can offer.

However, as I said earlier, the way Wittgenstein understands value also applies to aesthetic words or objects. Furthermore, works of art can par excellence remind us of this close connection between significance and the recovery of meaning. Drawing again on proposition 4.002 from the *Tractatus*, we could say that in our everyday life we are forgetful, lost within the particularity and partiality of our everyday life, in a way that can make us inattentive to this very basic fact that there is meaning. We forget that meaning is not identical to the particular sense-making.

A work of art can remind us of the openness of meaning (hence, according to what has been argued here, of significance), by challenging (through not fitting with) the partiality of our everyday world. As explained by Tilghman, the work of art pleases as a whole, not by virtue of a particular fact about it. Worldhood, or the referential whole as the source of significance, arises par excellence in things that are treated as works of art. Although one can mistakenly think that a work of art can be treated in isolation (out of time and space), Wittgenstein reminds us that to be clear about aesthetic words, one has to describe ways of living. Think of the specific cases of understanding aesthetic or ethical (or even religious) expressions, as they challenge our conception of language as mere factual representation and require an opening to the realm of meaning as a web of relations between different words and propositions (hence also between contexts of use). To offer an example discussed by Genia Schönbaumsfeld, a sentence such as ‘Juliet is the sun’ cannot be grasped by separately giving the referential meanings of ‘Juliet’, ‘is’ and ‘the sun’. Someone who only knows that the sun is a star located at the centre of our solar system would likely fail to understand the statement, ‘And such a failure of understanding cannot be remedied by, say, pointing at Juliet and at the sun and saying, “she is like that”, but rather by drawing attention to aspects of the sun that make the comparison with Juliet meaningful’.³⁸

Similarly, we can imagine Wittgenstein saying that his stove is the sun, and to understand that statement we would need to pay attention to those qualities of the stove, and its place in our human lives, that make that phrase intelligible. For example, we gather around the stove to warm up; the

³⁸ Schönbaumsfeld, G. (2007), *A Confusion of the Spheres, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion*, p.184

light coming from the stove is bright; the stove is the centre of our home, etc. Drawing attention to aspects of a notion (for instance, ‘the sun’) requires becoming familiar with the different contexts in which the word ‘sun’ is used, and thus with the semantic relations between the word and other words (i.e. with different propositional contexts).

To sum up, seeing something as valuable involves a recovery of possibilities of meaning (a recovery of the logical space). This recovery of logical or semantic relations cannot be distinguished from a recovery of contexts of use, namely, of the contexts of our human activities, of what we do.

References

- Appelqvist, H. (2013) ‘Why does Wittgenstein say that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same’, in Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter (eds), *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 40–58.
- Conant, J. (1998) ‘Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use’, *Philosophical Investigations* 21:3 July 1998.
—, (2005) ‘What Ethics in the *Tractatus* is not’, in D.Z. Phillips and M. von der Ruhr (eds), *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, London: Routledge, pp. 39–88.
- Diamond, C. (2000) ‘Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, *The New Wittgenstein*, edited by Alice Crary and Rupert Read, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 149–173
- Donatelli, P. (2005) ‘The problem of the higher in the *Tractatus*’, in D.Z. Phillips and M. von der Ruhr (eds), *Religion and Wittgenstein’s Legacy*, London: Routledge, pp. 11–38
- Floyd, J. (1998) “The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*” In L. Rouner, ed., *Loneliness*. Notre Dame, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Religion
- Friedlander, E. (2001) *Signs of Sense, Reading Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . (2017), ‘Logic, Ethics and Existence in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, in Reshef Agam-Segal, Edmund Dain (eds), *Wittgenstein’s Moral Thought*, London: Routledge.
- Hacker, P.M.S. (2000), ‘Was he trying to whistle it?’, *The New Wittgenstein*, edited by Alice Crary and Rupert Read, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 353–387.
- Heidegger, M. (1962), *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (trans.), New York: Harper & Row.

Final draft, published in *Philosophical Investigations*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phin.12218>

Ishiguro, H. (1969) 'Use and Reference of Names'. In *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Peter Winch. London: Routledge, pp. 20–50

Livingston, P. (2004) "'Meaning is Use" in the *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Investigations* 27:1 January 2004.

McGuinness, B. (1966) The mysticism of the *Tractatus*, *The Philosophical Review* 75, pp. 305–328.

Mulhall, St. (1990) *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*, London: Routledge

Russell, B. (1918), *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London: Green and Co.

Schönbaumsfeld, G. (2007), *A Confusion of the Spheres, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion*, Oxford University Press

Tilghman, B.R. (1991) *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics: The View from Eternity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Notebooks, 1914–1916*. In G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, (eds.), . Oxford: Blackwell.

———. (1965). 'A Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review* 74.

———. (1986), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C.K. Ogden, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

———. (1993), 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', in J. C. Klagge, A.Nordmann (eds) *Philosophical Occasions, 1912-1951*, Hackett, pp. 119–155.

65 Mildmay Park, N14NB London

Maria.g.balaska@gmail.com