

# A brief outline of the *Tractatus*

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The *Tractatus* can be seen as breaking down in roughly the following way: sections 1 & 2 lay out the basic elements of Wittgenstein's metaphysics; sections 3-5 concern his theory of representation, which is closely tied to his metaphysics; and sections 6 and 7 draw out some of the consequences of the preceding sections for science, value, and the nature of philosophy.

However, the work is not presented in the ordinary (philosophical) way, in which the earlier parts argue for claims which are presupposed in the later parts, but not the reverse. It is meant to be taken in as a whole; often, understanding why Wittgenstein says something in the first few pages, it's necessary to understand something which comes much later in the text. This is one of the main challenges to understanding the book. I'd recommend reading the whole thing through first, and then re-reading sections before we discuss them in class.

Despite this, we'll be, with some exceptions, following the order of the text. Our discussions will focus on the following themes (in this order):

- Facts and objects: the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* (§§1-2.063)
- The picture theory of representation (§§2.1-3.263)
- The theory of elementary propositions (§§4.2-5.5423)
- Logical form and the nature of philosophy (§§3.3-4.128)
- Philosophy, value, and the unsayable (§§5.55-7)

After this, we'll be discussing some objections to the system of the *Tractatus*.

If you would like to read more about the *Tractatus*, I would recommend the following three works, some of the points of which are incorporated below: Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*; Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*; and Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the 20th Century*, v. 1. Ray Monk's biography of Wittgenstein, entitled *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* is also a good read.