

## The tractatus ladder from a wittgensteinian religious point of view

**Adilio Spica, Marciano**

The tractatus ladder from a wittgensteinian religious point of view

Revista de Filosofía Aurora, vol. 34, núm. 63, 2022

Pontificia Universidade Católica do Paraná, Brasil

**Disponibile en:** <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=673374169009>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.7213/1980-5934.34.063.DS05>



Esta obra está bajo una Licencia Creative Commons Atribución 4.0 Internacional.

## The tractatus ladder from a wittgensteinian religious point of view

*A escada do tractatus de um ponto de vista religioso wittgensteiniano*

Marciano Adilio Spica [a] mspica@unicentro.br  
Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste (UNICENTRO), Brasil  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8977-8841>

Revista de Filosofia Aurora, vol. 34, núm. 63, 2022

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná, Brasil

Recepción: 23 Marzo 2022  
Aprobación: 27 Agosto 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7213/1980-5934.34.063.DS05>

Redalyc: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=673374169009>

**Abstract:** I propose that, in its form, it is possible to make a religious reading of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus along the lines of how Wittgenstein himself understood religion, and in particular, religious conversion. This idea could appear to be completely senseless. But we cannot forget that Wittgenstein himself said that although he did not consider himself a religious man, he could not help seeing every problem in a religious way. It is precisely this religious way of thinking that I would like to apply to the Tractatus. I begin by elucidating Wittgenstein's ideas of religion, especially his notion of religious conversion. After that, I briefly describe the Tractatus, its objectives, and what happens if we climb the ladder of this work. I then show how the goals of the work and where the ladder of the Tractatus leads us take a religious form. That is, they lead to a conversion to a new way of seeing the world and language. This is similar to a religious conversion that makes us see the world in a completely different way. I conclude by discussing how such a religious perspective helps us to understand the sense of the Tractatus by making an analogy with the Wittgenstein's ideas in relation to the role of religious doctrine.

**Keywords:** Wittgenstein, Tractatus, Sense, Religion, Religious point of view.

**Resumo:** *Eu proponho que, em sua forma, é possível fazer uma leitura religiosa do Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus aos moldes de como o próprio Wittgenstein entendia a religião, em especial, a conversão religiosa. Alguém poderia pensar que essa ideia é completamente sem sentido, mas não podemos nos esquecer que o próprio Wittgenstein afirma que, apesar de não se considerar um homem religioso, não conseguia deixar de pensar as coisas à maneira religiosa. É justamente essa maneira religiosa de pensar que gostaria de aplicar ao Tractatus. Começo expondo a ideia de religião de Wittgenstein, especialmente sua noção de conversão religiosa. Após isso faço uma breve descrição do Tractatus, seus objetivos e o que acontece se subimos a escada de tal obra. Depois, mostro como os objetivos e onde a escada do Tractatus nos leva têm uma forma religiosa. Isto é, ela nos leva a conversão para uma nova maneira de ver o mundo e a linguagem. Isto é similar a como a conversão religiosa nos faz ver o mundo de forma completamente diferente. Finalizo discutindo, rapidamente, como tal perspectiva religiosa nos ajuda a compreender o sentido do que está exposto no Tractatus fazendo uma analogia com as ideias que o próprio Wittgenstein tinha em relação ao papel da doutrina religiosa.*

**Palavras-chave:** Wittgenstein, Tractatus, Sentido, Religião, Ponto de vista religioso.

**How to cite:** SPICA, M. A. The tractatus ladder from a wittgensteinian religious point of view. *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, Curitiba, v. 34, n. 63, p. 68-84, out./dez. 2022

## Introduction

Wittgenstein's ideas about religion have long been a topic of scholarly debate. Some authors have tried to show how Wittgenstein understood both religious discourse and religion itself. Others have tried to apply his ideas about philosophy and his notes on religion to classical problems in the philosophy of religion. Both perspectives show how fruitful his work is for debates in this area. This article, however, neither intends to make an exegesis of Wittgenstein's notes on religious belief nor apply his ideas to classical problems in this discipline. Rather, this work aims to be an exercise in reading the Wittgensteinian idea that the *Tractatus* is a ladder that after being used must be thrown away. I propose that the ladder can be read from a Wittgensteinian religious perspective, and that this reading would help produce a better understanding of the final aphorisms of the *Tractatus*.

Everyone who has studied Wittgenstein's work will be familiar with the conversation between Wittgenstein and Drury in which the author of the *Tractatus* makes the following statement: "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view." (RHEES, 1984, p. 94). This statement has already been the subject of important discussions—perhaps the most important of which is Norman Malcolm's (1993) *Wittgenstein: a Religious Point of View*. In his book, Malcolm aims to show that there are important analogies between Wittgenstein's later philosophical thought and the religious point of view. Malcolm's work is unquestionably of great importance and deserves to be taken seriously in Wittgensteinian studies. But my aims here are different: first, unlike Malcolm, I am interested in exploring the possibility that Wittgenstein's religious point of view is evident not only in Wittgenstein's later philosophical thought but also in the *Tractatus*. Furthermore, I want to show that a specific religious point of view is compatible with some of Wittgenstein's ideas, that is, his own religious point of view—which is his perspective on how instruction in a religious faith works in conversion and the role of religious doctrine. Finally, it is important to emphasise that, unlike Malcolm who proposes four possible analogies between a religious point of view and Wittgenstein's second work,<sup>[2]</sup> I am interested only in two, as highlighted above: religious instruction for conversion and the issue of religious doctrine. In short, I want to show that the very Wittgensteinian idea of how instruction in a religious belief works can be seen in the way the *Tractatus* sets out the idea that such work is a ladder to see the language, the world and the life correctly. In turn, I emphasize the idea that Wittgenstein's ideas about religious doctrine can help us to understand the sense of the *Tractatus* as a whole.

To do this, I first intend to examine the Wittgensteinian idea that religious belief is a system of references. And to enter it, a very special kind of instruction is necessary—which is described in *Culture and Value* (1980, p. 64) as follows:

nstruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience. And this combination would have to result in the pupil himself, of his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. *It would be as though someone were first to let me see the hopelessness of my situation and then show me the means of rescue until, of my own accord, or not at any rate led to it by my instructor, I ran to it and grasped it.*

What interests me in this passage is the description of the process of becoming religious or entering a religious system of references. In this sense, I am not interested in focusing on the content of the process but on the steps that take one from not belonging to a religious system to adopting it. In the above passage, Wittgenstein enumerates three steps to instruction in a religious faith that leads to its adoption. Such steps begin by 1) demonstrating the hopelessness of the believer's situation; passes through 2) showing him salvation: the religious reference system itself; and ends with 3) an awareness of the need for religious faith. In my view, these three steps for the conversion to or adoption of a religious faith can also be seen in the Tractatian ladder that the reader must first climb to understand the work, and then be able to throw the ladder away and become aware of a correct view of the world and of life.

To reiterate, in 6.54 of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein states that his book is to be taken as a ladder, which after being used must be thrown away so that the reader can see the world correctly. But what are the rungs of this ladder? In my view, for the reader to understand the world correctly after reading the work, it is necessary to climb up at least three rungs analogous to the steps of instruction in a religious faith. Like a good instructor who thinks about problems in a religious way, Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, would then begin by 1) demonstrating the hopelessness of philosophy problems; 2) revealing the salvation for philosophy: a correct understanding of the logic of language; and then end 3) by making the reader, by himself, seize the way out: changing his life by beginning to see the world correctly. The instructor, Wittgenstein, sets out the first two steps in his own work. The third, despite being also shown in his work, needs an awareness induced by the correct understanding of the book.

Therefore, I will defend the possibility of reading the Tractatian ladder as analogous to the process of instruction in a religious faith. I say analogous because while religious instruction leads to a correct view of the system of religious references and its importance for the life of the believer, the Tractatian ladder, if climbed correctly, leads to a correct view of the language, the world, and the life. This understanding of the *Tractatus* ladder as analogous to religious instruction helps us to better understand why the ladder needs to be thrown away, as the *Tractatus* proposes, and therefore helps us to understand the sense of the *Tractatus* sentences themselves. As I will defend later, the sentences can be understood as analogous to the religious doctrine in that, despite not saying anything in the strict sense of the *Tractatus*, they play an important role in showing a correct vision of the world, the language, and the life. If my proposal for this reading of the book is plausible, the *Tractatus*, despite not being the work of a religious man, is the work of someone who, even

in his youth, “cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view”.<sup>[3]</sup> I will begin by elucidating each of the possible steps of the *Tractatus*, analogous to instruction in a religious faith, so that later I can show the effects of this for the interpretation of the work’s sense.

## Showing the hopelessness of philosophy’s situation

One of the central points in understanding the *Tractatus* is, without a doubt, understanding that the author of the work is a harsh critic of the preceding philosophy. Wittgenstein announces this in the preface to the work, stating that “[t]he book deals with the problems of philosophy, and shows, I believe, that the reason why these problems are posed is that the logic of our language is misunderstood” (TLP, p.3). This is even clearer in 4.003 of the *Tractatus*, when he states that:

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently, we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language. (They belong to the same class as the question whether the good is more or less identical than the beautiful.) And it is not surprising that the deepest problems are in fact not problems at all.

Basically, for Wittgenstein, philosophy has been concerned with unanswerable problems. She has tried to propose and discover the essence of the world and to answer questions about, for example, what defines being in itself, whether the beautiful and the good are the same, and indeed what is the sense of existence. The big problem is that these questions cannot be answered sense fully, because language with sense only contains propositions that figure the world, which are subject to truth and falsity, and which are composed by names denoting objects in the world. That is, language with sense belongs only to human investigations that are concerned with how the world is and with facts that are or are not the case. Thus, the great philosophical questions that have preoccupied great philosophers’ minds are, in fact, the result of a misunderstanding of the logic of language—a misunderstanding of the limits of what can or cannot be said with sense.

The philosophy prior to the *Tractatus* is nonsense because it seeks to make theory and to provide answers with claims of truth or falsity—but there is no object that corresponds to a study of philosophy. For the *Tractatus*, a correct understanding of language forces this philosophy into silence. And it must be silent simply because it is unable to give meaning of the linguistic signs that it has always used.

For Wittgenstein, the despair that devastates the non-believer before religious conversion is the despair of not seeing a way out of his life and of not seeing a solution to his problems. An analogous despair seems to be present in the philosophy that Wittgenstein criticizes. It is always dealing with problems that have no solutions: pseudo-problems generated by its misunderstanding of the correct way of doing philosophy. These pseudo-problems entangle the philosopher in studies that generate confusion and

logical errors, which make him stuck, and which produce an incorrect understanding of the life and of the world.

The first step in changing this is to become aware of the situation. In this sense, in the first step of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein shows to the reader the despair of his situation as a philosopher—his life as someone who is dealing with problems that are not really problems. He shows us the misunderstanding of the philosophical life that the philosopher intends to lead. In a way, Wittgenstein makes the philosopher aware of the hopeless situation of philosophy. Seeing this hopelessness is essential in order to climb to the next rung: the one where the philosopher can find the solution to his desperate situation.

### **Showing to the reader the way out: a correct understanding of the logic of language**

Just as the believer, prior to conversion to the religious belief system, despairs at not understanding the correct path for his salvation, Wittgenstein shows that pre-*Tractatus* philosophy is on a completely wrong path. It is just a set of pseudo-problems. The reader of the work, realizing he is involved in such an inconsequential task, then needs a salvation. And the *Tractatus*, analogously to good religious instruction, describes the new system of references, that is, a new philosophy which can make the reader climb up one more rung towards clarification of his role.

This new philosophy or system of references, unlike traditional philosophy, is not a set of doctrines that try to express absolute truths about the world and about life, but she is a “critique of language” (TLP, 4.0031). Her task is to tell us what can and cannot be said and what does and does not make sense. This proposal does not include a body of doctrines and treaties, nor is it a specific field of knowledge. Philosophizing comes to be understood as an activity of conceptual clarification. As Hacker (2001, p. 324) explains in the *Tractatus*: “to philosophize is to engage in an activity of conceptual clarification which results not in new knowledge but in a specific kind of understanding.” This understanding is about the functioning of our language, which ends up freeing us from errors and linguistic illusions and showing us the world and life in a correct way.

For Wittgenstein, philosophy has the task of perceiving the disguises of language—the errors expressed in propositions—and then returning our language to the path of sense. All the propositions of traditional philosophy, or at least most of them, are pseudo-propositions. The author of the *Tractatus*, then, proposes that his reader abandons this way of philosophizing and adopts a way in which there are no more philosophical propositions (TLP, 4.112) but only clarification of the logic of language.

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a

meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—this method would be the only strictly correct one. (TLP, 6.53).

So, philosophy as a doctrine must disappear, and a philosophy as clarification must emerge. Such a philosophy leads to an understanding of the limits of language and thereby the limits of the world.

This new philosophy is applied in the *Tractatus* itself when it performs a logical analysis of language that ends up showing us the limits of what can and cannot be said with sense. Such an analysis leads to the conclusion that language is the totality of propositions that are formed by other propositions that represent and figure the world. Only what is part of the world of facts can be represented by language, and not even the structure of language can be said. Rather, it is only shown in the proposition itself. Basically, then, the task of analyzing language takes one to the limits of what can be said with sense. By making a critique of language, Wittgenstein establishes the conditions of possibility for a language with sense, and only this language has the capacity to really say something with sense.

Elucidating the logic of language, the *Tractatus* concludes that the only things that can be said are propositions that figure the world, that is, propositions capable of being true or false. And it is only to them that we can attribute the status of propositions with sense. However, the same elucidation of the logic of language which allows us to identify what can be said with sense, allows us to comprehend that there is also what is simply shown. The logic of language itself is located in the latter case: it cannot be figured, but it is shown in the language itself (TLP, 4. 121).

Beyond the logic of language, there is something else that cannot be said with sense but that only shows itself: what Wittgenstein call Mystic <sup>[4]</sup> (TLP, 6.522). To the Mystic belong ethics, aesthetics and religion. Mystic's idea is also completely in tune with the *Tractatus'* objective of showing the limits of what can and what cannot be said with sense. It is the result of the logical analysis of language that elucidates the limits of sense. It is not a religious intuition displaced from the logic of the book, but the result of climbing the Tractatian ladder. <sup>[5]</sup> Only when I understand the logic of language with sense can I access the sphere of the Mystic *qua* Mystic. In other words, I can see that there is something of extreme importance that does not fit into the Tractatian rules of sense.

Nothing that belongs to the Mystic can be said with sense; it cannot be expressed in propositional form; and it cannot be true or false. Far from this being a defect or an accusation of irrelevance, Wittgenstein made it clear that what really matters actually belongs to the Mystic, because it contains all the questions about the sense of the world, language, and life itself. Indeed, the Mystic contains all the questions that science, that which deals with the sayable, cannot resolve. It contains the deepest problems of life and of the absolute things which are not subject to the contingencies of the world of facts and, therefore, to the domain of propositional truth and falsity. And that is why, for Wittgenstein, the important concepts of human life are not reducible to or explainable

in the natural sciences. But it is not only science that cannot provide answers to life's problems. Philosophy, as metaphysics, is also incapable of answering such questions because in trying to do so, it struggles against the limits of language; it does not understand such limits. By not understanding them, philosophy, as metaphysics, seeks to deal with things that are outside of the limits of language as if they were things with sense—as if they were possibilities susceptible of truth or falsity. This is how pseudo-ideas about the Self, God, Ethics, Aesthetics, the sense of the world, eternity, and so on are born.

### **Running to and grasping the way out: seeing the world correctly and changing your life**

Once the hopelessness of philosophy as a traditional metaphysics is understood, and the path to a correct understanding of philosophy and language is shown, it is up to the reader of the *Tractatus* to access the last rung of the ladder: to become aware of the limits of language and to see the world and life properly. Or, to put it better, we become aware of the limits of language and its effects on philosophy, our understanding of the world, and of life.

In the preface to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein states that, perhaps, his book “will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it - or at least similar thoughts” (TLP, p. 3). He is, in a way, saying that a correct understanding of the work involves the reader trying to take, by himself, the path that the author is taking. In this sense, it is necessary to climb the ladder while simultaneously thinking for oneself about its sense. If he does so, the reader of the *Tractatus*, as well as the religious person with his new system of references, will adopt the ideas of the *Tractatus* and the limits it shows him. He will see that the totality of what language manages to picture is the totality of the world, and beyond that, nothing with sense can be said. The reader will see that, like an eye in the visual field, he sees only as far as the limits of the world, but he cannot see beyond these limits. He will see that a world exists, but that we cannot speak about the foundations of its existence. And we can say nothing about what lies beyond it, if there is anything at all.

In this sense, the reader will become aware that there are limits to what can be said with sense. He will see that fundamental questions about the world and life lack sense and that they are not part of language with sense. He will see that it is not problems of natural science that he is trying to solve (TLP, 6.4312). Rather, they are 'problems' about the sense of life and the world—'problems' of absolute value—which science cannot solve. They are also 'problems' that are part of the volitional subject: the bearer of good and evil and the bearer of the search for sense. By presenting such 'problems' as part of what is in the mystical, as what is ineffable, Wittgenstein makes it clear that he does not want to deny them; he only understands that it is impossible to articulate them with sense: “So what cannot be said is not ineffable in the sense of being either incommunicable

or imperceptible – it just cannot be expressed by the sense of a significant proposition” (HACKER, 2001b, p. 151).

Wittgenstein states: “We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.” (TLP, 6.52). The disappearance of life's problems is not the denial of the sense of life but the cessation of the search for sense through language with sense. Hence, perhaps, Wittgenstein says that “[t]o pray is to think about the sense of life” (Notebooks, p. 73); it is to put aside any final search or any foundation for the ultimate sense of life, another life, or God and see that the world is a totality of facts—and that we can say nothing with sense about what is in this world. In this sense, it is an awareness, analogous to a religious awareness, about the limits of what we can say and what can only be shown. This awareness arises through a kind of astonishment at the fact that there is a world. Thus, the world presents itself as *sub specie aeterni*.

In aphorism 6.45, Wittgenstein wrote that “To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole - a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole - it is this that is mystical.” Such an idea can only be understood within a total vision that permeates the work.<sup>[6]</sup> The *Tractatus* understands the world as the totality of facts that occur within a field of possibilities called logical space. All facts are of equal value and are contingent in the sense that they are or are not the case. It is necessary to remember that in the world everything is as it is and everything happens as it happens, there is no value in it (TLP, 6.41). All propositions representing this world have equal value, that is, no value. The world is a whole made up of facts limited by facts. In the world nothing is beyond facts, nothing but the space of possibilities given by the logical space. Everything can be otherwise. Black (1964), when commenting on the mystic of the *Tractatus*, argues that the vision of the world as a limited totality is the intuition that there is something beyond the factual world that cannot be expressed in words. This something is the sense of the world, which has real value. In the world there are only facts and there is nothing of value, everything that has value is outside the world.

Thus, when Wittgenstein says that the mystical feeling is the intuition of the world as a limited totality, he is not saying something metaphysical or extra-linguistic, but simply that to see the world in the form of eternity is to see the world as limited to facts. The subject who perceives the world from a timeless point of view is perceiving it outside space and time, as the totality of possible facts. It is the perception of the world in a space of possibilities where everything can be otherwise, but otherwise factual. To see the world in this way is to see it in the form of eternity, beyond time and space: it is to conceive of it in its entirety.

But this is not a fleeting feeling or something that is made inside us by the work of some being. It is a feeling that arises from the logical understanding that the Tractatian ladder provides: to see the world as limited is to see it through the general form of the proposition. Such intuition is mystical because it cannot be said. Nothing we say about this

possible view of the world as a whole makes sense. No proposition can reach the totality of the world. Its wholeness can only be achieved outside it. It is necessary to be on the edge of the world to see it as a totality, and to see it as a totality is to detach it from a certain moment in a certain space and see it timelessly. The eternity of the *sub specie aeterni* is seen as timeless, independent of any connection with time. And this is shown by logically articulated language: the logic of language, through the idea of possibility, shows us how the world is.

Seeing the world in the form of eternity provides us with a move away from the factual world towards a vision of the world as a whole. The subject realizes, through this understanding, that the world is composed of facts that can or cannot happen. To be like this is merely a fact that could be different. It is to see reality not as absolute, but as a space within possibilities. This vision is not attained by the psychological subject, who as part of the world, is in the time and space of a physical and factual life. Such a vision of the world is reached only by the volitional subject, who sees the limit of the world, which as a limit is outside the factuality of the world, despite being only part of this world.

It is necessary to emphasize again that the vision of the world *sub specie aeterni* is only possible if we are equipped with the conceptions that the world is a limited whole and that language is also limited. Otherwise, we will always try to go beyond the limits of language and we will stop contemplating the world in the form of eternity. Therefore, the reader, as a last resort, will only succeed in understanding the *Tractatus* if he or she performs the exercise of running to it and grasping its ultimate sense. This is precisely to recognize that the propositions set out in the *Tractatus* are a contra-sense that only serve to show the limits of the language and of the world and that they should be thrown away—because what really matters is the change in the subject's worldview and not the doctrine expounded by the *Tractatus*.

Just like in a religion “the doctrines are all useless” and what matters is to “change your life. (Or the direction of your life.)” (WITTGENSTEIN, 1980, p. 53). In the *Tractatus* the correct understanding of the work must lead to a change of attitude, to a change of one's life or, at least, of one's philosophical life. Such a change includes a correct understanding of the limits of language, a correct understanding of the world as limited to contingent facts, and a correct understanding that the sense of the world and of life is not found in these facts. Rather, it is found in a correct understanding of the world and of life itself. In the same way that the good or bad exercise of the will does not change the world of facts, but instead the limit of the world, so a correct understanding of the *Tractatus* changes such limits: it changes the worldview of the volitional subject. The effect is that the world “becomes an altogether different world. It must, so to speak, wax and wane as a whole” (TLP, 6.43). In other words, there is a kind of conversion of a very special type, in which, just as in religious conversion, the most important thing is to change one's life or one's understanding of it, fulfilling the three steps of a properly religious instruction, transferred in form to philosophical work.

## Conclusion: Wittgenstein's religious point of view and the sense of the *Tractatus*

So far, I have shown that the steps of the Tractatian ladder can be read analogously to the steps of religious instruction. I did this with the aim of showing that it is possible to read the *Tractatus* from Wittgenstein's own religious point of view. But one question that remains is what the advantages are, if indeed there are any, of seeing the *Tractatus* from Wittgenstein's own religious point of view. I argue, in turn, that such a reading helps us to better understand the sense of the *Tractatus* itself. And I would like to conclude my discussion by quickly explaining this idea.

In 6.54 of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein says that anyone who understands his work recognizes that the propositions expounded in it are nonsensical (unsinning) and that they must be thrown away in order to have a correct understanding of the world. These ideas are at the heart of several discussions about the sense of the sentences in the *Tractatus*. On the one hand, some interpretations claim that what Wittgenstein means when he says that the ideas of the *Tractatus* are nonsensical is that the *Tractatus* itself must be understood within the distinction between saying and showing; that is, the book says nothing, it just shows. In this reading, the sentences of the *Tractatus* are a kind of illuminating nonsensical proposition that serve the end of ascending them and then seeing the limits of language and the world (HACKER, 1972; HACKER, 2001). Other interpretations, however, argue that what is stated in 6.54 is that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are simply absurd, except for a few sentences. In this sense, in the *Tractatus* there is no philosophical doctrine, in the strict sense, but only apparent, absurd doctrines that serve to elucidate how, in general, we proceed in philosophy (DIAMOND, 1991; DIAMOND, 2000; CONANT, 2000). One might ask which of these interpretations falls into the reading that I have proposed. I do not aim to answer this properly, but I would like to briefly launch the idea that a reading of the Tractatian ladder analogous to an idea of instruction in a religious faith can shed light on what Wittgenstein said in 6.54.

For Wittgenstein, the attitude it provides towards the world and life is more important to religious faith than the doctrine it preaches. It is in this sense that, for him, the important thing is not so much to talk about religion, but that religion transforms the lives of those who come to believe in it.<sup>[7]</sup> Religious language, then, in the light of the *Tractatus*, has no sense, it says nothing, but it shows a way of life. Thus, religious doctrine is less important than what it can do to the subject who comes into contact with it: basically, it transforms the subject's life. A subject whose life is not transformed by the doctrine has not understood it, even if he is able to dictate it from beginning to the end. The most important thing in religion is a transformation of life. The doctrine, then, above all has a practical objective: it shows a way of living. And the believer must cling to this way of living to really belong to a religion, according to Wittgenstein. What makes a subject religious is not the clothing he wears (the doctrine he recites), but the life he leads according to that doctrine.

By this, Wittgenstein is not saying that doctrine must be thrown away or that all religious doctrine is necessarily confused or senseless. Rather, he is saying that practical life ultimately gives sense to doctrine.<sup>[8]</sup> In other words, practical life is the fruits of doctrine that must be sought to understand the force of a doctrine in the life of the believer. Something analogous seems to happen in the *Tractatus*.

I have argued that it is possible to read the *Tractatus* from Wittgenstein's own religious perspective because he claims that he always sees problems from a religious perspective. In my proposed reading, I stated that the reader of the *Tractatus* is taken along a path that begins with an awareness of the despair of pre-*Tractatus* philosophy, then passes through an understanding of how to do philosophy correctly and ends with an awareness of the limits of language and the world that makes a correct understanding of the world and life possible. In this sense, the book's ultimate aim is practical; that is, it should lead to a profound change in philosophizing and in the way we see the world and life, and in the way we relate to the problems that arise in our world and in our lives. Thus, to the author of the *Tractatus*, it matters less that the reader knows the complete doctrine (sentences) of the work he writes and more the practical effects that the understanding of the work generates. So you can throw the book away. But, by this I understand that, similarly to what he says about religion, Wittgenstein does not comprehend the doctrine of the *Tractatus* as absurd or irrelevant. On the contrary, the strength of the doctrine (what is exposed in the *Tractatus*) is measured for the effects it has on the reader's life. From what it shows the reader. More than reciting the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein hopes that the reader, upon understanding the work, will change his or her life.

Thus, the sentences of the *Tractatus* are not absurd in the sense that they say and show nothing. What Wittgenstein is saying when he says that TLP sentences are nonsensical is that they should be taken, like religious doctrines, as a teaching, an instruction that shows us the need to change our lives. Changing life here is nothing more than changing the way we see the world and life. The strength of what is written in the *Tractatus* (its sentences) lies precisely in the practical effects it generates. Just as religious doctrine shows the believer how he should live, the *Tractatus* shows how we should understand language, philosophy, the world and the life. After the transformation is performed, it is useless, it can be thrown away. However, just as a religious doctrine that does not lead to the transformation of the believer's life is useless, the *Tractatus*, if it does not lead to a transformation in the way we see the world, the life and the philosophical practice, is also useless.

## References

- ANSCOMBE, G. E. M. *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967.
- BLACK, M. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

- CONANT, J. Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein. In: CRAY, A.; READ, R. (Ed.). *The New Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 174-217.
- DIAMOND, C. *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the mind*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991.
- DIAMOND, C. Ethics, imagination and the method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In: CRAY, A.; READ, R. (Ed.). *The New Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 149-173.
- HACKER P. M. S. Philosophy. In: GLOCK, H., *Wittgenstein: a critical reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001. p. 322 – 347.
- HACKER, P. M. S. *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001b.
- MALCOLM, N. *Wittgenstein: a religious point view*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- McGUINNESS, B. *Wittgenstein: A life. Young Wittgenstein – 1889-1921*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- MONK, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- PHILLIPS, D. Z. *Wittgenstein and religion*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- RHEES, R. (Ed.). *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Personal Recollections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- SPICA, M. A. *A religião para além do silêncio: reflexões a partir dos escritos de Wittgenstein sobre religião*. Curitiba: CRV, 2011.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge, 2001.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Notebooks (1914-1916)*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

## Notes

- [2] See Malcolm (1993, p. 84-92).
- [3] Here, one could question the fact that the passage of the conversation with Drury is much later than the writing of the *Tractatus* and that, therefore, it would be risky to see Wittgenstein's religious point of view in the *Tractatus*. But such a possible charge of the central objective of this article forgets that there are several passages in the *Notebooks* (1998) and also in authors who have dealt with his biography that show the great importance he gave to religious questions in the pre-*Tractatus* period, especially during the First World War (See, for example, Monk, 1991; McGuinness, 1988). Furthermore, the impact that Tolstoy's Gospels had on Wittgenstein's life in this period is well known. These writings and facts, in my view, do not make the undertaking of a Tractatian reading from a religious point of view of Wittgenstein himself unreasonable. Furthermore, as will be shown at the end of this work, such a reading can help in understanding the nature of the *Tractatus*.
- [4] Here it is worth noting that the notion of Mystic in the *Tractatus* cannot be understood in the sense of religious mysticism, but as the result of the elucidation of the logic of language that allows us to see what can and cannot be said (See, for example, SPICA, 2011).

- [5] And that is precisely why such a ladder can and should be thrown away, because for Wittgenstein, if the *Tractatus* is correctly understood, it shows us a correct vision of the world, of language, and of life: so the ladder is no longer necessary.
- [6] For Anscombe (1967), the idea of the world as a limited whole does not appear suddenly in the *Tractatus* but is seen elsewhere in the book, such as in the initial propositions, for example. I agree with Anscombe and understand that this view is closely linked with all of Wittgenstein's first work and has much to do with the *Tractatus*' conception of logic and language.
- [7] These ideas show themselves very clearly in the conversations between Wittgenstein and Drury about the Christian faith. See Rhees (1984).
- [8] For a better understanding of this idea, See Phillips (1993).

## Notas de autor

- [a] MAS is a Professor of Philosophy, PhD in Philosophy