In my last lecture, the last portion of it began to deal with analytic philosophy. As you might have sensed, as you listened to that, analytic philosophers are very, very much concerned with language, how it means, and what we can learn by getting clearer about our language. Specifically, I was discussing the philosophy, the earlier philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein as it comes to us in his book, *The Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, and we noted at that time that Wittgenstein has a certain perception of reality and then there is a certain understanding of language that goes with that. In my last lecture, I was able to explain to you what Wittgenstein’s concept of reality is, but now we want to take up his theory of language. Before we do that, though, let’s bow for a moment of prayer.

Father, we thank you again for the privilege of study. We pray that as we look at the thought of Wittgenstein and we see his understanding of language and we see what this means for theology, that You would help us to grasp the concepts that are being presented. We pray, as well, Lord, that we would see the implications of this philosophy for our own theology and that where needed, we would be able to defend our theology against the charge of meaninglessness that so many have raised in the contemporary scene. So, Father, help us in this time of study. For it’s in Christ’s name we pray it. Amen.

Let me turn now to describe for you Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Meaning. According to Wittgenstein, and this is Proposition 4.01, the proposition is a picture of reality. The proposition is a model of the reality as we think it is. Now Wittgenstein literally meant that a proposition, that is language, a sentence that asserts something, a proposition is a literal picture of reality not just that it is like a picture. As Norman Malcolm notes, Wittgenstein’s general concept was that when we put a sentence together, we construct a model of reality. And Malcolm says that Wittgenstein had gotten this idea from a magazine account of how a motor car accident was represented in a law court by means of small models.
Well in the same way, Wittgenstein thought that the words in a sentence could be arranged in a way to model reality.

Well, given the nature of reality as Wittgenstein conceived it, the perception that I shared with you at the end of our last lecture, well how then would a proposition picture, or represent this kind of reality? Well, Wittgenstein’s account here is precisely what we might expect it to be. Wittgenstein says that corresponding to the simplest element of reality there is a simplest element of a proposition. Now these simple elements of a proposition are what Wittgenstein calls *simple signs*. And Wittgenstein said that simple signs employed in propositions are called *names*. This you’ll find in *The Tractatus* as Proposition 3.202.

Now, when Wittgenstein says that these simple signs that designate objects are called *names*, we have to think not only of names like John or Mary or Jim, obviously those words do qualify as simple signs, but the key point here to remember or to understand is that for Wittgenstein names stand for objects. So, for example, the term *desk* would also count as a name. The term *blackboard*, the term *wall* or *house* or any other object we might name, all of those terms would qualify as names. And Wittgenstein believed that there was a one-to-one correspondence between the objects—that is the simples of reality—and the names, on the other hand, the simples of propositions, so that the name *desk* has a one-to-one correspondence to the object *desk* in the real world.

As Wittgenstein says, and this is Proposition 3.203, “The name means the object. The object is its meaning.” Well, just as objects cannot be analyzed any further, Wittgenstein claimed that the name cannot be analyzed further by any definition. It is a primitive sign. This is his comment at 3.26.

Now it should be clear from all of this that the Picture Theory of Meaning is going to be a heavily referential theory of meaning, that is, that the way that words mean is that they refer or designate specific objects in the world. Now corresponding to the elementary states of affairs are also an elementary part of language, namely, Wittgenstein believed that elementary states of affairs correspond to elementary propositions. Just as elementary states of affairs result from a connection and configuration of objects, so the linguistic means for picturing such states of affairs result from a connection of names.
Wittgenstein says, Proposition 4.22, “The elementary proposition consists of names. It is a connection, a concatenation of names.” Now the relationship between elementary propositions and reality is such that, and here I quote Wittgenstein, “to the configuration of the simple signs in the propositional sign corresponds the configuration of the objects in the state of affairs.” That’s Proposition 3.21 in *The Tractatus*. So that there is this correspondence, then, between the way that the words in a sentence are configured together and the way that objects are configured together in the world. As a result of this, and this is Proposition 4.21 in *The Tractatus*, Wittgenstein says, “The simplest proposition, the elementary proposition, asserts the existence of an atomic fact.”

Well, in addition, just as an object which is unrelated to other objects—for example, an object is part of a mere list of a bunch of objects in a given room—just as an object which is unrelated to other objects, is an object about which we can say very little, so Wittgenstein claimed that names do not have meaning or sense until they are combined in a proposition. If you look at a list of objects you find in the room and you just look at them as individual objects, there isn’t going to be much you can say about them. Similarly if you look at linguistic names, these individual terms, there isn’t going to be much that you can say about them in isolation from one another. You have to put them together in the form of a sentence. Wittgenstein would say that the names refer specifically to some object in the world, but and here I quote Wittgenstein at Proposition 3.3 of *The Tractatus*, “Only the proposition has sense. Only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning.”

So what he has in mind here is that if I just list the word desk, that isn’t going to tell you too much about what I am thinking of, but if I use the term desk in a sentence, if I say, “There is a desk in front of the classroom facing the blackboard,” well then you have a much better idea of what I am talking about. I am talking about a state of affairs and that’s going to help you to point out, if you had to, which desk I was thinking about and to understand what I meant.

Well, in virtue of Wittgenstein’s belief that words are names which stand for objects in the world, and in virtue of his belief that only within a proposition do words, individual words, that is, have meaning, Wittgenstein makes a very telling remark which again I would suggest shows the heavily referential nature of this theory.
of meaning and it also shows that he’s working with some form of correspondence theory of truth, that is, that our language is true because what our language says about the world corresponds to the way the world is. Wittgenstein says, and I quote him here, this is Proposition 2.0211 of *The Tractatus*, “If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend upon whether another proposition was true.” And then at 2.0212, “It would then be impossible to form a picture of the world, true or false?” In other words what Wittgenstein is saying is if there weren’t really objects or things in the world and we only had language, then whether one sentence was true would depend on whether it fit with another sentence in our language. But what’s happening there is that such a notion of truth is what’s known as a coherence notion of truth, that sentences are true which cohere with other sentences. You don’t have there a correspondence theory of truth, but on the other hand, if you believe that language stands for, or names, or designates objects in the world, then clearly our language refers to specific objects and our language is true or false if what we say in our language corresponds to the way the world is. So that’s why I say to you that this whole Picture Theory of Meaning is a heavily referential theory of meaning and it definitely seems to incorporate some notion, some form, of the correspondence theory of truth.

Well, we’ve talked then about the simple elements of a proposition, we’ve also talked about simple sentences, or simple propositions, what about complex states of affairs and complex propositions? Well, what we find here is just exactly what we would expect. Corresponding to complex states of affairs, Wittgenstein says, there are complex propositions. They also picture reality, just as complex states of affairs can be analyzed into simple states of affairs, so it is the case that complex propositions can be analyzed or broken down into simple ones. As Wittgenstein says at Proposition 4.221 of *The Tractatus*, “It is obvious that in the analysis of propositions, we must come to elementary propositions, which consist of names in immediate combination.” Again, Proposition 4.2211 of *The Tractatus*, he says, “Even if the world is infinitely complex so that every fact consists of an infinite number of atomic facts and every atomic fact is composed of an infinite number of objects, even then, there must be objects and atomic facts.”

Well, as I’ve already noted in our last lecture when I discussed Wittgenstein’s conception of reality, Wittgenstein gave no examples of these atomic facts, nor does he offer examples of
simple propositions. But just as he believed that you have to conclude *a priori* that there are such simple objects and states of affairs, so it also follows by logic that there must also be such simple propositions as well.

Well, so far we've talked about the different elements of a proposition, but nothing that I've said so far explains how a proposition or how even an element within a proposition can picture reality. And that's really the last link in the Picture Theory of Meaning. Well, you say, *That's fine. A sentence is a picture of reality, a proposition is, and so is a thought, but I still don't see how thoughts and propositions picture reality.* That is, what is this picturing relationship between language and the world that is contained in Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Meaning?

Well, I think to begin to explain this, the first thing I would say is to think of a literal picture, a real picture that you might have in your home. In that picture you see various objects that are supposed to represent or stand for or correspond to objects in the real world. In addition to the objects in the picture, you find that those objects, at least in the picture, stand together in various relations. For example, one object is to the right of another; another object is above another object. A third object is below another object. These are different relationships that the objects in the picture might have. And the relationships that the objects in the picture have to one another represent the way that objects in the world relate to one another. You find these ideas in *The Tractatus* at Propositions 2.13, 2.131, 2.14, and 2.15.

Now, the connection of the various elements of the literal picture is what Wittgenstein calls the *picture structure.* And the possibility that those elements can be structured together is what Wittgenstein calls the *form of representation* of the picture. That information you find at Proposition 2.15. Well, certainly as you reflect upon this idea, you can understand how a literal picture pictures the real world, but initially it doesn’t seem that a proposition bears this kind of relationship to the world that a literal picture does. However, Wittgenstein says, “That because,” and I quote him, “a proposition communicates to us a state of affairs, therefore, it must be essentially connected with the state of affairs.” Here you find this at Proposition 4.03.

The connection, though, between the proposition and the state of affairs is not a spatial picture like a literal picture would be in its relationship to the real world. Instead, the proposition
Wittgenstein says “is a logical picture of the state of affairs it describes.” This is Proposition 4.03. Now, what in the world does it mean for something to be a logical picture of a state of affairs? I think, again, George Pitcher in his book on Wittgenstein’s philosophy helps in explaining this idea. He writes, “In order for one thing ‘A’ to be a logical picture of another ‘B,’ three conditions must be met. One, there must be a one-to-one correspondence between the components of ‘A’ and those of ‘B.’ Two, to every feature of the structure or form of ‘A,’ there must correspond a feature of the structure or form of ‘B’ and three, there must be rules of projection connecting the components of ‘A’ and those of ‘B.’ Rules of projection are rules whereby given ‘A’ or ‘B,’ ‘B’ or ‘A’ can be reconstructed from it. A good example,” Pitcher says, “is the rules connecting a musical score and an actual performance of it. Given either the score or the performance, the other can be reconstructed from it.”

I think those of you who are musicians or who know music will understand this better than those of us who are not musicians, but the thought here is that if you look at a musical score, you see various marks on a page that represent notes. Those marks on the page aren’t the actual sounds, but if you see that musical score, you can project what the sounds will be. On the other hand, if you just hear a musical performance and you know the rules of projection, you could, after having heard that performance, sit down and write out marks on a page that would represent the musical score. And, as Pitcher says, that seems to be something of the idea that Wittgenstein had when he says that a sentence is literally a picture or a proposition is literally a picture of reality.

Well, all of this means that the fact that names are configured in a certain way in a proposition to assert the existence of a state of affairs—that fact represents that in reality the objects to which the names refer are structured together in the way the proposition indicates. Well, for Wittgenstein, then, propositions picture reality because they share the same logical form, as does reality. And the logical form that is the form of representation is to find, and I quote Wittgenstein, “the possibility that the things are combined with one another as are the elements of the picture.” This is what he says in *The Tractatus* at 2.151. This means, as I noted a few moments ago that, for Wittgenstein, when we put a sentence together, we construct a model of reality. As he says, and this is Proposition 4.031, “In a proposition a situation is as it were put together experimentally. That is, you can in your language structure a state of affairs. The reason that it’s experimental is that
you then have to go out and look at the world to see if the world matches what you’ve said about the world in this proposition that you’ve constructed."

Well, even though one would not think that a sentence printed on a page is really a picture, Wittgenstein says that it is a picture in the ordinary sense of what it represents. Malcolm says about all of this that “Wittgenstein conceives the proof of this to be that although words we have not previously encountered have to be explained to us, when we meet for the first time a sentence that is composed of familiar words, we understand the sentence without further explanation.” “I understand a sentence without having had its sense explained to me,” Wittgenstein says at point 4.021 of *The Tractatus*. “This can appear to one as remarkable fact. If it is a fact, the only possible explanation would be that a sentence shows its sense. It shows how things are if it is true.” This is what Wittgenstein says at Proposition 4.022. This is exactly what a picture does. That is, a picture shows how things are in the world if the picture truly represents the world. And that’s what Wittgenstein is saying a sentence does. A sentence composed of old words is able to communicate a new state of affairs by virtue of being a picture of it.

Well that’s the basic elements of Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Meaning. Let me draw out for you several key implications of this theory that Wittgenstein himself draws out for us. The first one is that in virtue of the picture theory, certain propositions are nonsense. Now if somebody uttered the following words: despair orange cup cloudy, that would surely be nonsense, but it’s not the kind of nonsense that Wittgenstein is thinking of. In order to understand what he means, we have to remember that for Wittgenstein, elementary propositions are configurations of names and the names directly picture objects and states of affairs in the world as those names are configured together in a sentence. As Wittgenstein says, “What the picture represents is its sense. Hence if a sentence does not picture any state of affairs in the world, then the sentence is without a sense. That is, it is nonsense. That means it has no meaning.” Now here it’s important to remember that Wittgenstein said that the world is the totality of facts and that propositions are pictures of facts. But now if that’s so, then propositions which have meaning can only be about states of affairs in the world. Any state of affairs, whatever that might be, that would be a state of affairs out of this world is not something that language can picture. It’s not something, according to Wittgenstein’s theory, that language
could be about and hence that kind of a sentence would not have a sense. Since for Wittgenstein having a sense means picturing facts and, of course, facts are states of affairs in the world.

Well, when you hear this you begin to wonder what kind of sentences are going to be nonsense. And probably some of your deepest suspicions are going to be confirmed within the next few moments as we see what Wittgenstein says about this.

Given these doctrines, the following kinds of propositions turn out to be nonsense. First of all: the propositions of metaphysics. And, of course, propositions about God and His relationship to the world wind up being propositions about metaphysics, but in addition to that, there are other metaphysical propositions that have no sense. Wittgenstein says, “If one wrote a book and called it *The World As I Found It*, the metaphysical subject ‘I’ would not be in the world. As a result, talk of that metaphysical subject would be nonsense and one should remain silent about such metaphysical items.” Here you might want to consult Wittgenstein at Proposition 5.631, 5.632, and 5.633. He makes these points about the propositions of metaphysics.

Well, it’s not only the propositions of metaphysics that are nonsense, but in the second place, Wittgenstein says it’s the propositions of ethics that are nonsense. Wittgenstein says, “The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world, everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it, there is no value and if there were it would be of no value.” That’s Proposition 6.41. What he means here is that as you look at the world, you see states of affairs, but you don’t see value or lack of value attached as objects to those states of affairs. If I see a state of affairs where one person is pulling a trigger of a gun and shooting another person, I see that state of affairs, my evaluation of that might be very negative, but I don’t see a negative evaluation as an object in the world alongside of the gun and the person who's holding it and the person who is getting hit by the bullet. All I see is the gun, the person who’s holding it and shooting it, and the person who’s hit. I don’t see any of the evaluation of that act as an object in the world.

Well, what that’s going to mean then is that whatever value judgments I might make about the world or any part of it or any act in the world are judgments that I make which do not represent states of affairs, objects in the world. Well, since the propositions of ethics are value judgments about the world, but they don’t...
picture value in the world, they literally are nonsensical. They don’t have a sense, according to Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory of Meaning. Wittgenstein says at Proposition 6.421, “It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed.” That means it doesn’t have a sense so you can’t speak about it. “Ethics are,” he says, “transcendental.”

Well, it’s not just the propositions of metaphysics and ethics that are nonsense; it’s also the propositions of religion and theology. Wittgenstein says at Proposition 6.432, “God does not reveal Himself in the world.” Well, since propositions are supposed to be pictures of states of affairs in the world, and since God is not to be found in the world, any proposition about God must be nonsense in Wittgenstein’s meaning of nonsense.

The fourth kind of proposition that’s nonsense, believe it or not, is the propositions or are the propositions of philosophy. Wittgenstein says that the propositions of philosophy are nonsense in that they picture nothing about the world. They don’t pictures states of affairs in the world. Wittgenstein even says at Proposition 6.54 of The Tractatus, he says about his own philosophizing, the following. He says, “My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it. He must surmount these propositions. Then he sees the world rightly.” Now by “senseless” in the passage I’ve just quoted, Wittgenstein means that they don’t picture states of affairs in the world. He doesn’t mean that the propositions of his philosophy or of other philosophies are gibberish; he just means they don’t picture states of affairs in the world.

Well, so the initial implication of the Picture Theory of Meaning is that there are a whole lot of propositions that are nonsense. A second implication of the Picture Theory is that if certain propositions are nonsense, then they ought not to be uttered. For Wittgenstein, all that can be said or spoken, that is, everything that has sense, relates to the world. Everything else is unsayable, it doesn’t have a sense and so as a result of that, it shouldn’t be spoken. Wittgenstein says at proposition 5.5561, “Empirical reality is limited by the totality of objects. The boundary appears again in the totality of elementary propositions.” Well now, this I would say to you is a statement about the limits of reality, but it is also a statement about the limits of language. In Proposition 5.6 Wittgenstein writes, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” This means that what can be said with sense shows
me how much is in the world and how far the world goes. But it should also be clear that, for Wittgenstein, the converse of his statement is also true. That is, it’s not only true that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world; it also means that the limits of the world mean the limits of my language. But, of course, Wittgenstein has already told us that the boundaries of this world leave out of this world metaphysics, ethics, and theology.

Now here you might want to see his important comment at Proposition 4.11 which shows that the propositions that speak of this world and, as a result, have sense and are sayable, are the propositions of natural science. As you can see, this is a philosophy that has a very, very rigorous commitment to empiricism.

Well, the ultimate conclusion then of his book and of this theory is what he states as Proposition 7. And Proposition 7 says this, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” Now a key point here, I think, is that we must recognize that Wittgenstein is not claiming that unsayable things are nonexistent. He’s only saying that they cannot be spoken of because they are not within the world. Such items might really be there and Wittgenstein says of them that they are the mystical as he claims at Proposition 6.522, “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical.” Now the phrase, “There is indeed the inexpressible” means that things which cannot be spoken of do in fact exist. The German phrase in the original text that Wittgenstein wrote is stated in such a way that he’s clearly asserting that inexpressible things do in fact exist. It’s just you can speak about them.

Well, let me mention several further aspects of the Picture Theory and then I want to turn to an analysis of how The Tractatus relates to logical positivism and the Vienna Circle. Wittgenstein claimed in regard to this Picture Theory of Meaning that “Every proposition is a true function on elementary propositions.” That’s his Proposition 5 in The Tractatus. As Malcolm explains, “a true function of single propositions, let’s represent it by the letter P, is a proposition whose truth or falsity is uniquely determined by the truth or falsity of P. For example not P, which means P is false, is a truth function of P. A truth function of two propositions, let’s say P and Q, is a proposition whose truth is uniquely determined by the truth or falsity of P and Q. For instance, propositions P and Q are both true is a truth function of proposition P and proposition Q. In this case, the proposition would be a conjunction and whether the conjunction is true or false depends on the truth or falsity of each conjunct; plus the fact that in the proposition both
conjuncts are asserted to be true.

Now the typical truth functional connectives are words like “and,” “or,” “if then,” and “if and only if.” Now if you understand what a truth function is, then, we now can see what Wittgenstein means when he says, “Every genuine proposition is a truth function on elementary propositions.” Since most propositions that a person would utter are complex propositions, it is clear that those kinds of propositions are analyzable into elementary propositions. Wittgenstein’s doctrine here means that a genuine proposition is a combination of elementary propositions connected together. And we might think here that the connective is one of the four that I already mentioned: “and,” “or,” “if then,” “if and only if.” But that is not necessarily so because many complex propositions which picture complex states of affairs don’t have any words in them like “and,” “or,” or the other ones. Now remember here that a proposition like “The cat is on the mat,” is probably a complex proposition for Wittgenstein. All of this leads Malcolm to say that it’s really not clear at all that this doctrine about truth functions follows from the Picture Theory or that it’s even compatible with it, but nonetheless Wittgenstein held this to be true.

Another aspect of the Picture Theory that Wittgenstein adds as part of it, is that there are, for Wittgenstein, three basic kinds of truth conditions and accordingly, three kinds of sentences. There are, on the one hand, tautologies. These are sentences that are true for all possibilities of the elementary proposition. There are contradictions. They are sentences that are false for all truth possibilities. And then there are propositions that are neither always true nor always false. All of this you find at 4.463 of The Tractatus.

Now according to Tractatus, the so-called propositions of logic, that is, logical truths, principles of logic are also, all of them, tautologies. As Malcolm says, this means that they express no thoughts. They don’t say anything; we could actually do without them. But they aren’t nonsense—for the fact that a certain combination of propositions yields a tautology—reveals something about the structures of the constituent proposition.

Well, someone might wonder how do you know that any given non-tautologist or non-contradictory proposition is true or false? That is, one can, in a proposition, put together for the sake of experiment a state of affairs, as Wittgenstein had said, but how would you know whether that proposition that you just formed is true or false?
Wittgenstein also says, and this is his Proposition 4.26, “The specification of all true elementary propositions describes the world completely. The world is completely described by the specification of all elementary propositions plus the specification which of them are true and which false.” Well he further says, and this is Proposition 5.5151, “The positive proposition must presuppose the existence of the negative proposition and conversely.” Pitcher, in his work, calls this The Principle of Sufficient Negation.

Well, Malcolm also shows that Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory and his explanation of logical truth lead to an interesting doctrine of necessity and also to a denial that one can have any knowledge of the future. As to necessity, genuine propositions say how things are, but they don’t say how things must be. The only necessity that there can be is embodied in tautologies and, of course, the equations of mathematics, as Malcolm explains. But neither tautologies nor equations say anything about the world so there’s no necessity in the world. Wittgenstein says, and this is Proposition 6.3, “Outside of logic everything is accidental.” That is, it’s contingent; it’s not necessary. As to knowledge of the future, note the following things that Wittgenstein would say. For Wittgenstein, one proposition can be inferred from another only if there is an internal structural connection between them. But, of course, remember, all propositions picture states of affairs and remember Wittgenstein has said that states of affairs are independent of one another and they don’t infer one another. The existence of one state of affairs can’t be inferred from the existence of another entirely different state of affairs, but that’s really what an inference to a future state of affairs would have to be. As a result of that, we really don’t know whether any
proposition about the future is true because we don’t know what future states of affairs there are going to be. And we can’t get to them from the states of affairs that we have right now because states of affairs are independent of one another.

As Wittgenstein claimed, we don’t even know whether the sun will rise tomorrow. This is Proposition 6.36311. To be able to say that it’s going to rise tomorrow, you’d have to be able to infer that from other states of affairs that you’ve seen and, of course, that’s not possible.

Well, Wittgenstein’s doctrines about states of affairs being independent of one another leads to the notion that causality is not in the world. That is, we don’t see a transference of causal power in the world. This, of course, along with the doctrine that says, “States of affairs are independent of one another,” leads to a very interesting doctrine about human will and action. And with that, I want to close this lecture.

As Malcolm says, and I quote him, “If we conceive of an act of will, a volition, as one occurrence and the transpiring of what is willed as an entirely different occurrence, it follows from the foregoing doctrines that there can be, at most, a merely accidental correlation between one’s will and what happens in the world. I cannot make anything happen, not even a movement of my body.” As Wittgenstein states, this is Proposition 6.373, “The world is independent of my will.” In his notes, he put the point this way, “I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will. I am completely powerless.”

Well, how does all of this relate in The Tractatus to logical positivism and the Vienna circle and what does all of this mean for theology? In my next lecture, I want to pick that up and then after dealing with that, I want to talk for a little bit about the philosophy of Wittgenstein’s later period. But next lecture for all of that.