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Since its first appearance in print, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has been universally recognised as a seminal work in philosophy. It is a complex work which poses many exegetical problems whose resolution is by no means easy. One particular problem to which I wish to propose a solution here concerns the interrelation among the following three propositions:

2.04 The totality of existing states of affairs is the world. [Die Gesamtheit der bestehenden Sachverhalte ist die Welt]

2.06 The existence and non-existence of states of affairs is reality. (We also call the existence of states of affairs a positive fact, and their non-existence a negative fact.) [Das Bestehen und Nichtbestehen von Sachverhalten ist die Wirklichkeit. (Das Bestehen von Sachverhalten nennen wir auch ein positive, das Nichtbestehen eine negative Tatsache.)]

2.063 The whole of reality is the world. [Die gesamte Wirklichkeit ist die Welt.]

On the face of it it seems as if these three propositions are inconsistent. For we are told in 2.04 that the totality of existing states of affairs is the world; while 2.06 and 2.063

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1 In the interests of ease of reference I have thought it best to use the standard Pears & McGuinness translation of the *Tractatus* which was revised in the light of Wittgenstein’s own suggestions and comments on the first, C. K. Ogden, translation [Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961)]. I have made one change, however. In place of Pears & McGuinness’s translation of ‘gesamte’ as ‘sum-total’, in 2.063 and elsewhere, which to me has an oddly arithmetical connotation, I have substituted the more mundane ‘whole’.

2 ‘Reality’ in these early propositions of the *Tractatus* is a translation of ‘Wirklichkeit’ which can, of course, also be translated as ‘actuality’. Wittgenstein, however, also uses ‘Realität’ in the Tractatus. Does the translation of two different German words by one English word cause any problem? I believe not. ‘Realität’ is used only in two relatively late propositions: 5.5561 and 5.64. In 5.64 it occurs in the context of a remark on Realism and Solipsism which is not immediately relevant to the issues under discussion here; and while the context of its occurrence in 5.5561 is much closer to the concerns of propositions 2ff. I do not believe that our understanding of those propositions will be radically affected one way or another by how it is understood here.
together yield the claim that the whole of reality, that is, the whole of the existence and non-existence of states of affairs is the world. How can the positive facts alone be equal to the sum of the positive and negative facts?

Do we have an inconsistency here? I believe not. Before I discuss how the apparent inconsistency can be explained away I want to line up some of the definitions that Wittgenstein gives us prior to the three aforementioned propositions so that we can see clearly just what these propositions commit us to.

1. The world is all that is the case. [Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist.]
   1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things. [Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, nicht der Dinge.]
2. What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs. [Was der Fall ist, die Tatsache, ist das Bestehen von Sachverhalten.]
   2.01 A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things). [Das Sachverhalt ist eine Verbindung von Gegenstanden (Sachen, Dingen).]

Putting 2 and 2.01 together we get

A A fact is the existence of a combination of objects.

Putting A together with 1.1 we get

B The world is the totality of existing combinations of objects, not of things.

In my opinion, the charge of contradiction can stick only if we take ‘whole’ in 2.063 to be redundant, that is, if we read 2.063 as being equivalent to ‘Reality is the world’. If this is what 2.063 means then those who see a contradiction here would be right. But this is not what it says. It might be asked "What is the difference between the ‘whole of reality’ and ‘reality’?" This question in turn prompts the logically prior question “Why differentiate between reality and the world?” The answer to this question is, I believe, as follows. The world changes, and in so doing, existing states of affairs cease to exist and other states of affairs come into existence. Reality, according to Wittgenstein, is the existence and non-existence of states of affairs. As such, it can never change. The connection between reality and the world, then, is just that the whole of reality, what reality amounts to at any given time, is the world. Now, if this reading of the connection between reality and the world is correct, it should fit in the context of other key propositions.

Let us try, for example, 2.12.
2.12 A picture is a model of reality. [*Das Bild ist ein Modell der Wirklichkeit.*]

Putting this together with 2.06 and 2.01 we get

C A picture is a model of the existence and non-existence of objects.

Now, since according to 2.13 ‘In a picture, objects have the elements of the picture corresponding to them’ [*Den Gegenstanden entsprechen im Bilde die Elemente des Bildes*] the question now arises ‘Can a picture be a model of the non-existence of combinations of objects?’ Given the correspondence between elements in the picture and objects, it seems as if the answer must be no. After all, what makes a picture to be a picture is precisely that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way (2.14). Since its elements correspond to objects, then what the picture represents is that things are related to one another in the same way as the pictorial elements. But in a non-existent combination of objects there obviously is no relation of objects to one another in any way, let alone in a determinate way, and so it is impossible to picture it. Or is it?

For a clue to a possible solution let us turn back to 1.12, and the parallel proposition, 2.05.

1.12 For the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also whatever is not the case. [*Denn, die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen bestimmt, was der Fall ist und auch, was alles nicht der Fall ist.*]

2.05 The totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist. [*Die Gesamtheit der bestehenden Sachverhalte bestimmt auch, welche Sachverhalte nicht bestehen.*]

Substituting appropriately in 1.12 we obtain

D The world determines both the existence of combinations of objects and the non-existence of combinations of objects.

And substituting appropriately in 2.05 we get

E The world also determines which combinations of objects do not exist.

So, a picture, any picture, is a model of reality since it either agrees with reality, in which case the objects corresponding to the elements in the picture are related to one another in the same determinate way in which the elements in the picture are related to one another, or it does not agree with reality, in which case the determinate relations between
the pictorial elements do not correspond to determinate relations between objects. Whenever a picture agrees with reality it is a picture of something in the world. Whenever it fails to agree with reality, it is a picture of something not in the world. But even in this case it still models reality since reality is the existence and non-existence of states of affairs.

Let us now turn to the standard secondary literature to find out what, if anything, has been said on this problem by the commentators. In the little space devoted to it in his A Companion to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, Max Black confesses that he finds puzzling the introduction into the Tractatus of the notion of ‘reality’. Despite his puzzlement he suggests the following resolution to the problem: “Perhaps the right answer is that ‘the world’ and ‘total reality’ [die gesamte Wirklichkeit] are synonyms; the world has both negative and positive aspects, the former of which are emphasized by using the expression ‘total reality.’ [die gesamte Wirklichkeit’]”

R. J. Fogelin thinks that the difficulty is primarily one of terminology. “Given that every object must occur in some state of affairs or other (2.0121), we know that given all states of affairs, all objects are given as well. But we have already seen that given the totality of objects, all possible states of affairs are given (2.0124). In other words, given all existing states of affairs, we can construct, by way of the objects they contain, all possible states of affairs — both those that exist and those that do not exist. It is in this way that the structure of reality is implicated in the structure of the world. For quite trivial reasons, the structure of the world is implicated in the structure of reality. Of course, it still remains a mistake to identify the world with reality, but, in the end, this is something that can be set right without undermining the basic principles of the Tractarian ontology.”

Note that Fogelin takes proposition 2.063 to be a statement of the identity of world and reality. He thereby makes ‘whole of reality’ equivalent to ‘reality’ which would seem to banish the expression ‘whole’ to the limbo of purely rhetorical devices. As I indicated above, I believe it to be plausible to interpret ‘whole’ as acting the part of a restrictive modifier on the notion of reality. If it be read in this way then 2.063 is no longer an identity claim, and the more obviously inconsistent aspects of the conjunction of the three propositions 2.04, 2.06 and 2.063 disappear.

J. Griffin also takes 2.063 to be an identity claim. He believes that Wittgenstein is committed to the following three propositions: “(i) the world is the sum of existent states

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3 Max Black, A Companion to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, (Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 70
of affairs, (ii) reality includes positive and negative facts, and (iii) reality = world”.

Griffin’s solution to the problem is to differentiate between kinds of facts, between positive facts and negative facts. “Thus, the totality of positive facts is the whole world, and a single positive fact is one part of the world. Now, this is not the case with negative facts. If we add the whole set of negative facts to a group of positive facts, this is not like adding even one more positive fact . . . When Wittgenstein says that the world is the sum of positive facts this may be taken to mean that the world is completely constituted by existent states of affairs. When he says that the world includes both positive and negative facts, this may be taken to refer to their inseparability; with a set of positive facts comes a set of negative facts. And since the world’s being completely constituted by existent states of affairs and positive and negative facts’ being inseparable do not rule one another out, Wittgenstein’s three claims need not be incompatible.”

To sum up, the consensus of scholarly opinion seems to be against treating the conjunction of the three propositions as inconsistent. There are two major lines of approach. On the one hand we have those who, seeing the problem as basically one of terminology, propose reconciliation via the mediation of propositions 1.12 and 2.05. From these propositions we learn that the world, as the totality of facts, the totality of existing states of affairs, also determines, by that very fact, what is not a fact, what is not an existing state of affairs. On the other hand we have those who understand ‘whole of reality’ as being synonymous with ‘reality’. I have opted for what appears to me to be the best of both worlds by adopting the position that ‘whole of reality’ and ‘world’ are synonyms and also by using proposition 2.05 to interpret the seemingly inconsistent propositions 2.04, 2.06 and 2.063.

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6 Griffin, p. 37.
7 Griffin, pp. 37-38.