BEYOND THE *TRACTATUS* WARS

Over fifteen years have passed since Cora Diamond and James Conant turned Wittgenstein scholarship upside down with the program of "resolute" reading, and ten years since this reading was crystallized in the major collection *The New Wittgenstein*. This approach remains at the center of the debate about Wittgenstein and his philosophy, and this book draws together the latest thinking of the world's leading Tractatarian scholars and promising newcomers. Showcasing one paper alternately from each "camp," *Beyond the* Tractatus *Wars* pairs newly commissioned papers addressing differing views on how to understand early Wittgenstein, providing for the first time an arena in which the debate between "strong" resolutists, "mild" resolutists, and "elucidatory" readers of the book can really take place. The collection includes famous "samizdat" essays by Warren Goldfarb and Roger White that are finally seeing the light of day.

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BEYOND THE *TRACTATUS* WARS

The New Wittgenstein Debate

Edited by Rupert Read
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

In this book, authors draw English text from either published versions of the *Tractatus*, or from translations of their own. When they believe it necessary, to avoid confusion or to note possible concern about differences between translations, they note the source.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew A. Lavery and Rupert Read

This book is intended to provide the reader with an overview of the general themes of the most recent phase of Wittgenstein research, "the New Wittgenstein debate," which takes its name from the title of a book published by Routledge more than a decade ago, in 2000. In some obvious ways this book serves as a "sequel" to that; they share some contributors, considerable references to frequently the same texts, and much philosophical disposition. In some important ways, however, its purpose is divergent: *The New Wittgenstein* was concerned in general with *laying out* the basics of and applications of "resolutism"—the reading of Wittgenstein's corpus emphasizing a "therapeutic" continuity between what are traditionally seen as his "early" and "late" periods. It was essentially a philosophical "coming out" party for the viability of a resolute approach, for the light that "resolutism" could shed on a host of philosophical themes (like politics, private language, methodology, etc.) previously understood almost solely from a "standard" viewpoint. While traces of this project clearly remain here, resolutism's potential viability is no longer questioned; in fact it is even assumed in some circles, and so this book (which, unlike *The New Wittgenstein*, tends to focus somewhat more singlemindedly on the *Tractatus*) allows that reading to bear its own fruit by revealing the nuances, internal conflicts, and sometimes opposing further commitments of now not-quite-so-new readings of Wittgenstein. (And this book brings together also a few of those whom "resolute readers" regard as their most perceptive, important, and sympathetic critics: namely, Roger White, Peter Sullivan, and Adrian Moore.) Thus we aim to be part of a movement beyond "the *Tractatus* Wars" of the last decade and a half, and into a new phase of (1) development of the resolute, therapeutic approach, and (2) genuinely productive engagement with genuinely engaged detractors or constructive critics of that approach.

Warren Goldfarb begins this effort by acknowledging the same indebtedness to the early manoeuvres of resolutists and offering an impressive overview of the landscape in which they maneuvered, in "*Das Überwinden*: Anti-Metaphysical Readings of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*." This long-awaited paper, which created a sensation in one of the key moments in the public emergence, lionization, and contestation of "the new Wittgenstein" approach—the Wittgenstein congress at Kirchberg in summer 2001, on the fiftieth anniversary of Wittgenstein's death—outlines the terrain by laying out the essential claims about nonsense (perhaps *the* key term in the "*Tractatus* Wars" between standard interpreters and "resolutists"), with an emphasis on claims about the use of that term in the *Tractatus*, up to the period just after the publication of *The New Wittgenstein*.

Goldfarb's paper sets the tone for the book, and gives it historical background. The remainder of this book consists of pairs of papers, authors in conversation with one another. Against the backdrop provided by Goldfarb, these pairings demonstrate both the vitality and the range of a full-blown philosophical approach, one that has moved beyond merely concern over its fundamentals, in two ways. First, they show the variety of thoughts that can be fostered by resolutism's arrival on the scene of "grown-up" philosophical ideas and accepted exegetical strategies by including both resolutists and those who would hesitate to be so called but whose thinking has been influenced by resolutism nonetheless, even if only in an agonistic spirit. Second, they also demonstrate in greater detail than has ever previously been the case the variety that exists within resolutism itself. In some senses, Chapters 2–9 all comment on each other, all work together to defy a facile classification of what resolutism is, all point in the directions that resolutism may travel in the future.

As Goldfarb's paper shows, moving beyond the *Tractatus* "Wars" may first require seeing them through to their end, and this is the work of the book's next two chapters. First Roger M. White's "Throwing the Baby Out with the Ladder," also long-awaited by scholars of Wittgenstein, a powerful critique of Conant and Diamond, argues that it is too hasty to let go of all of what standard readers see the *Tractatus* as doing in a reading that harkens back to the standard interpretation while acknowledging the central "claim" of resolutism: that all nonsense is just pure nonsense. Following this—in the spirit of dialectic and vigorous debate that *The New Wittgenstein* embraced by including a response to its contents by the standard reading's standard-bearer, P.M.S. Hacker, at its conclusion—James Conant (a key contributor to that book and of course one of the first and leading "resolute" readers) and Ed Dain reiterate resolutism's demands to this new kind of hybrid reader: such clinging results, in their view, in one of two unworkable outcomes, ineffabilism or logical positivism. Not only does this exchange help enumerate the wealth of sophisticated options potentially available to the reader of the *Tractatus* in the wake of the New Wittgenstein debate, it also marks an important moment in that (ongoing) debate: it shows the standard reading adapting to the resolute reading and sophisticating itself in the process, rather than the

previous norm of resolute readers simply being seen as obliged to answer objections offered by standard readers.

   This exchange suggests, however, that the groundwork of a resolute approach may not yet be complete, and that task is taken up in novel ways in the two pairs of papers that follow. The fourth essay in the collection, Silver Bronzo's "Context, Compositionality, and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," takes up the resolutists' flag, arguing that the *Tractatus* already rules out the standard reading by undercutting compositionalism as a stand-alone explanation for any linguistic act and thus the ability for there to be anything like substantial nonsense, on which the standard reading depends. The overall impact, however, looks beyond a defense of "resolutism" to a continuation of its "therapeutic" project: compositionalism fails not because there is a better explanation, but because seeking a definitive explanation of the working of language is a chimera. In "The Dialectic of Interpretations," Oskari Kuusela sets out to repair the austere conception of nonsense argued for by Conant and Diamond in response to criticisms raised against it by Hacker in 2000. Thus in a certain sense Kuusela manages the extraordinary feat of dialectically synthesizing the (Hackerian) 'standard' interpretation with the (Conant and Diamond) "resolute" interpretation. This project is not merely retrospective, as it suggests a strikingly novel view of what Wittgenstein was after in the *Tractatus* and of how the project of the *Tractatus*—in particular, how outlining a "concept script" that (Kuusela holds) tacitly embodies some dogmatic commitments without being committed to any metaphysical doctrines— can satisfy exegetical demands of both standard and resolute readers.

   In the fifth and seventh papers in the collection, the argument/response dynamic is continued, but in a way that argues for the value and applicability of resolution as a philosophical, therapeutic approach to more than merely interpreting Wittgenstein. In "Toward a *Useful* Jacobinism," his response to Bronzo, Lavery argues that a too impassioned quest for a "philosophically superior" reading of the *Tractatus* misses a key point in the study and the philosophy of Wittgenstein: moving beyond cloistered academic debates and into applying philosophically honed critical intelligence to the problems of the lived-world. This is a radical questioning of any "*Tractatus* wars": the claim is that any reading of the *Tractatus* can be successful only if it takes us away from philosophy about the meaning of a reading and returns us to the everyday world, and to philosophical and not merely scholarly ways of taking and changing that world. Rupert Read (one of the editors of *The New Wittgenstein*, as of the present book) and Rob Deans respond to Kuusela (and to Conant and Dain too); they continue the work on a "stronger," more "Jacobin" (to use Goldfarb's term) vision and version of "resolutism" (than that present in the recent work of Conant and Diamond) that they began in earnest in 2003 in the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*.[1] Read and Deans thus make an impassioned call for fully embracing "resolutism" in "The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*." By way of responding to Kuusela, and taking up his suggestion that there appears to be a philosophical unclarity—a

hovering—in the resolute stance unless it moves either somewhat in the direction of the standard reading or toward the kind of more radically post-metaphysical approach that Read and Deans, like Juliet Floyd, have argued for, they suggest that resolutism's contribution, and in fact the *Tractatus*'s brilliance, can best be seen when resolutists move beyond the need to compromise their key assertions in the face of criticism. The reading they put forward sticks to its guns and suggests, to borrow their words, that what is most important is "to be on the path to doing philosophy aright. And that path is what 'severism'—the resolute (as opposed to irresolute) application of 'the resolute reading'—does for us" (p. 166).

One further way in which the book moves beyond the *Tractatus* wars is by taking the issues that have preoccupied philosophers in those *into* the discussion of later Wittgenstein. In certain respects, Lavery's and Read's and Deans's papers do this; but it is most pronounced in the exchange between Sullivan and Moore, in which they "shift the primary focus of discussion from Wittgenstein's earlier to his later thought" (Sullivan, p. 170). In other words: an issue that Sullivan and Moore have tended previously to focus most explicitly around early Wittgenstein is now brought to bear more focally on the reading of later Wittgenstein. In that way, appropriately, they make clear how *Beyond the* Tractatus *Wars* continues strongly in the spirit of *The New Wittgenstein*, in the sense of laying out in concrete terms how questions of interpretation in early and later Wittgenstein are most fruitfully *brought together*. For the issues that preoccupy Sullivan and Moore (primarily in later-Wittgenstein interpretation, and in substantive philosophy) *are best seen as "projected" from questions about what reading the* Tractatus *resolutely is / would be / could not be like.* This is a powerful for-instance of what Wittgenstein himself famously said: that the one book ought to be read directly after and against the background of the other.

That is how and why Sullivan and Moore continue here their long-running debate about idealism in Wittgenstein, but take it forward, in the course of these two papers, from the arena in which they have previously largely conducted it—early Wittgenstein—into Wittgenstein's later work. In the first of these final two papers, "Synthesizing without Concepts," Peter Sullivan argues that the need to acknowledge that there is a "way of grasping a rule that is not an interpretation" is the same as the need to acknowledge that the concepts through which we might articulate experience in basic perceptual judgments are already prefigured in that experience. Sullivan challenges what *could* be seen as a consequence of some standard "ineffabilist" readings of the *Tractatus* (or at least: of *A.W. Moore's* broadly ineffabilist reading thereof): that in his early work Wittgenstein in effect embraces transcendental idealism, even if he does so against his better judgment, while his later thought offers us more "resolutely" powerful ways of resisting it. In contrast, Sullivan holds exactly the reverse, thus in one respect at least allying himself with the central consequence of the resolutists' continuist "program"; namely, that there are not two distinct phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy *in anything like the way normally assumed in Wittgenstein studies*. In "A Response to Sullivan," Adrian Moore

explores the relation between the Wittgenstein who is ultimately hostile to transcendental idealism on the one hand and transcendental idealism itself on the other, by suggesting that, while he repudiates transcendental idealism as nonsense, it is a kind of nonsense whose attractions his own work engenders, and to whose attractions he himself is susceptible (at least in his early work). While Moore goes on to argue exactly that Wittgenstein ultimately rejects it (looking specifically at how his conception of the limits of rule following developed between the *Tractatus* and the later works), this approach obviously and powerfully challenges those commentators who deny that there are *any* interesting or deep questions about the relation between Wittgenstein and transcendental idealism.

What is remarkable about these final essays, what they exemplify about the status of the New Wittgenstein Debate, about "resolutism," and "the *Tractatus* Wars," is what philosophy that embraces or at least considers resoluteness can do as philosophy. While theirs may not be—in fact, very clearly is not—the "Jacobinism" that some previously discussed contributors to this book envision, the exchange between Sullivan and Moore shows an *interest* in "resolutism" and in the issues and methods that it has helped to foreground that is full-grown, and provoking as a philosophical tool for purposes other than simply understanding the workings of the *Tractatus*—a text that, if the resolute reading is right, there is strictly no such thing as *understanding* anyway. Sullivan and Moore move us "beyond the *Tractatus* Wars" by helping us to *think* Wittgenstein (early and later) as a philosopher whose sticky engagement with idealism sheds distinctive valuable light on the entire post-Kantian philosophical problematic.

As a whole, then, the essays in this book demonstrate both the rich vastness of post-standard interpretations of Wittgenstein (and particularly of the *Tractatus*) as well as making and embodying arguments for (and against) these interpretations. If the explosion of interest in Wittgenstein made evident by the success of *The New Wittgenstein* ten years ago now could engender such diverse and powerful thinking as is presented in the pages that follow, we are confident that the period of Wittgenstein scholarship that follows this book will promote more, and even more important thought (and, hopefully, action). We hope that our four pairs of essays in debate and dialogue with one another, plus Goldfarb's magisterial scene-setter, will be a key part of and directly conduce toward that aim. We hope, that is, that, taken together, the essays in this collection already *instantiate* a vital movement beyond "the *Tractatus* Wars" of the last twenty years, and set out a healthy agenda for the years to come.

Note

1   *Philosophical Investigations* 26:3 (July 2003), 239–268 (see http://www.uea.ac.uk/~j339/replytomounce.pdf.).

1

DAS ÜBERWINDEN

Anti-Metaphysical Readings of the *Tractatus*[1]

Warren Goldfarb

As all its readers know, the basic puzzle of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is that it makes many metaphysical pronouncements, while at the same time it declares metaphysics to be impossible. Or so it appears. To what extent those appearances can be reconciled has been a continuing theme in the interpretation of the book since its appearance, starting with Russell's rebuke in his Introduction ("after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the skeptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole"), and with Ramsey's overly repeated quip.[2]

For at least the last forty years, the dominant view of the *Tractatus* has been that Wittgenstein does not take metaphysics to be impossible. The doctrines of the book have the consequence that metaphysics is *nonsense*, but that is not at all the same thing. Metaphysical theses cannot be said—on that Wittgenstein is clear—but Wittgenstein does speak of what can be shown, rather than said. It is this status that the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* has, on this view. Many commentators have taken this line, but its fullest and most self-conscious expression lies in the writings of Peter Hacker and David Pears. Here's Hacker: "The author of the *Tractatus* was explicitly committed to a host of claims about logic, language, thought and the logical structure of the world, which cannot be stated in well-formed sentences of language, but are shown by them." And thus Pears: "The opening ontology is not something that we are supposed to discount because it is an attempt to say things that can only be shown. On the contrary, here, as elsewhere in the *Tractatus*, the strict impossibility of formulating a thesis in factual language is, if anything, a sign of its importance."[3] On this view, there are important claims, theses, that can be shown, but not said. We have then two types of communication that language can effect. The ordinary way of communicating is to say things; but there is another track: that of showing; and there are things not amenable to being said that can be communicated by being shown.

If Wittgenstein is communicating a metaphysics, what kind of metaphysics it is seems patent: it is emphatically realist. As Pears puts it, "the *Tractatus* is basically realistic in the following sense: language enjoys certain options on the surface, but deeper down it is founded on the intrinsic nature of objects, which is not our creation but is set over against us in mysterious independence."[4] Whatever they may turn out to be, Wittgenstein's objects are "out there," given independently of us and prior to language. Language is responsible to these objects. Their logical behavior inflicts a structure on language, since the structure of language must mirror that of the objects. Indeed, often Wittgenstein is taken to be sketching a transcendental argument of some sort: if representation of the world by language is to be possible, then there must be objects that are simple, invariable, eternal, have fixed repertoires of possibilities of combinations with other objects, and lack intrinsic material properties. The intelligibility of language rests on these objects. That propositions have sense is thus based on metaphysical features of the world. In this way, as Pears puts it, Wittgenstein is giving an "explanation of the miracle of propositional sense."[5]

About realism too there seems no question about textual support. The opening of the *Tractatus* unabashedly presents (or so it seems) a realist metaphysics, and the introduction of language only after facts and objects suggests that the ontology is prior. Of course those remarks are nonsense, by the lights of the book, but somehow we can understand what they are getting at.

My topic in this paper is dissent from this view: denying that the *Tractatus* is propounding realism, and denying that Wittgenstein is communicating a metaphysics. This is "the new Wittgenstein," but it goes back farther than some recent literature indicates; the new Wittgenstein has roots over thirty years old. Realism was the focus of this kind of dissent at first, starting with a 1969 paper of Hidé Ishiguro, and continuing with two papers of Brian McGuinness published in the early 1980s, with an unpublished but circulated manuscript of my own from 1979, and with a paper of Peter Winch published in 1987.[6] Cora Diamond's paper "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*," published in 1988, sharpened the issue by starting with the *status* of Wittgenstein's seemingly metaphysical remarks, rather than their content.[7] Diamond urged an understanding of those remarks as pure nonsense, not as nonsense that somehow communicates. Wittgenstein's objects as the bedrock of a realism would be swept away with this. My aim here is to survey the earlier dissent, to see what the lacunae in it were that Diamond addressed; and then to see what Diamond's interpretive stance involves, how it redirected the issues, and where it now is.

I

Frege's context principle "only in the context of a proposition does a name have meaning" occurs in the *Tractatus* at 3.3. In her 1969 paper, Ishiguro drew from the principle the plausible inference that one cannot look for the referents of

Wittgensteinian names independently of their use in propositions. On this under-
standing, there cannot be anything prior to the use of names in propositions that
fixes the referents of the names—no ostensive acts or other baptisms. Rather, it is
the use of propositions containing a name that fixes its referent.

A second point supports this line of thought: the objects of the *Tractatus* are
unlike any kind of object we ordinarily encounter. The features Wittgenstein
ascribes to objects, particularly the independence of elementary propositions from
each other and the role of objects in constituting any conceivable world as well as
the actual one, make the objects peculiar, as Ishiguro put it, "not like things (how-
ever simple) in the empirical world which can be individuated extensionally." Thus
the only grasp we have on identity criteria for such objects comes via the propo-
sitions that contain names for them, not from something intrinsic to the objects.
Simple names, Ishiguro concluded, are "dummy names," like the "a" in "let a be
the center of a circle." This, of course, is not at all like any realist picture of objects.

McGuinness took up this invocation of Frege's context principle, and elabo-
rated how it should be viewed as yielding a non-realist position. For Wittgenstein's
objects are simply whatever is demanded by propositions: "the semantic role of
the supposedly possible simple . . . name is that of being combined with other
simple . . . names to produce a proposition having a truth-value." Wittgenstein is
not a realist, McGuinness says, in respect of the objects his theory of language
demands, because those objects are "not concrete objects which may sensibly be
said to exist or not." Again, there can be no pre-propositional "grasp" of objects;
there is no operation other than grasping or expressing propositions.

> Our acquaintance with objects . . . is not an experience of knowledge of
> something over against which we stand. . . . Objects are . . . beyond being,
> and it is therefore misleading to regard Wittgenstein as a realist in respect
> of them.[8]

A different argument, not invoking the context principle but with parallels to
Ishiguro's and McGuinness's concerns, is explored in my 1979 manuscript. There
I argued that the question of realism can be approached by way of the question of
how simple names go proxy for simple objects. If one has the picture of the
independently existing realm of simple objects on one side and language on the
other, the question arises as to what bridges the gap. The standard answer is this:
the connection between simple name and simple object is made by a mental act:
some sort of intentional act whose upshot is a dubbing. Hacker expresses the view
thus: "a mechanism of a psychological nature is generated to project lines of
projection onto the world"; it is "the view that essential symbolic phenomena
occur in the soul by means of psychological processes."[9]

This position can be seen at once to be inconsonant with a central theme of
the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein seeks to put a limit to thought by putting a limit to
language. He writes to Russell in August, 1919:

The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by propositions—i.e. by language—(and, what comes to the same, what can be thought).[10]

For Wittgenstein, thought is a language itself, so that the account of language is meant at the same time to be an account of thought. Thus Hacker's statement is backwards: it's not that symbolic phenomena occur by means of psychological processes; rather psychological processes occur by means of symbolic phenomena. The order of explanation is from Tractarian theory of meaning to the nature of mental life. If unanalyzed mental processes play a basic role in the account of language, then Wittgenstein's taking a proper account of language as solving all philosophical questions is completely undermined.

McGuinness summarized my point in a humorous simile. To claim that the elements of propositions "acquire meaning and [the propositions] acquire truth-value in virtue of an act of meaning or intending you will have done nothing. It would be like the peasants to whom the working of the steam-locomotive was carefully explained, who then asked, 'But where does the horse go?'"[11]

Wittgenstein says that a thought is a logical picture (3); and a picture is a fact (2.141). Thus thoughts are sorts of facts. Since a thought is simply a fact, a relation of "psychical constituents," and sits squarely in one symbolic realm, it seems clear that thoughts cannot forge the link between a symbolic realm and the world—they rely on that link. For example, my thought "This is *a*" contains a constituent corresponding to the object *a*. But then this thought presupposes whatever it is that makes this constituent so correspond. One constituent must already refer to *a*; the thought cannot create the reference relation. A particular thought has the content it does by dint of the workings of language. Consequently, if mental acts are to produce reference, those mental acts cannot be thoughts. Further confirmation of the point that Wittgenstein's account of language is meant to provide an account of mental phenomena and not the other way around comes from the remark "Theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology" (4.1121). Since philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts (4.112), what we do in philosophy of psychology is lay out further analyzed forms of the propositions of psychology. This will tell us the nature of mind.[12]

What then becomes of the view that mental dubbings underlie the workings of simple names? We have seen that if there is to be an act of dubbing to link names with objects, it must be prior to thoughts, beliefs, and intentions. Any such dubbing act would thus be unlike the mental acts with which we are familiar. There is some process, otherwise indescribable, that links the simple names with simple objects. This is a curious position: on the metaphysical reading, that propositions have sense is *explained* via an invocation of the ontological realm. On the view we here come to, that dubbings are unexplained and out-of-the-world, there is no possibility of clarifying *how* the objects fulfill this task. This is what I call a "mystery-act" view.

Indeed, in the second edition of *Insight and Illusion*, Hacker comes to just such a view. He discards the formulations involving "psychological mechanisms," and says:

> That such configurations, in thought or language, actually represent . . . is a function of the will, of the metaphysical self. . . . It is a mental act (albeit of a transcendental self, not of the self that is studied by psychology) that injects meaning or significance into signs.[13]

Mental acts of a transcendental self not amenable to psychological scrutiny certainly do strike me as mysterious.

My point, of course, was not that we should embrace mystery acts, but rather that there is no need in the *Tractatus* for dubbings at all. And no dubbings mean that we have no external view of the objects. As I put it, the account rests content in language. All that we should want to say about a name's going proxy for an object is exhausted by logical form, that is, the possibilities of combining with other names into propositions.[14]

To the objection that this will not determine *which* object of the given logical form the name designates, I would reply that there is no real question here. Like Ishiguro and McGuinness, I take it that the peculiarities of Wittgensteinian objects make inapplicable anything like criteria of identity. Towards this end, I used an argument that also appeared in McGuinness. He put it thus: "if I suppose two objects of the same logical form and call them '*a*' and '*b*', and if I suppose that '*a*' has one set of material properties and '*b*' another, there is really no sense to the question whether perhaps in reality '*b*' has the set of properties I have assigned to '*a*' and conversely."[15] That is, if I have two names with the same logical form, the notion that there is some ambiguity—that one name could designate this object and the other that object, as opposed to vice versa—is empty, because it doesn't make any difference, as far as the world being described goes, which names which.

We have wanted to ask, given a description of the syntax of the simple name, which object having that logical form is the one the name represents. But there can be no answer to that question: there is nothing but logical form to give, for objects have nothing else. In 2.01231 Wittgenstein says "if I am to know an object, though I need not know its external properties I must know all its internal properties." Thus knowing which object a simple name represents—knowing the meaning of a sign—amounts only to a knowledge of the object's internal properties. All there is to be known is given by the logical form of the sign.

However, this interchangeability argument is dangerous and misleading. It looks nice: it gives expression to the idea that Tractarian objects, since they lack any intrinsic material properties, are too thin to support a realist conception. But the point we want to get to is, roughly, this: that there is no conception of objects, and of situations, hence of the world, independently of language. These notions

are given only via our operating in language. The interchangeability argument requires a perspective from which this is denied. It claims that there is no difference between the world in which *a* has these material properties and *b* has those, and the world in which *a* has those and *b* has these. If we take it that our conception of situations, and hence difference of situations, is given via our understanding of language, that is, the understanding of propositions that represent situations, then of course there is a difference between those worlds: in one, *a* has these and *b* those, in another *a* has those and *b* these—and that is all that difference in situation amounts to.

The argument thus *itself* takes an external stance towards the ontology. This is much the common stance: one talks about the system from outside, describing its ontological and logical features as if we can make perfectly good sense of them; adding, however, that according to the *Tractatus* we are inside the system, and to those inside such talk does not make sense. It is just the use of this stance that underwrites the dominant interpretation; the external stance gives rise to the idea that Wittgenstein is presenting features of reality which, once we are inside, become unsayable.

Thus I find it problematic to adopt the external stance when the goal is to undercut the ascription of realism. To attempt such undercutting while occupying that stance almost demands that we give an alternative, anti-realist, account of objects. But the point should be that there is no more a perspective from which such a "linguistic" (or "linguistic-idealist") account can be given than there is from which a realist account can be given. The external stance is one to which, on Tractarian grounds, we ought not have access at all.

The question of stance is key to arriving at a more profound sense of what the alternative to the metaphysical interpretation could be. Otherwise, the issues are stalled. Matters will turn on deciding whether a weaker reading of the context principle is possible,[16] and whether the ontological is prior to the linguistic or vice versa. These questions are not readily adjudicable given the text and the common ways of reading it.

McGuinness and I tried to suggest some other way of reading. For we saw that our denial that the *Tractatus* espouses realism could be sustained only if the apparently realist nature of the opening of the text could be taken differently. In a suggestive remark, McGuinness called the opening of the *Tractatus* "a kind of ontological myth that he wants to give us to show us the nature of language. As is well-known, one of the chief results of the view of language so attained is the rejection of all such myths." In his later paper, he wrote:

> Wittgenstein's method . . . allows itself to use or feign to use a whole metaphysics in the task of getting rid of metaphysics. This sort of *Abschreckungsmethode*, a deterrence by example, is perhaps legitimate. But when we end up having strictly thought through everything then . . .we see that realism coincides with idealism.[17]

The thought here is that the seemingly metaphysical remarks of the *Tractatus* are doing different work from that of suggesting an unsayable metaphysics. We are meant to come to see that they are myths. It is not that we are to "discount" the opening ontology because it turns out to be unsayable (as Pears takes McGuinness to be saying), but rather we are to think through the remarks, to see that what they present is not coherent.

A similar thought occurred to me: as I put it,

> the basic structure [of the *Tractatus*] is . . . dialectic. First, to be sure, is a step to objects, objects of a certain character; this step is perhaps grounded in naively realist intuitions about language and representation. Then, however, relying on the character of the objects and the nature of language, the text goes on to undermine the idea that objects can be construed as a transcendental category, a category conceivable apart from language. Hence we have here an undermining of the notion of ontology at all. . . . We are to kick the ladder away not by ignoring how we arrived at the altitude of remark 7, but by retracing the earlier remarks armed with the recognition of correct method in philosophy that we have gained.[18]

The idea of reading the *Tractatus* in this dialectical way was essential to the development of a non-metaphysical interpretation. McGuinness wrote me at the time, "Whether all this lends itself to further development, and if so in what direction, I am not yet clear." Nor was I. We were working in the wrong direction: from the denial of realism to how the seemingly realist remarks had to be read. That they had to be read in some sort of transformational manner was, to be sure, correct. But it was the manner of reading that had to be put first, and clarified independently of the issue of realism, in order to make progress.

II

On the dominant reading, the metaphysical sentences of the *Tractatus* work by somehow suggesting ineffable features of reality (even though these sentences are nonsense), which features, it turns out, are shown by sentences with sense and sentences of logic. Thus, those metaphysical pronouncements may be nonsensical, but they too communicate; they are helpful, informative nonsense. (Thus, in fact, on this view there are *three* tracks for communicating: saying, showing, and what I've just called "suggesting.") Diamond's approach to the *Tractatus* starts by criticizing this idea. Drawing on Wittgenstein's remark that a "proposition is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination" (5.473), Diamond contrasts a view of nonsense that, she asserts, is presupposed by the dominant reading, and a view of nonsense that she takes to be Wittgenstein's. On the latter view, a sentence is nonsense because the words haven't been given meanings that yield sense—end of story. The former view is something like this:

that sentences can "try to say something," but if, in so doing, they violate principles of logical syntax, they turn out to be nonsense. In this, as Diamond puts it, there is a "conception of *something* you cannot do," like putting together concepts that don't stick to each other, or using a formal concept as though it were a real concept.[19] On her favored view, no such something is suggested.

In this, Diamond is making a powerful new use of the context principle. We can see expressions as referring only in particular propositions. To take an expression to be referring to a thing or a concept in a sentence requires that we make sense of the sentence, that is, we grasp a proposition it expresses. But if the sentence is nonsense, that is precisely what we cannot do. As Diamond puts it, to take the expression to be referring is to see the expression as a "working part" of a proposition, as something that can contribute to the way in which the sentence expresses something.

On Diamond's view, then, one cannot take Wittgenstein's metaphysical pronouncements to be striving to express ineffable truths; if they are nonsense, they are simply nonsense. There is no manner in which they communicate, nothing they "futilely try to state." And so there are no ineffable truths, no unsayable "features of reality," no *theses* that cannot be formulated in factual language.

Thus Diamond would want to understand a sentence like "there exist (necessarily) simple objects, eternal and unchanging, common to our world and all conceivable worlds, and having only formal properties intrinsically" not as a sentence that strives to express something that is in some unsayable way true, but as simply not, in the end, saying anything. It is just nonsense, simply incoherent. Obviously, in that case there can be no question of realism in the *Tractatus*.[20]

Metaphysical sentences of the *Tractatus*, such as those which seem to be talking of simple objects, Diamond calls "transitional language." We think we have some understanding of such sentences, perhaps by dint of psychological associations we have with them or mental images they call to mind, abetted by the sentences' having apparent logical form parallel to unproblematic sentences. We are, however, meant to *interrogate* that understanding, particularly as we read on in the text and learn more of the procedures that Wittgenstein is trying to formulate. At some point when we carry the interrogation far enough, the incoherence of the original sentences will become manifest. At that point, we are not left with "ineffable features of reality" but with plain nonsense, recognized as nonsense through the dissolution of concepts we thought we had.

Diamond calls interpretations of the *Tractatus* that take its remarks to suggest ineffable theses "chickening out." I prefer the terminology, due to Thomas Ricketts, of "irresolute" interpretation, with its connotation of "a kind of dithering, which reflects not being clear what one really wants, a desire to make inconsistent demands."[21] As a result of Diamond's work, the central problem for those who wish to dissent from the dominant reading of the *Tractatus* has become that of seeing what a resolute interpretation could come to and how it might be

carried through. The starting point has shifted, from the question of realism to the very notion of the *Tractatus* as presenting a metaphysics.

There are many good reasons for seeking as resolute an understanding of the *Tractatus* as we can muster. Let me give three.

(1) In calling something nonsense, surely Wittgenstein is committing himself to the idea that it makes no sense. But if showing is in any way a sort of communicating, that commitment is taken back. So understood, inconsistency is avoided only at the cost of reneging on the commitment. The central critical word of the *Tractatus*, "nonsense" becomes just an epithet applied to some communications and not others. We have no genuine ruling out of metaphysics, or anything else: only a relabeling.

(2) The picture theory purports to tell us what truth is, namely, accurate picturing. On an irresolute reading, the *Tractatus* adopts this theory. To think there are "ineffable truths" is to contradict this theory. It seems to say that there is a type of truth that is not "agreement with reality," as Wittgenstein lays out that notion.

(3) The *Tractatus* claims to solve the problem of the *a priority* of logic by showing how logic has no content. Irresolute interpretations make this impossible to sustain. That is, it is certainly the case that logical truths, being tautologies, have no sayable content. But if showing is a type of communication, then it seems there is some sort of showable content (ineffable, showable content); and logical truths are not empty of that sort of content. (See 6.12–6.1201.) If this is a sort of content, it appears that the problem of the *a priori* has been "solved" only by a relabeling.[22]

Of course, here I am assuming that we should like to understand the *Tractatus* in a way that renders it as coherent as possible; these three reasons recommend a resolute interpretation in order to do so. This may not be a universally shared assumption. Hacker, in his recent criticism of Diamond's line of thought, speaking of his (totally irresolute) way of taking the *Tractatus*, says "That this doctrine is inconsistent, that this position cannot be upheld, is undeniable, as its author later realized."[23] I find this astonishing, as a guide to interpretive practice.

Reading the *Tractatus* resolutely promises also to provide a subtler and more convincing picture of the relation between early Wittgenstein and late. Early and late, on this view, Wittgenstein sought to undermine metaphysics by showing the incoherence of the language in which one attempted to express it: what changed were the tools he brought to bear, indeed, what it was to show incoherence. There are more specific points of contact as well. On the resolute reading, Wittgenstein is trying to teach us that metaphysics is simple nonsense that appears to make sense only if we think we can rise above the standpoint of our operation in language. It is surely not inapt to juxtapose this aim with his comment in the *Investigations*, "philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday" (§38).

Critics of reading the *Tractatus* resolutely contend that any such reading must wind up denying that the book can provide insight. Marie McGinn calls such reading "paradoxical" because "The work is at the same time held to provide the

insights necessary for its own self-destruction and to provide no genuine insight that is not ultimately obliterated in the final act of self-annihilation."[24]

That a resolute reading precludes obtaining insight from the *Tractatus* seems to me mistaken. It is true, there is no philosophical theory that yields the ineffability of what otherwise would be insights, and hence become insights *faute de mieux*. The model is different. Insight is brought by our thinking the philosophical sentences through, and by our coming to see that they say nothing (and suggest nothing). Consider, as an analogy, the example from the *Philosophical Investigations* of the sentence "It's five o'clock on the sun" (§350). We might start off thinking this made sense, imagining sun-denizens looking at their watches, commenting that it was time for cocktails, etc. Clearly, though, a short course of analysis will get us to see that it makes no sense at all. Through that analysis we gain insight; but the sentence "It's five o'clock on the sun" does not gesture at or in any other way express the insight. The later Wittgenstein would like us to treat philosophical theses the way we treat this sentence. Resolute readers maintain that the early Wittgenstein wishes us to treat his own seeming philosophical theses the same way.

The criticism that a resolute reading leaves no room for insights is probably based on the misapprehension that Diamond and her elaborators have presented an interpretation of the *Tractatus*. She, and we, have not. She has argued that the dominant interpretation relies on an incorrect and un-Wittgensteinian notion of nonsense, and fails to carry through the commitments Wittgenstein intends when he calls something nonsense. She has thereby articulated a program for interpreting the text. That is not yet to interpret the text. An actual resolute interpretation of the text will involve the working-out of *how* the interrogation of its pronouncements goes, of what processes—what demands placed on the notions—lead us to the recognition that those pronouncements are nonsense. It must be done case by case. In short, the idea of a resolute reading is programmatic, and our understanding of its results depends entirely on the execution of the program.

Little of this has in fact been done. One instance is Ricketts's treatment of possibility.[25] Ricketts notes that in the 2.0s we are given to believe that there is a range of possibilia: the possible states of affairs, of which some, the factual ones, subsist. But we are also told that, when objects combine, it is into an (obtaining) state of affairs. (As Wittgenstein later explained to Ogden, when he writes in 2.03, "In states of affairs objects stand in a determinate relation to one another" he meant "*that there isn't anything third* that connects the links but that the links *themselves* make connexion with one another."[26] If there were the "combinations of objects" that would amount to a possible state of affairs, then the state of affairs would be factual when it has some further property or because the links are connected in some further way: there would be something third. In short, the initial suggestion of the text that there are possible states of affairs is meant to be discarded, as we start seeing that we are putting inconsistent demands on such things.[27]

If the text may be intentionally destabilizing the notions which it uses, then clearly new ways of reading it are in order. Traditionally, one tried to find readings

of notions like "logical space," "pictorial form," and the like that were consistent with all the remarks and played a reasonable role in the overall doctrine; and one tried to figure out how, consonant with all the texts, Wittgenstein came out on whether there were negative facts or not, and so on. On the resolute reading, these may be chimerical aims, since Wittgenstein's purpose is to get us to see that the concepts involved are not coherent, however alluring they may be.

Hacker derides this style of reading as "deconstruction," and "postmodernism."[28] These epithets are silly. The rubric that more accurately applies is *esotericism*: the notion that the apparent claims of the author mask a deeper authorial purpose, which, once understood, changes or even reverses the point of those claims; and that only a class of *cognoscenti* will come to see this deeper purpose. True enough, I suppose, on a resolute reading; and it does make me a little uncomfortable. The discomfort is assuaged by various remarks in Wittgenstein's "Preface" and, of course, the closing remarks of the book, particularly that about the correct method in philosophy: for these remarks are meant to get us to see just the deeper authorial purpose. (However, I do think that the emphasis some commentators put on what has been called "the frame" is misleading, since there are plenty of signals in the body of the text, e.g., in the 4s.)

Further progress in understanding the prospects of a resolute reading requires treatments from this perspective of other central Tractarian notions.[29] About the question of realism, the most critical notion is that of object. Here, I think, we need to think through two sorts of considerations. First is the full force of Wittgenstein's remark "Wherever the word 'object' is correctly used, it is expressed in conceptual notation by a variable name." If I say, "there's an object on the table", I am saying "($\exists$x) (x is on the table)"; no predicate "object" figures in it. (If I were to frame this statement as "($\exists$x)(x is an object & x is on the table)"—parallel, that is, to how one might frame "There is a matchbook on the table"—I should have to be brought to see that the phrase "x is an object" does no logical work—it doesn't contribute to any inferential connections, and so on—and hence is useless.) Thus the entire content of the notion of object is exhausted by the variable. The seemingly metaphysical sentences that use the word "object" need to have the word draw on its content as a variable, but at the same time use the word with the surface grammar of a property word. We should come to see that there is no property being ascribed; and hence these sentences are simple nonsense.

A second consideration here has more general application. Wittgenstein's characterization of "object" as a formal concept is often taken this way: we see that a sentence like "x is an object" tries to state something that cannot be false; but since every proposition with sense must present a contrast, between what would make it true and what would make it false, we conclude that the sentence is nonsense, and "object" is a formal concept, something shown by notation. Clearly this line of thought courts—indeed, demands—irresolution: there is *something* we are prevented from saying, by the contrastive constraint on saying.

The question then is whether we can come to a more resolute understanding of this constraint. Here the text of the *Tractatus* does not provide help, for it seems to suggest an ontological grounding of the constraint: as presented in the *Tractatus*, that propositions with sense must present a contrast *results* from their being pictures of facts, and from facts being contingent: a fact can be the case or not be the case. (This is also at the core of how the Vienna positivists took the *Tractatus*. They identified meaning with the configurations of experiences that verify the sentence. Since configurations of experiences are all contingent, it follows that meaningful sentences are too.) Wittgenstein's pre-Tractarian writings may furnish some clues to an alternative. Remarks from *Notes on Logic* like "The sense of a proposition is determined by the two poles *true* and *false*. The form of a proposition is like a straight line, which divides all points of a plane into right and left" (p. 102) and many others suggest that the contrastive constraint is intrinsic to Wittgenstein's very notion of making sense, of communication, of thinking, and so on. That suggests that there ought to be a way of showing that "is an object" collapses, as an attempt to communicate something, that does not suggest a something that it is *trying* to say. That no contrast is presented should make us see that there is simply nothing being said, by showing how we do not get as far as communicating anything coherent. I do not yet see how to articulate such a line; clearly it is essential to do so, if the prospects of a resolute interpretation are to be reasonable. (I would also urge that, in any case, a better understanding of the grounds of the contrastive constraint is central to any progress in understanding the early Wittgenstein's thought.)

It strikes me, too, that the irresolute understanding of the contrastive constraint—that it is grounded in features of the ontology—may be a key ingredient in McGinn's thinking that one must preserve the "nonsensical" insights in order to underwrite the Tractarian critical machinery. She may be asking: if the 2.0s are plain nonsense, how is the contrastive view of sense, an insight necessary for the *Tractatus*'s self-destruction, to be supported?

The question presupposes that there must be some theoretical insight, some view, that underlies the progression towards dissolution. This seems to me to be mistaken. But to carry my line through, it must be admitted that "nonsense" cannot really be a general term of criticism. If it were a general term of criticism, it would have to be legitimized by a theory of language, and Wittgenstein is insistent that there is no such thing ("Logic must take care of itself"). If it is something shown but not said, we are in real danger of its being a "what" that is shown, depending on the features of reality that we cannot talk about but only exhibit. The way out of this morass has already been canvassed. Wittgenstein's talk of nonsense is just shorthand for a process of coming to see how the words fall apart when worked out from the inside. What Wittgenstein is urging is a case-by-case approach. The general rubric is nothing but synoptic for what emerges in each case. Here the commonality with his later thought is unmistakable.

So again we are forced to recognize how far from any settling of the question we are without developing the actual readings, the tracings of how the notions

invoked in Wittgenstein's sentences implode. Talking in the abstract about what the status of judgments of nonsense could be, and about other such topics, is incapable of clarifying. The resolute view must take it that clarification, and its resultant renunciations, is possible without a theory to undergird it. Whether this is plausible or not cannot be settled by arguing about this possibility as a thesis, but only by looking at putative clarifications, with their renunciations.

In that there is also a prospect of addressing another line of criticism, which I take to be the strongest one Hacker adduces. In writings after the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein does say things like "I used to believe *p*" for various philosophical sentences *p*, for example, "there is a connection of world and language." Hacker claims that Wittgenstein is clearly referring to the *Tractatus*, and so this contradicts the resolute readers' claim that talk of a world-thing connection is just plain nonsense. My suspicion (and my hope) is that laying out the actual dissolutionary analyses will reveal that expressions of world–thing connections, simple objects, and so on are essential in driving the analytic process forward (it is indeed a dialectical process). If so, Wittgenstein's later remarks like "I used to believe there was a connection of world and language" are no longer proofs of irresolution. They are certainly autobiographical, but it is autobiography that Wittgenstein wishes to preserve precisely because the illusion of understanding such a remark (that there is a connection of a certain kind between world and language) is what can drive one (and did drive him) to the realization that philosophical theories generally, including this one in particular, were nonsensical, relying on parts that turn out upon interrogation not to have meaning. Let me repeat, however, that this is programmatic, and not to be settled by abstract talk.

In coming out from the project, we will encounter again the question of what a resolute reading could leave the reader with. As I suggested above, the reader is left with the insight gained from the process of working through the remarks: insight, for example, that it is illusory to think there is a standpoint from which to talk generally of the structure of facts, the structure of language, and their relation. Now, I think there is some force in McGinn's demand that the reader should be left with something that in retrospect validates the process of "working through." But this need not be some ineffable truth, some metaphysical suggestion, some theory of things that *underlies* how analysis proceeds. I would hope that the resolute reader will be left with—as the nonmetaphysical precipitate of the self-undermining metaphysical myth—the requirement of clarity, and an appreciation of the content of such a requirement. (Perhaps: the practical command of a *Begriffsschrift*.)

Now, it has been suggested (by Juliet Floyd[30]) that the absence of any concrete or specific canons of analysis in the *Tractatus* shows Wittgenstein to have an even more radical aim: an undermining, as being just as much an illusory overly general stance, of the general idea of analysis, of a uniform *Begriffsschrift*, and hence of the content of the requirement of clarity. I do not think such an interpretation "paradoxical," as McGinn would; it has, after all, a form analogous to a *reductio ad*

absurdum. But, as an interpretation of Wittgenstein's intentions, it is far too radical for me. I would hope that the working out of a resolute reading, insofar as it can be done, would enable us to avoid such an all-pervasive undermining. As I've emphasized, we cannot know this until more work is done in carrying a resolute reading forward. But at this point, in advance of such work, I'm sure the supporters of the *ancien regime*, like Hacker, Pears, and McGinn, would be happy to remind me of the fate of those who subvert the stability of that regime, but want to stick at a reasonable *Girondisme*.

Note on the Title

"*Das Überwinden*" is a reference to the second paragraph of 6.54, the penultimate section of the *Tractatus*: "*Er muß diese Sätze überwinden, dann sieht er die Welt richtig.*" Pears–McGuinness translate the first clause as "He must transcend these propositions" (i.e., the propositions of the *Tractatus*). I would translate the clause as "He must overcome these propositions." That difference of preferred translation is a rather nice reflection of the debate between irresolute and resolute interpretations. (The Ogden–Ramsey translation has "He must surmount . . .")

By the way, the contested verb "*überwinden*" is the one that figures in the title of Carnap's well-known 1932 paper "*Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache.*" (This is the paper in which Carnap discusses Heidegger's sentence "*Das Nicht nichtet.*") "Transcend" is obviously wrong as a translation of "*Überwindung*" in Carnap's title. In the standard translation due to Arthur Pap, the clause becomes "The Elimination of Metaphysics." I would prefer, just as in translating *Tractatus* 6.54, "The Overcoming of Metaphysics."

Notes

1 This paper was originally drafted in 2000 for a conference on the *Tractatus* at the University of Utrecht; it was a response to and an appreciation of the then-recently published book, A. Crary and R. Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*, London, Routledge, 2000. A revised version was presented at the 2001 conference of the Austrian Wittgenstein Society in Kirchberg-am-Wechsel, and subsequently at colloquia in several American and Canadian universities. I am grateful to many in the audiences at those occasions for helpful questions and discussion. My thanks also to Cora Diamond, Alexander George, and Thomas Ricketts for insightful comments.

2 "What we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either." F.P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1931, p. 238. Actually, it was not in the context of speaking about the *Tractatus* that Ramsey said this. Nonetheless, it has long been cited as a criticism of Wittgenstein.

3 P.M.S. Hacker, "Was He Trying to Whistle It?," in *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 383; David Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. 1, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 112. The rhetoric here is typical. "Cannot be stated in well-formed sentences" and "strict impossibility of formulating a thesis" suggest that perhaps some things can be stated in ill-formed sentences, and that we may be able to formulate the thesis if we were more lenient. Cp. G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, South Bend, Ind., St. Augustine's Press, 1959, p. 162: "But an important part is played in the *Tractatus*

by the things which, though they cannot be 'said', are yet 'shewn' or 'displayed'. That is to say: it would be right to call them 'true' if, *per impossibile*, they could be said; in fact they cannot be called true, since they cannot be said, but 'can be shewn', or 'are exhibited', in the propositions saying the various things that can be said."

4 *The False Prison*, p. 8.

5 Ibid., p. 110.

6 Hidé Ishiguro, "Use and Reference of Names," in Peter Winch, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, London, Routledge, 1969, pp. 20–50. (The same book contains Rush Rhees's essay "'Ontology' and Identity in the *Tractatus* à propos of Black's Companion," which also dissents, in arguing that the *Tractatus* was not concerned with ontology.) Brian McGuinness, "The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*", in Irving Block, ed., *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1981, pp. 60–73, and "Language and Reality in the *Tractatus*," *Teoria*, 1985, vol. 5, pp. 135–144. Warren Goldfarb, "Names, Objects, and Realism in the *Tractatus*," ms. 1979. Peter Winch, "Language, Thought and World in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," chapter 2 of his *Trying to Make Sense*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

7 First published in *Philosophy*, 1988, vol. 63. Reprinted in Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, pp. 179–204. Page references in the text are to the latter.

8 "The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*," pp. 72–73.

9 *Insight and Illusion: Wittgenstein on Philosophy and the Metaphysics of Experience*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1972, p. 51 and p. 55.

10 *Cambridge Letters*, ed. B. McGuinness and G.H. von Wright, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 124.

11 "Language and Reality in the *Tractatus*," p. 137.

12 The notion of experience, I would think, is to receive similar treatment. It cannot be taken as a primitive notion: what experience comes to at all will be given via the analyzed forms of our (empirical) sentences in which the notion figures. This is why experience, perception, and related notions play so little a role in the *Tractatus*. It is not an oversight on Wittgenstein's part (as Hacker alleged—*Insight and Illusion*, chapter 2) that epistemological considerations are absent from the text. Epistemology can play no foundational role because it presupposes the foundations. Facts about experience, perceptions, and so on, are just facts, internal to the world; experiential statements will be given sense in terms of the structures by which we depict facts.

13 *Insight and Illusion*, revised edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 75. The textual basis for Hacker's calling in the transcendental self is, need I say, thin. Ostension still seems to play some role still for Hacker, since he identifies the elucidations of 3.263 with propositions of the form "This is A." "It is, as one might say, an ostensive definition . . . misconstrued as a bipolar proposition" (p. 77). Textual basis for this is also lacking.

14 Winch, "Language, Thought and World," gives several arguments for this point. Further support can perhaps be found in the remarks starting in 3.31 about expressions and how they are presented, particularly 3.317.

15 "The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*," p. 71.

16 See Pears's criticism of Ishiguro and McGuinness in chapter 5 of *The False Prison*.

17 "The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*," p. 63, and "Language and Reality in the *Tractatus*," p. 143.

18 "Names, Objects, and Realism in the *Tractatus*," p. 14.

19 "Throwing Away the Ladder," p. 195. An account of Diamond's treatment of nonsense is given in my "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 1997, vol. 22, pp. 57–73.

20 Diamond's suggestion, that it is a mistaken conception of nonsense that underwrites an incorrect way of reading the *Tractatus*, was elaborated and substantiated in several papers

of James Conant, including "The Method of the *Tractatus*," in E. Reck, ed., *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 374–462, and "Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein," in *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 174–217.

21 The characterization of the connotation is Diamond's, in "Realism and Resolution: Reply to Warren Goldfarb and Sabina Lovibond," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 1997, vol. 22, p. 78.

22 This criticism is an adaptation of one which Gödel leveled against the positivists' view of logic and mathematics. "Mathematical sentences have no content only if the term 'content' is taken from the beginning in a sense acceptable only to empiricists and not well founded even from the empirical standpoint." That way of thinking of "content" was adventitious, Gödel charged, since logical and mathematical truths had conceptual content; and the positivists gave no argument to rule out this type of content. See Kurt Gödel, *Collected Works*, vol. III, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 337.

23 "Was He Trying to Whistle It," p. 383.

24 Marie McGinn, "Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 1999, vol. 49, p. 496.

25 Thomas Ricketts, "Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense," in H. Sluga and D. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996, section V.

26 *Letters to C.K. Ogden, with Comments on the English Translation of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1973, p. 23.

27 Ricketts also notes that, if there were this range of possible states of affairs, it would be common to our world and any other conceivable world, and would thus usurp the role assigned to objects in the 2.02s. That Wittgenstein did not wish to recognize reified possible facts (a prominent feature of Russell's pre-1910 metaphysics), is signaled early on in his remark "Positive and negative facts there are, but not true facts and false facts," *Notes on Logic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 97. Hacker criticizes Ricketts's reading in footnote 24 of "Was He Trying to Whistle It?" He notes, for example, that there are no properties of possible states of affairs, since they are not objects, and only objects have properties. Hence there is no property of a possible state of affairs that is its actuality. This is a canonical case of irresolution. Truth acts exactly like a property of possible states of affairs; its not being so is ruled out by the special features of Wittgenstein's notion of property. But there is *something* that marks out, among the possible states of affairs, those that are true from those that are not.

28 "Was He Trying to Whistle It?," p. 359 and p. 360.

29 Importantly including the notion of showing itself. Clearly, a resolute reading has to deal with passages that explicitly invoke "showing," and the remark near the end (6.522): "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich." (The Pears–McGuinness translation here, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words" is unjustifiably irresolute. "Things"?) Such remarks would have to be shown to be transitional language, and their unraveling traced. Some efforts in this direction have been made recently by Michael Kremer in "The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense," *Noûs*, 2001, vol. 35:1, pp. 39–73.

30 "Number and Ascriptions of Number in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in J. Floyd and S. Shieh, eds., *Future Pasts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 145–191.

2

THROWING THE BABY OUT WITH THE LADDER

On "Therapeutic" Readings of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

Roger M. White

> The inexpressible (that which I find mysterious and am unable to express) is perhaps the background from which all that I am able to express receives its meaning.[1]

The most natural reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* runs along the following lines: philosophy is concerned with fundamental issues concerning the nature of logic, language, the relation of language to reality, and "the essence of the world." Reflection, however, on those very issues provides strong logical grounds for claiming that the answers to the questions which philosophy raises cannot be stated in language itself. Rather, philosophy is concerned with something that *shows itself* in the significant use of language, but that cannot be *said* or put into words. The body of the book is then concerned to specify precisely those features of reality that cannot be put into words and at the same time to bring out why they cannot be put into words. This automatically leads to the further reflection that this is, at least apparently, a self-defeating enterprise, since both specifying these features and arguing for them will at every turn involve one in attempting to say what, *ex hypothesi*, cannot be said. Hence the *Tractatus* will move ineluctably to its final catastrophe, which is probably the most famous, and certainly the most notorious, claim that is made by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*: the claim that he makes in the final paragraphs of the book that the sentences he has been advancing throughout the book are nonsensical (*unsinnig*):

> 6.54 My sentences are elucidatory in that someone who understands me finally realizes that they are nonsensical, if he has climbed through them—on them—beyond them. (He must, as it were, throw away the ladder after having climbed up it.)
>   He must surmount these sentences; he then sees the world aright.[2]

This claim has been regarded as outrageous by a majority of commentators, even by those, such as Russell and Ramsey, who in other respects have expressed sympathy with much else in the book. The hostility is immediately intelligible. The very first reaction that most people have when they read the *Tractatus* is the thought: "What more blatant an example could you find of a *reductio ad absurdum* than an argument which led one to conclude that not only the premises of the argument but every step in the argument was nonsense?" But even if there was widespread resistance to this whole strand in the *Tractatus*, which Wittgenstein himself clearly saw as the "main point" of the whole book,[3] there are significant differences in the reactions, which are worth indicating at least briefly. For Russell, in his Introduction to the *Tractatus*, the key point was that since Wittgenstein had indeed succeeded in communicating a great deal in the book, the account of "what could be said" must, despite the strong arguments that Wittgenstein had advanced, be in some way unduly restrictive, and there must be some way to say the things that Wittgenstein was claiming could not be said—"possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit."[4] Ramsey's reaction seems to have been more in line with Dr Johnson's no-nonsense comment on the mystical theology of Jakob Böhme: "Were it even so [that he had seen *unutterable things*], Jacob would have resembled St. Paul still more, by not attempting to utter them."[5] Members of the Vienna Circle followed the *Tractatus* in holding that considerations in the theory of meaning did indeed rule out the possibility of significant metaphysical utterances. However, they regarded this as showing that as a result there was nothing "shown," that Wittgenstein had indeed produced a *reductio* argument that showed there was nothing beyond the limits of my language. Hence the natural conclusion to draw was that the whole idea of there being something inexpressible was just an illusion.

By comparison, those who have been prepared to champion Wittgenstein's position have been few in number.[6] They include most notably Elizabeth Anscombe[7] and Peter Geach.[8] Although I myself side with them against those who oppose Wittgenstein at this point, the purpose of the present article is only indirectly to further the defense of this apparently awkward position. It is rather to discuss an interpretation of the *Tractatus* that has recently gained currency, which seems to have been prompted initially as a reaction to Geach's article.[9] This is the interpretation that has been advocated most forcibly by Cora Diamond and James Conant, and that has subsequently, with significant variations, found favor with various writers.[10] This rests on a rejection of the kind of account of the *Tractatus* that I outlined in the opening paragraph, claiming instead that the book should be read "ironically" (Conant) and with a purely "therapeutic" intent (Diamond). But before turning to that, it is necessary to give at least a thumbnail sketch of some of the considerations that Wittgenstein advances for there being "that which can be shown but not said."

I. Why We Cannot Say What We Cannot Say

Recent discussions have tended to concentrate on the case highlighted by Geach's article, that of the difficulties that arise when we assign entities to different logical categories (types, as belonging to different formal concepts), of *saying* that they are of different categories. Although this case is undoubtedly important, and has central significance for the *Tractatus*, it is far from being the only consideration at work in Wittgenstein's thought, and it is worthwhile indicating the variety of the ideas that for Wittgenstein all point towards the one central theme of the book. It frequently happens in interpreting the *Tractatus* that one finds it is a mistake to look for a single argument that establishes its central contentions: it is, rather, that Wittgenstein is presenting as reinforcing each other a series of considerations all leading in the same direction. In the present case, I suspect the ideas I summarize do not amount to a single theme.[11] Although there are complex interrelations between these different ideas, they are difficult to reduce to any one formula, and for my purposes I shall simply list what I take to be crucial ideas at work at different stages in the *Tractatus*. This variety is worth stressing, since the stress upon the one case, the case of its being claimed that sentences such as "A is an object" are nonsensical, itself suggests neither the breadth of the "anti-metaphysical" thrust of the *Tractatus* nor the continuity between the concerns of Wittgenstein's early work and his later concern with "metaphysical claims," such as his preoccupation in the 1930s with "Everything is in Flux" and "You cannot step into the same river twice," which at least apparently are far removed from the questions raised by formal concepts.[12]

(1) We may in the first instance think of the *Tractatus* as being a transcendental enquiry into the question "How is language possible?," interpreted, at least in part, as the question "What must the world be like for it to be describable in language?" leading to such considerations as, say:

> 2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on the question of whether another was true.

> 2.0212 It would then be impossible to sketch out a picture of the world (true or false).

If we construe the project of the *Tractatus* in these terms we immediately run into a fairly obvious difficulty. Let us suppose that the result of our inquiry leads to the conclusion that for the world to be describable at all it must be thus and so (a describable world must be one in which p, q and r must all be true). *Saying* this would lead straight to a contradiction, since we can now form the following description: "a world in which at least one of p, q, and r is false," which *ex hypothesi* would be a description of an indescribable world. So if we lay stress in our account of meaning on the idea of names standing for objects, and conclude that every

proposition is a truth function of propositions that present us with possible arrangements of such objects, we may then go on to say:

> 1.2 The world divides into facts.

> 1.21 Any one can either be the case or not be the case, and everything else remain the same.

> 2 What is the case, a fact, is the obtaining of states of affairs.

> 2.01 A state of affairs is a combination of objects, *etc.*

If we try to present these four propositions as giving us a condition for the possibility of language, it immediately becomes impossible to state it as a condition for the describability of the world, since, once stated, it provides us with the possibility of forming the *ex hypothesi* impossible description "a world in which some of the states of affairs that obtain are not combinations of objects."

Put generally, if, as Wittgenstein says,

> 3.031 . . . The truth is, we could not *say* of an "illogical" world how it would look,

for that very reason, we cannot say what conditions the world would have to satisfy in order to be "logical."

(2)

> The limit of language shows itself in the impossibility of describing the fact that corresponds to a proposition (is its translation), without simply repeating the proposition.

> (Here we have to do with the Kantian solution to the problem of philosophy).[13]

Looking at the *Tractatus* from a slightly different angle, it is concerned with the way that language relates to reality, the way in which language "reaches right up to reality" (2.1511), in such a way that, for instance, the particular situation now before me is such that it makes a particular proposition p true. What we would like to do is to describe the situation now before me in such a way that it is clear that this situation "fits" the proposition p. The *language* of facts is clearly internally related to the language of propositions. (That is to say, it is a fact that p if and only if "p" is true.) If one then takes the language of facts and states of affairs seriously—as specifying existing features of reality—one must say that a proposition is internally related to the states of affairs that make it true, and to understand the

proposition is precisely to know which states of affairs make it true and which make it false (4.024). If we wish to specify the states of affairs that make a proposition true, there is no way in which we can do it other than by using precisely the same set of words as those we use in formulating *p* itself (or some logically equivalent set of words). If we were to use a form of words to describe the state of affairs that was not logically equivalent to our original proposition, we should no longer be explaining what it is for the state of affairs to be a truth-condition of *p*, but specifying an external relation between the proposition and the state of affairs.

If, then, we wish to give an account of what is meant by "comparing a proposition with reality," the nature of the correspondence between the two, we constantly find that we come up with such claims as "'The cat is on the mat' is true if and only if the cat is on the mat," and "The convention governing the word 'red' is that it is truly applicable to all, and only, red things." What we would like is a genuinely informative account of the relation of a proposition and those states of affairs which make it true, but it can't be given.[14]

Instead when we talk of "comparing language with reality," we are talking about something that we learn to do when we learn the language, and which is *shown* by the way that we do in practice compare propositions with the world. But any attempt within language to give an informative description of the relation we are looking for when we seek to verify a particular proposition is doomed.

(3)

> "It is necessary also to be given the proposition that all elementary proposi-
> tions are given." This is not necessary because it is even *impossible*. There is
> no such proposition! That all elementary propositions are given is SHOWN
> by there being none having an elementary sense which is not given.[15]

Wittgenstein is throughout writing about language as a whole, the world as a whole, making *exhaustive* remarks about the relation of language to the world. It is precisely because they are exhaustive that they are supposed to show "the limit of language" by drawing it from within, so that everything that lies outside the limit will be simply nonsense.[16] The background against which Wittgenstein is working is his concern with the status of *Russellian* logic. The central point of Russell's work was the avoidance of the range of logical paradoxes that arose if one tried to talk globally——the vicious circles generated by talk of "the set of all sets" or "the universal set." But Wittgenstein's whole project depends essentially upon making observations that are to be given global import—"The world is *everything* that is the case," where the "everything" is to be construed without any kind of restriction whatever. Hence the danger arises at every point of precisely the kind of vicious circles that Russell was dedicating his energies to avoiding:

> 1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being *all* the facts.

Such a proposition immediately threatens to generate precisely the kind of vicious circle that was to be avoided. Is it a fact that these are all the facts? And if so, is it an additional fact to the ones we had already?[17] If we attempt to *say* what is said in 1.11 we immediately run into the whole gamut of logical paradoxes that Russell was engaged with. Of course, even the opening flourish "The world is everything that is the case" already runs into difficulties not just with the everything but with the "is the case," when we ask whether "The world is everything that is the case" is one of the things which is the case, generating precisely the sort of loop that Russell's paradox preyed on. Wittgenstein is banishing such paradoxes by declaring the illegitimacy of such global talk as we find in the opening paragraphs, but engaging in such global talk to effect the banishment. Hence the opening paragraphs are to be regarded as nonsensical sentences attempting to bring us to see something that, on pain of contradiction could not be said, but that was actually shown (but not said) by the way that sentences that *are* significant relate to reality.

(4)

> 4.12 Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it—the logical form.
> In order to represent the logical form, we would have to place ourselves and the propositions outside logic, which means, outside the world.

One major theme of the *Tractatus* is that every symbol is of precisely the same logical type as that which it symbolizes. This idea is to my mind undoubtedly a theme which Wittgenstein learnt from his study of Frege's writings, where, whereas a proper name, which stands for an object, is itself an object, a functional expression is not an object—a quotable expression—but itself a function mapping names onto propositions. It is this idea, once modified by a rejection of Frege's unfortunate construal of sentences as complex proper names, and replaced with the conception of a propositional sign as a fact that represents a state of affairs (3.14), that is the core idea of the "picture theory." According to this conception, in order to assert that there is a three-termed relation holding between three objects, one has to produce a propositional sign by establishing a three-termed relation between the names that refer to those objects. In this way, every symbol will possess a logical form in common with that which it symbolizes. But this common form cannot itself be presented in isolation from the fact that it manifests itself in both the symbol and that which it symbolizes, since it follows automatically from what has just been said that any specification of the symbol itself could only be by means of another symbol possessing the same logical form as both the symbol itself and what it symbolizes. It is here that the inadequacy of the resolution of Wittgenstein's difficulty adumbrated by Russell becomes apparent. Going up a level in a hierarchy of languages simply replicates the difficulty at the higher level.

(5) This leads on to the question with which Geach concerned himself in "Saying and Showing." Geach with some plausibility traces the idea here back to the difficulties Frege had already indicated of putting into words his distinction between function and object. Whether that is so, or, as I suspect, as a result of reflecting on Russell's Theory of Types, Wittgenstein was led independently to substantially the same position as Frege found himself in is impossible to say, and is a matter of indifference.

Let us suppose that one tries to develop, on logical grounds, an ontology of logically different sorts of entity—in Frege's case functions and objects, in Wittgenstein's case, e.g. objects and states of affairs—where the mark of the fact that they were *logically* different sorts of entity would be that one could not coherently have a quantifier that ranged over the entities of different logical sorts, and where it would be impossible to substitute a phrase symbolizing an entity of one logical sort for an entity of a different logical sort.

N.B. for Wittgenstein, the impossibility is strict: he is not saying, e.g., "it would be impossible *salva congruitate*. . . ." Since, in accordance with the last section, a symbol is of the same logical type as what it symbolizes, it quite simply makes no sense to talk of substituting a symbol for an entity of one type for an entity of another type. This is the point of saying (3.023) "We cannot think anything illogical, since otherwise we should have to think illogically," and, in the notes dictated to G.E. Moore, "An illogical language would be one in which, e.g., you could put an *event* into a hole."[18]

We now run into difficulties if we attempt to say to what logical sort an entity belongs, or that these entities are of different logical sorts, or how many entities there are of a given logical sort. For instance, Frege wished to insist that his distinction between functions and objects was exclusive and exhaustive. If, however, we try with Frege to say *that* by saying:

> Here I can only say briefly: an object is anything that is not a function, so that an expression for it does not contain any empty place,[19]

we can, in the very nature of the case, give no coherent account of the quantification involved in the use of the word "anything" in that sentence. A quantifier, such as that used here, which would have to range over both objects and functions is precisely what is ruled out by the insistence on objects and functions being of different logical categories.

Hence we are led to Wittgenstein's insistence on a fundamental difference between "formal" concepts and genuine concepts, and that:

> 4.126 That something falls under a formal concept as one of its objects, cannot be expressed by a proposition. Instead it is shown in the sign for the object itself. (A name shows that it designates an object, a numeral, that it designates a number, *etc.*)

. . . The sign for the mark of a formal concept is therefore a characteristic feature of all symbols, whose meanings fall under the concept.

The expression for the formal concept is therefore a propositional variable, in which only this characteristic feature is constant.

At first sight, if we take the introduction of a word like "object" seriously, it appears that we ought to be able to say such things as "There are objects." Wittgenstein is, however, insisting that this is to misunderstand the way the word "object" functions, and that we are here misled by the surface grammar of such sentences as "There are objects that are F." Whereas "There are objects that are F" is perfectly coherent, "There are objects" is simply nonsense. It looks as though we can say: "If, from 'There are books on the table' we can infer 'There are books,' so, by parity of reasoning, from 'There are objects that are F' we can infer 'There are objects.'" Wittgenstein, however, is insisting that "There are books on the table" is of a different logical form from "There are objects that are F," and that in a correct logical notation they will receive visibly different renderings. The first will be rendered as "$(\exists x)$ (Bx & Tx)," but the second, not "$(\exists x)$ (Ox & Fx)," but simply "$(\exists x)$ (Fx)." The rendering "$(\exists x)$ (Ox & Fx)" would be appropriate only if the word "object" signified a genuine concept and not a formal concept. As a word for a formal concept, its function is to specify a domain of quantification—and we should read "$(\exists x)$ (Fx)" as "Something is F" and not as "Some thing is F."[20] To render "There are objects that are F" as "$(\exists x)$ (Ox & Fx)" would make sense only if we were quantifying over a domain that is wider than the domain of objects, but, if "object" signifies a formal concept, there could not be such a wider domain. We may say that a formal concept, such as that signified by the word "object," is simply the objective correlative of the words "everything" and "something." This is the point of Wittgenstein's saying that "The expression for the formal concept is therefore a propositional variable." But if the correct rendering of "There are objects that are F" is simply "$(\exists x)$ (Fx)," then "There are objects" on its own cannot be rendered,[21] and the apparent analogy between the inference from "There are books on this table" to "There are books" and that from "There are objects that are F" to "There are objects" is exposed as an illusion.

Hence, Wittgenstein will conclude "There are objects" is simply nonsense, and that what we want to express by saying "There are objects" is something that cannot be said, but that is shown by the way proper names for objects and variables that range over objects function within the language; what we want to express by saying "There are at least two objects" is shown by there being at least two names in the language, etc. . . .

(6) The last element in Wittgenstein's idea of what can be shown but not said that should be mentioned is to my mind not very strongly connected with those already mentioned, but it is one which undoubtedly played a major part in the project of the *Tractatus*. It is also given central significance in Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein.

6.37 . . . There is only *logical* necessity.

This is sometimes regarded as simply a Humean prejudice, and in the context in which it occurs it is highly plausible to connect what is said with Hume's discussion of causality. The remark does, however, arise more directly out of Wittgenstein's own theory of meaning. The *Tractatus* seeks to "draw the limits of what can be said" by constructing an account of "the general form of proposition," a variable which ranges over every possible meaningful proposition. In this he is guided by the idea that "to understand a proposition means to know what is the case, if it is true" (4.024) where this is interpreted austerely as meaning which combinations of states of affairs will make it true and which false. Since each state of affairs can either obtain or not obtain, and they are all logically independent of each other, the only room that the general form of proposition leaves for necessary propositions is for the degenerate cases of propositions—the completely vacuous tautologies and contradictions. Hence there can be no significant synthetic necessary propositions. But since the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself are put forward neither as vacuous tautologies nor as merely contingent propositions, they automatically fall outside the scope of the general form of proposition, and hence are simply nonsense. They are, for instance, concerned with what *must* be the case for language to be possible, and with objects whose existence cannot be brought into question within language. Even the claim "There is only logical necessity" is now to be seen as self-refuting. *It* is clearly neither an empty tautology nor the contingent claim that there don't happen to be any necessary propositions that are not logically necessary. Rather, for Wittgenstein, even here we would have to be concerned with something that cannot be said, but which instead is shown by the fact that the general form of proposition leaves no room for any necessary propositions other than tautologies and contradictions.

Whatever may be said for or against Wittgenstein's remarks about ethics, aesthetics, and religion at the end of the *Tractatus*,[22] they do not seem to be nearly as closely connected with the earlier, logical, motivations for the showing/saying distinction as Wittgenstein appears to have thought.[23] If there is anything which connects the earlier reflections with these final remarks, it would seem to be this rejection of propositions asserting substantial necessities: for, whatever the status of claims in ethics and religion, they do not appear simply to be asserting contingent facts about the world.

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There is a long mystical tradition in both philosophy and theology which would insist that there are deep truths that cannot be put into words, and that any attempt to communicate those truths would necessarily result in the utterance of sentences that were nonsense. Whether such a tradition is defensible or not, it should be sharply contrasted with Wittgenstein's conception, despite his preparedness at 6.522 to use the phrase "*das Mystische*" to characterize what can only be shown.[24]

The earlier mystical traditions were typically concerned with a form of esoteric knowledge of that which transcended normal experience and understanding. Wittgenstein, however, when he talks of "what is shown" is talking about something that is shown by our ordinary everyday use of language, and that is therefore at least tacitly known and understood by all of us—by everyone who has mastered their mother tongue.[25] Consequently many of the difficulties surrounding the supposition that mystical theologians were genuinely engaged in an act of communication when they wrote about the ineffable do not beset the project of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein is concerned to draw our attention to something with which, if he is right, we are all at least tacitly familiar. Even if the communication is necessarily indirect, and that indirectness justifies Wittgenstein in beginning:

> This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have already thought the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts.[26]

What he is aiming to do is draw our attention to something that we are all fully equipped to see for ourselves.

Equally, the typical response among the positivists, "If we can't say it, there's nothing there," seems little more than an unargued prejudice. There is no good reason to take this seriously unless it were to be accompanied by a detailed examination of the considerations Wittgenstein has advanced for there being that which can only be shown. *Prima facie* at least there is a great deal that we can know and understand but not say: for instance, if by dint of careful listening I come to appreciate Gregorian Chant, so that I can listen to it with understanding, there seems to be no good reason to insist that I must be able to say to someone else wherein my understanding consisted. Nevertheless, there clearly are people who do and people who don't understand such music, and those who do understand manifest their understanding in their concrete reactions to particular pieces of music.

There is, however, one obvious difficulty that Wittgenstein has to confront, and that is the difficulty with which we began: if Wittgenstein is to write a book to communicate that which cannot be said, then either the sentences of the book will have no sense—be simply nonsense—or, if they have a sense, that sense will necessarily fail to capture what it is that he wants to convey to us. How can a book, whose sentences are, on their author's own admission, nonsense, communicate anything at all?

II. "Therapeutic" Readings of the *Tractatus*

It is the supposed impossibility of giving a coherent answer to that question which has prompted a different kind of interpretation of the *Tractatus* from the one that I have just been sketching. Nonsense sentences do not say anything, nor, *pace* a few commentators on the *Tractatus*,[27] are nonsense sentences presented by

Wittgenstein as the sort of thing that "shows" something. Hence, it is claimed, those who interpret Wittgenstein along the lines that I have outlined are subscribing, or at least presenting Wittgenstein as subscribing, to the absurd idea that there are two kinds of nonsense—mere nonsense on the one hand, and "substantial" or "informative" nonsense on the other. This is to represent Wittgenstein as "chickening out" (Diamond)[28] or "irresolute" (Warren Goldfarb).[29] If Wittgenstein followed the logic of his own argument, then he would recognize that, having been compelled to conclude that the bulk of his book was nonsense, he had said nothing, shown nothing, and communicated no philosophical insight.[30]

It is proposed therefore that we resolve this apparent absurdity by rejecting completely what I have so far been calling the "natural" reading of the *Tractatus* and look at it in an entirely different way. In writing the book, Wittgenstein was trying neither to say anything, nor to show anything, nor to communicate an ineffable logico-philosophical vision. Instead it is to be read ironically, or to cure us of the urge to make philosophical pronouncements of the sort made in the *Tractatus* itself.

On this account, we are initially seduced into thinking that we are being invited to engage in a profound philosophical inquiry into the nature of logic, language, and reality. The inquiry comes apart in our hands, and we realize that the whole inquiry was nonsense. This has the therapeutic value of freeing us from the urge to engage in the inquiry in the first place, and we "then see the world aright."

There is considerable local variation among the advocates of this "new" reading of the *Tractatus*.[31] The following passage by Thomas Ricketts gives a sober and clear presentation:

> The *Tractatus* imagines an attempt to think through at the most general level what a conception of sentences as logically interconnected representations of reality requires. At its opening, it presents what appears to be an alternative theory to Russell's flawed one. We see through this appearance, when we realize that on the theory's own apparent telling, there can be no such theory. When we throw away the ladder, we give up attempts to state what this conception of representation and truth demands of the world, give up trying to operate at an illusory level of generality, without however rejecting the conception of truth as agreement with reality. Rather, we understand what this conception comes to, when we appreciate how what can be said can be said clearly, when we appreciate the standard of clarity set up by the general form of sentences.[32]

I find this whole "therapeutic" reading bizarre for a number of reasons, some of which I will mention later, but my principal concern in this article is to show that the interpretation rests on a series of misrepresentations of what it is that the proponents of the more orthodox readings of the *Tractatus* are saying. As a result,

most of the energies of writers such as Diamond and Conant are devoted to insisting on points which hardly anyone would deny, points that can readily be granted by their opponents. Above all, it would be only a careless thinker who would wish to say that there was such a thing as "substantial nonsense"—nonsense such that "its sense was senseless," or whatever—or who would expound the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus* in such a way as to ascribe such an idea to Wittgenstein himself. If the orthodox reading does not require one to ascribe to Wittgenstein a conception of there being two kinds of nonsense, then there is very little argument being offered in favor of the new "therapeutic" reading.

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> Wittgenstein saw a tension in Frege's thought between two different conceptions of nonsense, which I shall call the *substantial conception* and the *austere conception* respectively. The substantial conception distinguishes between two different kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense and substantial nonsense. Mere nonsense is simply unintelligible—it expresses no thought. Substantial nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way—it expresses a logically incoherent thought. According to the substantial conception, these two kinds of thought are logically distinct: the former is mere gibberish, whereas the latter involves (what commentators on the *Tractatus* are fond of calling) a "violation of logical syntax." The austere conception, on the other hand, holds that mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is.[33]

The first point to make about a passage like this is that it gives the impression that there are authors who claim that there is such a thing as substantial nonsense. Whereas the truth is that none of the villains of the piece—Frege, Carnap, or whoever[34]—ever makes such a claim. The claim is foisted on them by Diamond and Conant, either because they use a certain form of words such as a "violation of logical syntax" or a "category mistake," all of which can be given a perfectly innocent ("austere") reading, but which are here read in what is to me a highly strained way, or because it is claimed that, say, Frege's remarks in his discussion of Benno Kerry, or the commitment to an orthodox, "ineffability," reading of the *Tractatus ipso facto* implicate one in a belief in "substantial nonsense."

The claim that Wittgenstein was accusing Frege of a belief in substantial nonsense is based on a reading of 5.4733:

> Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition has a sense; and I say: every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense, this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts.
>
>   (Even if we believe we have done so.)

This is not the most pellucid remark in the *Tractatus*. A major part of my difficulty here is that, unless I am mistaken, Wittgenstein is actually misremembering Frege, who doesn't, to the best of my knowledge, say what Wittgenstein quotes him as saying.[35] I read Wittgenstein along the following lines—and in this I do not believe there is any disagreement between myself and Conant or Diamond: if we ask whether the *same* word, "object," occurs in the two sentences "There is an object that is F" and "I object to what you are saying," we can clearly answer in two different ways. According to the criteria employed by the typesetter, we have the same word. However, the two instances of "object" signify in completely different ways, are different parts of speech, and will be handled completely differently by the dictionary maker. In Wittgenstein's terminology the two words symbolize in completely different ways, and are *different* symbols. This provides us with a different criterion of identity for words, which, following 3.327, says, "The sign determines a logical form only together with its logico–syntactic employment," and since by those standards the two occurrences of "object" have quite different logico–syntactic employments, we have different words here, or in Wittgenstein's terminology different *symbols*.

In the light of this let us consider an instance of supposed nonsense, such as "There are objects." On one way of looking at this, this will be explained to be nonsense by saying that it involves a misuse of the word "object," and is a violation of the rules of logical syntax governing the word "object," which assign a significant use to the word only in such sentences as "There are objects that are F." In this we are talking about the word "object" in accordance with the typesetter's criteria of identity for words. If, however, we adopt the second criteria of identity for words, the word "object," as it occurs in the sentence "There are objects that are F," does not occur in the nonsense string "There are objects" at all, since a word is only the word it is when it has a specific logico–syntactic role, and the word "object" has, *ex hypothesi*, no logico–syntactic rôle in "There are objects." It is simply a different word from the word "object" that occurred in "There are objects that are F." Hence, according to this way of talking, we do not say that the sentence "There are objects" is nonsense because it is ill–formed, but it is nonsense because we have given no meaning to the string of letters: "objects." Hence the word "objects" is simply a meaningless string of letters, and the word "objects" that is used in "There are objects that are F" no more occurs in "There are objects" than the word "heist" occurs in "Hume was an atheist,"

One may agree with all this as an interpretation of what Wittgenstein is saying in passages like 5.4733. One may also agree that Wittgenstein's perspective is philosophically more insightful, but still maintain that that is a far cry from seeing Wittgenstein as accusing Frege of holding a theory of substantial nonsense, and an even further cry from his having made out a successful case that this is so. The most that can be said is that when someone talks of a "violation of logical syntax" or "logically ill-formed sentences" or "sentences embodying category mistakes" or the like, from all that has been said here, they are putting in a philosophically

less felicitous way what Wittgenstein would have put by saying that "Julius Caesar is a prime number" does not contain a use of the phrase "prime number" as that phrase occurs when gainfully employed, and hence contains a phrase to which no meaning has been assigned. The most natural interpretation of phrases such as "violations of logical syntax" is to take them to apply to a sentence that is *void of any sense* whatever because it incorporates a word or phrase that has been assigned a significant use only when combined in other sentences but not in this one. Provided we adhere to the typesetter's criteria of identity for words and phrases, such a way of describing nonsense is merely a stylistic variant on Wittgenstein's way of putting matters and not at all a commitment to a "sentence whose sense is senseless."

I contend that, whatever may be said for or against Wittgenstein's way of contrasting his position with that of Frege in 5.4733, it would be a very bad reason for ascribing to Frege a conception of there being such a thing as substantial nonsense.

So, all this strenuous polemic is curiously beside the point. If we wish to convict someone of holding that there are two kinds of nonsense, we need to look elsewhere. The issue is actually simple: what Diamond and Conant should be challenging is not the idea that there is substantial nonsense but the idea that they fail to distinguish from that—the idea that someone can maintain that a sentence is simply nonsense but can simultaneously believe that one can, under appropriate circumstances, use that sentence to communicate. We need therefore to look directly at those places where someone maintains that they can communicate by uttering nonsense sentences. It is here that the discussion most obviously has purchase, and, if there is a case that needs answering, it is the following far simpler challenge to those who, like myself, believe that Wittgenstein was using nonsense sentences to convey philosophical insights, and to Frege who saw himself as forced into lapsing into nonsense in order to convey his distinction between concept and object.

III. The Uses of Nonsense

Let us look first at what Frege actually said in his discussion with Benno Kerry, and at Geach's gloss on Frege. (Frege is here talking of the difficulties he finds himself in, being obliged to say such things as "The concept *horse* is not a concept"):

> I do not dispute at all Kerry's right to use the words "concept" and "object" in his own way, if only he would respect my equal right, and admit that with my use of terms I have got hold of a distinction of the highest importance. I admit that there is a quite peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with a reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object, when what I intend is a concept. I fully realize that in such cases I was relying upon a

reader who would be ready to meet me halfway—who does not begrudge a pinch of salt.

   . . . It may be easier to come to an understanding if the reader compares my work *Function and Concept*. For over the question what it is that is called a function in Analysis, we come up against the same obstacle; and on thorough investigation it will be found that the obstacle is essential, and founded on the nature of our language; that we cannot avoid a certain inappropriateness of linguistic expression; and that there is nothing for it but to realize this and always take it into account.[36]

On which Geach comments:

   Frege already held, and his philosophy of logic would oblige him to hold, that there are logical category distinctions which will clearly show themselves in a well-constructed formalized language, but which cannot properly be asserted in language: the sentences in which we seek to convey them are logically improper and admit of no translation into well-formed formulas of symbolic logic. All the same, there is a test for these sentences' having conveyed the intended distinctions—namely, that by their aid mastery of the formalized language is attainable.[37]

   Certainly in both these passages there is a contemplation of the use of "logically improper," or nonsensical sentences to convey an insight, and what is more the need to resort to such nonsense sentences in order to convey that insight, because no meaningful use of language could successfully capture it. From this, it might appear, and has appeared to some of the writers in the current debate, that Frege is thereby automatically committed to holding that there is substantial, or philosophically illuminating nonsense. But that would be an illusion. Frege wishes to convey an "ineffable" insight; to do so he is forced to resort to sentences that are on his own admission inappropriate to those insights and that will include sentences that are nonsense. But this is very different from him, absurdly, ascribing a sort of sense to these nonsense sentences.[38]

   Instead he can quite well say what Wittgenstein says at 6.54:

   My sentences are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsense.

As Diamond stresses, Wittgenstein does not say here "he who understands my sentences", but "he who understands *me*." So too Frege wishes his readers to grasp his distinction between function and object—a distinction which, "by a kind of necessity of language," cannot be put into words. To that end he utters nonsensical sentences, not so that the reader can grasp the meanings of those sentences but so that the reader can come to an understanding with Frege himself.[39]

What Frege and Geach are here committed to is not the view that there are philosophically significant nonsense sentences, but the view that it is possible to communicate philosophical insights by the use of sentences that are nonsense—and here "nonsense" may be interpreted with the full austerity that Conant and Diamond insist upon.

"But if nonsense sentences have no sense, how can they be used to communicate? How can we do anything with a string of words that has no sense?" Well, we do it all the time. There is no reason why we should not communicate an insight by whatever means there are to hand, and not merely by asserting a significant sentence. As Donald Davidson remarked in another connection: "Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact—but not by standing for, or expressing that fact."[40] We frequently communicate by using sentences that are void of any literal sense whatever—consider commonplace examples that afford paradigm cases of Carnapian "violation of syntax," "category mistakes," and the like, such as Wemmick's delightful summary of Jaggers:

> "Deep" said Wemmick, "as Australia." Pointing with his pen at the office floor, to express that Australia was understood, for the purpose of the figure, to be symmetrically on the opposite of the globe.
> "If there was anything deeper," added Wemmick, bringing his pen to paper, "he'd be it."[41]

Even considering a simple example like this shows a number of things which suggest that the arguments of advocates of the therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus* are approaching the issue of nonsense too simplisticly:

1. This is an entirely straightforward and unproblematic example of communication: neither Pip nor any of Dickens's readers has any difficulty whatever in understanding Wemmick, or gathering how he is regarding Jaggers.
2. The sentence used by Wemmick is mere nonsense, and expresses no thought. If, for instance, we follow Wittgenstein and say that to understand a proposition is to know what is the case if it is true, and interpret that to mean: specifying the situations that would make it true, there are simply no situations or states of affairs that would make it true that if there were anything deeper than Australia it would be Jaggers.
3. What tends to make one confused here is that *Wemmick* is certainly expressing what he thinks about Jaggers. But it does not follow that *the sentences he uses* express the thoughts which Wemmick is wishing to convey. If we were to report what it is that Wemmick thinks about Jaggers, we could not do it in the form: "Wemmick thinks that if there were anything deeper than Australia, it would be Jaggers."
4. Equally, although this is an instance of successful communication, and, what is more, communication achieved by the use of the sentence "If there was

anything deeper, he'd be it," we cannot use that sentence to specify what it is that Pip learns. We can no more say that Pip learns that if there were anything deeper than Australia, it would be Jaggers, than we could say that that was what Wemmick thinks. If we want to say what it is that Pip has learnt we have to use other words.

5. We cannot alleviate our understanding of this situation by positing special, contextually defined meanings for the words used by Wemmick. If he means anything by the word "Australia," it is the name of the country on the other side of the world from himself—as he indicates with his pen. This is so, even though it is precisely *that* meaning which reduces his sentence to mere nonsense.

6. Of course, this situation is different from the situation of the *Tractatus* and its reader. We have little difficulty here in *saying*, that is to say, giving a prose version which gives the gist of what it is that Wemmick is conveying by his utterance. Even so, we travesty what goes on if we think that, in order for there to be successful communication, Pip must somehow *translate* Wemmick's words into such a prose version. Pip understands Wemmick purely by means of the words that Wemmick uses, and no other words will typically occur to him when he grasps what Wemmick is after.

7. Reflection on all this suggests that Conant's characterization of "mere nonsense" is potentially misleading. He writes: "mere nonsense is simply unintelligible—it expresses no thought."[42] Wemmick's sentence here expresses no thought, but he can nevertheless use the utterance of that sentence to communicate. It would however be somewhat unnatural to describe Wemmick's sentence as unintelligible—even though considered in isolation we might say that the sentence "If there were anything deeper than Australia, it would be Jaggers" is unintelligible and expresses no thought. We have to be careful here to distinguish in that case between "Wemmick utters an unintelligible sentence," and "Wemmick is speaking unintelligibly." Conant's subsequent argument suggests he is simply conflating these two.

So too, Diamond slides from the claim that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are nonsense to the claim that Wittgenstein is talking nonsense.[43] What the Wemmick example suggests is that when she makes that slide, "the decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one we thought quite innocent."[44]

We frequently can, and do, communicate using sentences that are simply nonsense—including even sentences which can be grossly grammatically deviant ("Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle"[45]). Under appropriate circumstances, we do so freely and easily. That much is, or ought to be, uncontroversial. As illustrated by the example from *Great Expectations*, what differentiates such communication from normal communication is that we cannot report what it is that is communicated by using the very same sentence that was used in the

communication (once the communication has succeeded, we throw away the ladder). In a way, none of this is surprising: I can, after all, under appropriate circumstances, communicate something to you by pulling your nose—and there too, if I succeed, what has been communicated will not be specified by saying that your nose has been pulled.

What, however, needs clarifying is precisely what differentiates the case of pulling your nose from using a nonsense sentence to communicate: the latter, unlike the former, is still a *linguistic* communication—a use of language, and of precisely the same language as is used in normal communication. It is this fact which has disconcerted so many of Davidson's readers of his remark above about "bumps on the head." His remark, which in itself is quite unexceptionable, seemed to minimize the difference between metaphor *as a use of language* and non-verbal communication. We may, if we like, talk here of a "figurative use of language,"[46] but, although it is acceptable so to talk, it does little to clarify the situation, since in their generality the concepts of *figuration* or "*Bildlichkeit*" mean little more than a way of speaking which diverges from normal, literal, prose. Even if the variety in the examples here is such that no detailed general account of what happens when we use nonsense to communicate is possible, what we need to clarify is the relation of such a use of language to the use of normal, significant propositions. For one of the most obvious things to say is that we have here a use of language that is *parasitic* on the normal use of language: unless we were familiar with the normal use of the words which occur in the nonsense sentence, we should be completely unable to follow what was going on when the nonsense sentence was uttered.

It should be stressed that this question raises just as pressing an issue to be addressed by the proponents of a "therapeutic" reading of the *Tractatus*. Although they are fond of stressing that nonsense is nonsense, and therefore comparing the sentences of the *Tractatus* to "piggly wiggle"[47] or the like, *they* need an account of the therapeutic or ironic use of nonsense. Their account "supposes a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it." The therapeutic purpose of the *Tractatus* is achieved if someone is disabused of the illusion that certain "metaphysical" sentences in the book make sense. But there is simply no imaginative activity of taking "piggly wiggle" for sense, no therapeutic activity of disabusing someone of the illusion that "piggly wiggle" makes sense. As a result they are forced to talk in ways that sit oddly with their stress on an "austere conception of nonsense," and that require clarification every bit as much as the ways that those of us who believe Wittgenstein was using nonsense to try to bring us to see something about the essence of logic, language, and the world are obliged to talk. Thus Conant will talk of "the perception of a flawed sense in certain nonsensical propositions,"[48] and Ricketts, in the passage I quoted above, said "we realize that on the theory's own apparent telling, there can be no such theory." What is "a flawed sense"? What is

it for something to be true on a *nonsense* "theory's own apparent telling"? Diamond talks of a conception which "dissolves into incoherence when pushed slightly."[49] "Piggly wiggle" does not dissolve into incoherence, no matter how hard you push it. There seems here something that is deeply in need of explanation. It *looks* just as mysterious as Diamond and Conant claim they find the idea of things which can be shown but not said.

One reply that is wholly inadequate here is to say that, whereas it is the business of logic and philosophy to explain significant propositions, the *illusion* of a significant proposition is a psychological matter, and that there is a purely psychological difference between different kinds of nonsense. "Psychological" here is a weasel word. If a man were to say to me that for him "piggly wiggle" made sense, I would regard that as a psychological matter, and a fit subject for the alienist rather than the philosopher to look into. In the *Tractatus*, however, we have a *universal* illusion. *Everyone* thinks that Wittgenstein is putting forward significant propositions until they are persuaded otherwise. There is a great deal that we can *apparently* do with the sentences of the *Tractatus*: we can paraphrase them; we can translate the book, we can follow trains of thought; we can discuss the cogency of arguments that are put forward, we can expound to students "the main outlines of the picture theory" etc., etc. None of this has any parallel whatever in the case of the man under the illusion that "piggly wiggle" makes sense. Also we can *generalize* from the examples given of nonsense sentences to a whole range of other sentences being nonsense: thus there is prolonged debate in the secondary literature of "Why the sentence 'A is an object' is nonsense?"[50] which is meant to throw light on the claim that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are nonsense—even though the sentence "A is an object" does not itself occur in the *Tractatus*. Pointing out that "piggly wiggle" is nonsense has no implications whatever for which other sentences are, or are not, nonsense. What we need to understand is what it is about these words which creates this wide-ranging illusion, and that is a question about language and the words, and not the psychology of the individual reader of the book.

If we are to clarify these questions, it is useful to move away from the hothouse atmosphere of *Tractatus* interpretation and look at an unequivocal case of the use of nonsense to afford an insight.

In algebraic chess notation, the ranks and files of the chessboard are designated by the numbers 1 to 8, and the files a to h (with, e.g., White's Queen Rook on the square a1). A chess move is then designated by the name of the piece to be moved, followed by the name of the square that is its destination. This, with slight elaborations for castling, resolving ambiguities and the like, gives a *complete* account of the way to specify a move in chess.

In one of his games, David Bronstein, playing Black, had a Bishop in an apparently dominant position, being well centralized on e5. In this position, he played the paradoxical move of retreating this Bishop to the corner of the board, to the square h8 where it looked completely out of play. This unlikely looking move turned out, as the game developed, to be the key to his winning strategy,

which depended on the Bishop retaining control of the a1–h8 diagonal. From h8, it did this ideally, since it was now placed on a square that was inaccessible to the opponent, so that the bishop could neither be exchanged nor attacked. He annotated this move as follows:

> Bh8   I like this move a lot: Bj10 would have been even stronger.

1. The first point to make about this annotation is that it contains a sentence which is *demonstrably* nonsense—"austerely" nonsensical, if you like. The explanation of the chess notation sketched above was complete, and that explanation assigned no meaning to the letter "j" or numeral "10."

2. Although it is a nonsense sentence, no one has any difficulty in understanding what Bronstein is up to. In fact, most people's initial reaction to this example is to say that he is using hyperbole. But he is not: hyperbole would be a significant proposition which gave an exaggerated account of the actual situation. Here, however, we simply have nonsense. What this suggests is the readiness with which we regard such a nonsense sentence as if it had sense.

3. But even if we in this way regard it as if it were a proposition with a sense, we can give no coherent account of what that sense would be. It is clear that Bronstein is imagining a move in the actual chess game, played on an 8 by 8 board. He is not, e.g., saying, "If this chess position occurred on a 10 by 10 chessboard, Bj10 would be the best move": no one considers that possibility at all, and it is completely irrelevant—who knows, on the enlarged board Bj10 might be an outright blunder. The only "sense" we could ascribe to this sentence would be one in which *per impossibile* the Bishop would be envisaged as moving two squares off the board while remaining on the 8 by 8 board.

4. No one is under the illusion that this sentence is anything other than nonsense. Despite the tendency to describe it as hyperbole, everyone will see this annotation as a joke, precisely because it is nonsense.

5. But, even if this is a joke, it is a serious chess annotation, designed to bring to our attention features of the move that Bronstein actually made. The function of the nonsense here is to draw our attention to something in the actual situation. We are led to see the move actually played—Bh8—in a certain light, to see the move as placing the Bishop on a square where, though apparently out of play, it exercises control over the a1–h8 diagonal from a square where it is invulnerable to attack or exchange, by means of the fantasy of a move where the Bishop would be apparently *absolutely* out of play, but *absolutely* invulnerable to exchange or attack.

6. Anyone who understands Bronstein will recognize his sentence as nonsense—and as *deliberate* nonsense: replace his annotation with a genuinely significant sentence and the whole joke is lost.

7. One point is completely obvious with this example, but worth stating explicitly in the present discussion. Bronstein's annotation is instructive, and one can learn from it, but what one learns is something about the chessboard, and not the trivially obvious fact that the sentence he used was nonsense.

8. Once again, as with the example from *Great Expectations*, although this is a genuine act of communication, neither what Bronstein wishes to communicate nor what we learn can be stated by using the sentence Bronstein actually used. It would be ridiculous to say, "Bronstein told us that Bj10 would have been even stronger." In this case it is not difficult to give the upshot of what we learn in boring prose—say, in the form "The further this Bishop retreats along the diagonal, the better", but such a sentence will typically not occur to one. One doesn't usually interpret an annotation like this by *translating* it into a significant proposition, but by seeing the move actually made in a certain light— seeing the Bishop as controlling the long diagonal from a square from which it cannot be attacked, etc.

Now of course this example contrasts with the use of sentences in the *Tractatus* in that Bronstein is not attempting to draw to our attention that which could not in principle be said. But before turning to that point, we need to examine how it is that Bronstein is able to achieve successful communication by using a sentence that is palpable nonsense. Saying that he is speaking figuratively merely labels the problem, particularly when as here he is clearly not using any of the recognized figures such as metaphor or hyperbole—he is opportunistically creating his own type of figure.

Clearly, what Bronstein is doing is exploiting an analogy between two different ways of talking: we use the numerals both to designate the ranks of the chessboard and in designating, e.g., the addresses of houses. But the analogy between these two uses of the numerals is imperfect. Whereas in the case of addresses the number series is essentially open-ended (If "8 Downing Street" makes sense, it follows that "10 Downing Street" also makes sense), whereas, equally, the number series for the chessboard is essentially closed—*no* meaning has been given to the use of numerals beyond "8." Bronstein's annotation pushes the analogy beyond breaking point. Because of the analogy that does exist, we instantly perceive "Bj10" as having a sense, even when no sense has been given to it, and even when we could not say wherein that sense consisted, because we in imagination follow the analogy beyond breaking point. What we have is a crossing of two different, incompatible, ways of talking, in much the same way as in an Escher print we have the crossing of two incompatible techniques of visual representation. And just as the effect of the Escher print is that we see a staircase both ascending and descending, so we hear Bronstein's annotation as both describing a move that might have been played on the actual chessboard, and as describing a move on a possible unbounded

chessboard.[51] The resulting surreal train of thought lapses of course into incoherence, but the effect of going through the train of thought is to highlight those features of the move actually played which it would share with the fantasy move that has been conjured up.

What we find in the sentences of the *Tractatus* is, it seems to me, precisely the same exploitation of the analogies between two, incompatible, ways of speaking— ways of speaking for which different grammatical rules hold, but where it is essential to the way language works that there should be considerable overlap between the grammatical rules. Let us return to "There are objects," and Wittgenstein's contrast between genuine concepts and formal concepts. We say both "There are books on that table," and "There are objects that are F." The analogy between these two ways of talking instantly suggests that just as "There are books" makes sense, so "There are objects" must make sense, and the same kind of sense. Wittgenstein is, however, insisting that the first two sentences are of quite different logical forms, and hence the suggestion is misplaced. Here the analogy runs far deeper than that between the designation of chess moves and of house addresses. We could readily alter the chess notation and leave the rest of the language intact, but it is hard to imagine a language in which a formal concept word like "object" or "thing" did not produce precisely this surface analogy between sentences of different logical forms: *every* language will create sentences in which there is a word corresponding to "thing" in which it is apparently functioning as a genuine predicate which is true of everything. Similarly *every* language will have an identity sign that apparently functions as a relational expression, in which designations of facts have the apparent form of definite description, seemingly picking out a complex object in which the objects which figure in that fact are constituents of the fact. As a result, whereas no one will be under any illusion that the sentence used by Bronstein was anything other than nonsense, in the case of the sentences of the *Tractatus* almost everyone has the strong illusion that such sentences as "Everything is identical with itself" or "There are infinitely many things" make sense. If Wittgenstein's arguments are right, this is only an illusion, and a major part of the philosophical task will be to expose it as an illusion. Here I am in complete agreement with the therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*.

However, therapeutic readers take the further step of claiming that Wittgenstein's *whole* purpose in putting forward such sentences as

> 2.026 Only if there are objects, can there be a fixed form of the world

was to expose them as nonsense, for readers to discard once they "have seen the world aright." Their argument for this is simply that nonsense is nonsense, and once you have recognized that a sentence is nonsense, you can do nothing with it. To say otherwise would be to involve yourself in the absurd idea of "substantial nonsense." However, we can now see that this is a bad argument, and the conclusion does not follow.

Bronstein's annotation exploited an analogy between two different ways of speaking, by pushing that analogy beyond breaking point to produce a sentence that was demonstrably nonsense. He thereby produced a nonsense sentence that created the fantasy of the "move" Bj10. But his purpose in doing so was to highlight features which were shown by the actual move Bh8. The detour into nonsense was to direct our attention to the actual. If we take seriously Wittgenstein's often repeated claims that there was that which could not be said but that was shown by our actual use of significant propositions, there is every reason to regard him as engaging in an activity that is strictly parallel to Bronstein's. In order to direct our attention to those features that were shown by our meaningful use of language, but could not be significantly said, he was forced to take a detour into nonsense, but with the purpose of directing our attention to what actually went on when we use language to talk about the world and what was shown by our use.

At the very least, nothing said by Diamond and Conant shows that what I have just sketched is incoherent, or that Wittgenstein was "chickening out" if this was indeed what he was doing. But what are we to say about the difference between what Bronstein was doing and what Wittgenstein was doing? Bronstein was not trying to draw our attention to what could not be said: he was simply not saying what *could* also be said. Wittgenstein however is using nonsense sentences to draw our attention to that which, on his own admission, he could not also say. It is hard to see why that should make a difference. If "that which could not be said" were the ineffable truths of mystical theology, pointing to something that transcended human experience, it might. In the latter case the whole question of successful communication *by any means whatever* is put in jeopardy.[52] Here, however, we are concerned with things that, if Wittgenstein knows them, are also at least implicitly known to every competent user of language. What Wittgenstein is engaged in is an activity of Socratic midwifery, to bring to the surface something that he believes we all already are fully competent to see for ourselves. He is simply drawing attention to something he believes is already implicit in our mastery of language, and our ability to know how the world must be if what we say is to be true or false.

It is only if one neglects the diversity in what can properly be regarded as communication and holds that *all* communication is necessarily communication of a proposition—that is to say, if one holds a crude view of the possibilities of communication, where communication always consisted in taking a proposition out of my head and putting it in yours—that one will be inclined to insist that the fact that Wittgenstein was seeking to communicate something that could not be said implies that what he was trying to do is *essentially* different from what Bronstein clearly succeeded in doing.

There is nothing wrong with saying that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be taken *figuratively* except that the breadth of the notion of figuration makes the claim almost vacuous.[53] It looks as if Wittgenstein himself might have resisted the suggestion. In conversation with Waismann, he said:

> Religious language is not a sort of metaphor [*Gleichnis*]; otherwise you have to be able to say it in prose. Running against the limits of language? Language isn't a cage![54]

But that certainly doesn't look decisive. This remark rests on an over simple account of metaphor, let alone the figurative in general. The idea that we should resist the suggestion that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be taken figuratively would seem to depend on three assumptions, each of which betrays a limited conception of the possibilities of figuration. There is no good reason to suppose any of the following:[55]

1. A sentence used figuratively must have a literal meaning.
2. If a sentence used figuratively lacks a literal meaning then it somehow acquires a special "figurative meaning."
3. If the function of figurative discourse is to prompt an insight, then that insight will be propositional in nature, and could in principle be recast as a proposition.

IV. Critique of the "Therapeutic Reading"

My main purpose in this article is to establish one simple point—that 6.54 does not necessitate a "therapeutic" or "ironic" reading of the rest of the book. Equally, accepting the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus* does not, as many commentators have thought, convict Wittgenstein of incoherence. Wittgenstein could, on the account I have sketched, quite consistently maintain that, since he was concerned with what could only be shown, his attempt to bring to our attention what could be shown necessarily involved him in continually using nonsensical sentences to do so. There are, however, a number of reasons for believing that the "therapeutic" interpretation is deeply wrongheaded.

What is puzzling is the way that the alleged therapy is supposed to be achieved. After all, if what was required to disabuse people of the wish to produce metaphysical theories was that one should present a supposedly incoherent theory of the relation between language and reality, the result would have been achieved centuries ago. But, even apart from that, the Achilles' heel of the therapeutic reading is that it seems impossible on this reading to give a coherent account of the way in which we are meant to come to see why the sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be regarded as nonsense. What is supposed to happen runs along the following lines. One is first seduced into thinking that Wittgenstein is developing an account of the relation between language and reality, although what he is putting forward is nonsense. One then comes to realize that on the theory's own terms it is nonsense, and this has the effect of one's coming to see that any attempt to develop a philosophical theory of the relation between language and reality is doomed, and therefore abandoning the attempt to construct any such theory.

What is perplexing here is that, for this to work, the nonsense "theory" must be seen as having "terms," so that the theory can be seen as nonsense on the theory's terms.[56] If there is only the illusion of having understood the theory, there is only the illusion that the theory has revealed itself to be nonsense. When Ricketts writes "on the theory's own apparent telling, there can be no such theory,"[57] a "theory's *apparent* telling" can only *apparently* imply that there can be no such theory. If what is meant is that the theory is in some way self-refuting, or that we are *actually* presented with a theory which implies any such theory to be impossible, that simply shows the theory to be false, not nonsense. We have in fact been given no good reason to suppose that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are nonsense. It is difficult to avoid the impression that this is the point at which the therapeutic reading makes Wittgenstein "chicken out": the sentences of the *Tractatus* are to be given sufficient sense to inform us of their own nonsensicality.

The situation is quite different from that which arises for the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus*. It is the orthodox reading that is fully "resolute" at this point. Once we allow the idea that Wittgenstein may use nonsense sentences to draw attention to features of language and reality, then the account runs along the following lines: Wittgenstein wishes to bring us to see something that is manifest in our significant use of language, but that cannot be properly described by the sentences of that language. He therefore presents an account that apparently describes those features in order to bring us to appreciate "what can be shown but not said." Once he succeeds, once we "understand Wittgenstein," we both recognize those features and why they cannot be put into words. We therefore realize that the sentences that had led us to that point could not describe what we had been brought to see, and it is because they had been given no other sense that would be relevant in the context of the *Tractatus* that we realize that they are nonsense. It is precisely as baffled attempts to say something that can only be shown that they are exposed as nonsense.

But there are a number of other reasons for regarding the approach adopted by Diamond and Conant to be wrongheaded. I shall here briefly indicate some of the main ones.[58]

(1) What is for me the most important reason is also the one that is most difficult to argue. For me, this is an immensely trivializing account of Wittgenstein's work. For most people engaged in working on the *Tractatus* it is because we believe it to contain a large number of profound discussions of the nature of logic, language, and the relation of language to reality, which is the outcome of the sustained and difficult exploration that we find reflected in *The Notebooks*. It contains a huge number of deep insights which are the starting point for further philosophical reflection. Even if, in addition to the insights, there is a great deal that is wrong with what he says, it is almost invariably the outcome of profound and powerful argument, presenting us with a deep challenge to say why it is wrong. On the present account all this is just an illusion: nothing is shown, no insights are vouchsafed, other than that we have been led on a wild goose chase. If the work

is intended as "therapy," it looks a highly perverse way to set about it, and, not surprisingly, the book has to be regarded as an unmitigated failure, since the great majority of its readers, far from being cured by the book, have as a result of reading it been persuaded to take seriously precisely the ideas that they were meant to be freed of. Not until Diamond and Conant wrote did anyone even suspect that they were undergoing therapy, let alone being cured. But, quite apart from the queerness of the alleged therapy, what we are being offered looks something quite paltry by comparison with what most of us believe we have learnt from our engagement with the book. For me at any rate, the book, viewed this way, would no longer be the major work of philosophy I have always believed it to be, but just an eccentric sport in the history of philosophy.

(2) At first sight, the account we are now considering has apparently made itself irrefutable, since the citation of any text from the *Tractatus* that seems to contradict it can be dismissed as simply part of the ladder that we are meant to throw away. There is however always the larger question of the way in which this interpretation would fit in with what else we know about Wittgenstein and his writings. Here, all that we are offered is the suggestion that a "therapeutic" reading would somehow establish a continuity between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work. This suggests to me a deep misunderstanding both of the *Tractatus* and of the sense in which the *Investigations* may be regarded as therapeutic in intent. Only the former point is my present concern. Although I disagree with many of the details of his presentation, Peter Hacker has marshalled an overwhelming case for thinking that those of us who believe Wittgenstein was offering us a vision of the way language related to reality—simple objects, elementary propositions mirroring states of affairs and the rest—are thinking of the book in precisely the same way that he himself did.[59] Without rehearsing his evidence, I shall just cite here one example. When Wittgenstein returned to philosophy in the early 1930s his first substantial writing was what has now been published as the *Philosophical Remarks*. In that we find Wittgenstein at first attempting to modify and repair the *Tractatus* account of the relation of language to reality, before finally subjecting it to criticisms that led him to dismantle it. If the moral of the *Tractatus* was meant to be, in Ricketts's words "When we throw away the ladder, we give up attempts to state what this conception of representation and truth demands of the world," this is completely unintelligible: why was Wittgenstein continuing the attempt? It appears that even in his own case the therapy was a complete failure, and one could only say "Physician, heal thyself."

The challenge that Hacker has made here seems to me simple and decisive, and yet I know of nowhere where the proponents of the therapeutic reading even attempt to address it. Unless they do so, their interpretation of the *Tractatus* is spinning in the void, out of touch with the rest of what Wittgenstein actually said outside the *Tractatus*.

(3) There is one particular aspect of the "external evidence" for the interpretation of the *Tractatus* that is particularly important here. Before returning to

Cambridge, Wittgenstein had dealings with the Vienna Circle. Despite the fact that he was initially welcomed by them as someone who had pioneered their opposition to metaphysics, there soon developed on both sides a recognition that there was a deep incompatibility between what they were both saying. This is most naturally understood as residing in the fact that there was a deep difference in their respective oppositions to traditional metaphysics: for them traditional metaphysics was simply nonsense, but for Wittgenstein what was wrong with traditional metaphysics was that it tried to present a theory—to say what could only be shown. On the interpretation we are now considering, there is nothing shown, there is just a therapeutic project to disabuse us of the temptation to do metaphysics. Conant and Diamond both wish to distance Wittgenstein's position from that of the Vienna Circle, but where is the difference now supposed to be? It now seems the only difference is the trivial one that, while agreeing with them that all metaphysics was simply nonsense, he thought it worthwhile to engage in his therapeutic project—which, whatever they made of it, scarcely indicates any difference of philosophical belief from their own.

(4) The account is presented as resting on a distinction between a "frame" and the rest of the *Tractatus*. The frame—initially the preface and 6.54—are those sentences in which Wittgenstein speaks *in propria persona*, guiding us how to read the rest of the book. Thus, instead of the nonsense sentences of the *Tractatus* being revealed as nonsense by their spontaneous combustion, some of the sentences of the book are treated in a quite different way from the others, where the sentences thus treated are far from exhausted by the initial account of the frame. These propositions (e.g. the context principle at 3.314, the difference between formal concepts and genuine concepts at 4.126, the account of nonsense at 5.4733, and the claim that there is only logical necessity at 6.37)[60] are given critical significance in the whole exposition. Despite the apparently global nature of Wittgenstein's claim that his sentences are nonsense at 6.54, these propositions are plucked as brands from the burning, and treated as significant propositions, registering crucial philosophical insights—insights that have the consequence that some of the other sentences of the book are nonsense.[61] Such propositions, called by these authors the "frame," provide the clues necessary for interpreting the rest of the book.

There are a number of reasons why such a separation of some sentences in the *Tractatus* from the others in this way is quite unacceptable, even apart from the fact that it was not what we are led to expect from 6.54. Even if everyone will allow Wittgenstein a decent amount of poetic licence, so that trivial exceptions, such as those sentences in which Wittgenstein simply mentions what Frege or Russell has said, will be allowed to be significant, 6.54 seems to suggest that there was something nonsensical about *everything* that has led up to that point.[62] Once we try to exempt quite crucial elements in the previous exposition from this universal stricture, we run into difficulties on all sides. In the first place, the book now seems to be atrociously written. We now have sentences whose status is utterly different jumbled randomly together: significant claims being apparently commented on by

nonsense sentences and vice versa. The book is now radically disorganized, with the crucial methodological remarks appearing scattered without rhyme or reason.[63] But the point here is not merely stylistic: there are complex relations of dependence between the propositions of the *Tractatus* that explain their position within the structure, and what will frequently occur when one examines the propositions which here are presented as the "frame" is that they are presented in the book as justified by sentences that are presumably nonsense. Let us look at one straightforward example. Conant attaches great significance to 4.111–4.112, but these propositions are part of a sequence and appear quite intelligibly as a gloss on 4.1:

> 4.1 A proposition represents the existence or non-existence of states of affairs.

> 4.11 The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or, the totality of the natural sciences).

> 4.111 Philosophy is not a natural science.
>   (The word "philosophy" must mean something, which stands above or below, but not alongside the natural sciences.)

> 4.112 The aim of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.
>   Philosophy is not a doctrine, but an activity.
>   A work of philosophy consists essentially in elucidations.
>   The result of philosophy is not "philosophical propositions," but the clarification of propositions.
>   Philosophy is to make clear and sharply to delimit propositions which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.

> 4.1121 Psychology is no nearer to philosophy than any other natural science.

It is obvious that this is intended as a continuous train of thought, in which the central theme is the settling of a boundary dispute, separating philosophy off completely from science. But it takes its point of departure in 4.1—every proposition being the representation of the existence and non-existence of states of affairs. The thought is as follows: *every* significant proposition is concerned with contingent matters of fact—which states of affairs exist and which do not—something that it is the business of the natural sciences to find out. Hence if we are not to confuse the task of philosophy with something that is properly speaking the business of the natural sciences, we see that philosophy cannot be seen as having a domain of propositions that belong especially to it—since *all* propositions are the business of the natural scientist. Hence we have to see the philosophical task differently—as not establishing propositions at all, but as clarifying what is going on when people put forward propositions. This is a clear line of thought, but it is presented naturally as flowing from 4.1. However, if any of the

propositions of the *Tractatus* are to count as nonsense by Wittgenstein's criteria, 4.1 is surely one such. But unless 4.1 is in play, 4.111 and 4.112 stand in mid-air without justification or explanation. Conant is therefore faced with an unpalatable alternative. Either 4.1 is to be regarded as a significant proposition, in which case it becomes completely obscure which propositions, if any, belong to the ladder we are meant to throw away; or, as actually happens, 4.111 has to be interpreted quite out of context, as an oracular pronouncement of Wittgenstein's, coming from nowhere, and simply presented on a take it or leave it basis. From this perspective, e.g. an innocent word like "*Erläuterung*" suddenly becomes a quasi-technical term to be glossed by 6.54, taking the remark out of its original context, where it no longer has a home, and placed in an alien one.

Time and again, remarks that are treated by Conant or Diamond as registering insights in terms of which we can see that the purported "metaphysics" of the *Tractatus* is merely a nonsensical illusion are most naturally understood as consequences of that very metaphysics. Cut adrift from that "metaphysics," these "insights" simply appear as dogmatic assertions on Wittgenstein's part, which no one who is not simply overawed by Wittgenstein is going to acquiesce in without further explanation. Remarks such as "there is only logical necessity" or "the result of philosophy is not 'philosophical propositions'" run counter to deeply engrained ways of thinking and talking. It is only when we see them in context that we do not simply write them off—the first as a "Humean prejudice" and the second as the result of an unduly narrow conception of "proposition," say. But the context in which such remarks make sense and have purchase is when we see them as part of the gradual unfolding of the vision announced in the very opening sentences of the book ("The world is everything which is the case. The world is the totality of facts, not of things . . ."). It is because the world is *everything* that is the case, and the totality of what is the case is the totality of facts of the kind that it is the business of the natural scientist to find out, that the general form of proposition will be developed in such a way as to leave no room for any necessary truths other than empty tautologies, and to leave no propositions as the business of the philosopher as opposed to the natural scientist. The attempt to extricate certain sentences as "frame" sentences from the rest, so that the rest will be shown to be nonsense by that frame, is in this way always to fail to appreciate the extent to which those "frame sentences" are themselves put forward only as consequences of such clear examples of nonsense as "The world is the totality of facts."

The most serious difficulty of all, however, is that Wittgenstein's reasons for regarding his sentences as nonsense upon examination apply with full force to the great majority of the sentences that have here been singled out as belonging to the "frame." I shall look here at two of the plainest examples. Diamond talks of "There is only *logical* necessity" (6.37) as being "a wonderful remark,"[64] but continues that "it is ironically self-destructive."[65] It is indeed, though not quite for the somewhat obscure reasons she herself gives. It is self-destructive precisely because it itself is not something that could be shown on logical grounds alone, but equally it is put

forward not as a contingent matter of fact but as itself a necessary truth, thus becoming its own counter-example. Therefore, if Wittgenstein's remark is not simply to be rejected as self-contradictory, it can only be because in putting forward the remark he was drawing attention to something that could not be said, but that was shown by the fact that the only necessary propositions allowed for by the general form of proposition were tautologies and contradictions. But the sentence itself then has to count as nonsense to draw our attention to what cannot be said. In a very similar way, the sentences in which Wittgenstein introduces the distinction between formal concepts and genuine concepts are self-defeating. Consider the sentence which is critical for the whole of the present debate from 4.26:

> If something falls under a formal concept as its object, this cannot be expressed by a proposition. But it is shown in the symbol for the object itself.

Here the first clause is general, and ought to have as its substitution instances of such propositions as "A is an object," yielding "If A is an object [falls under the formal concept *object*], then we cannot express the proposition that A is an object"—which is palpably self-defeating: the consequent takes away the possibility of making sense of the antecedent. In this kind of way the whole introduction of the distinction between formal concepts and genuine concepts runs into the problem of the distinction itself declaring it to be impossible to say what we are apparently saying when we draw the distinction. Hence it turns out that not only is it impossible to say that something falls under a formal concept, it is impossible to say that it is impossible to say that. Confronted by this paradoxical situation we have no alternative but to declare the whole language used in the attempt to introduce the distinction to be nonsensical. If we then adhere to an austere nonsense, and further claim that all we can do with a nonsense sentence is expose the illusion that it makes sense, we cannot say that Wittgenstein has introduced a notion of "formal concept" at all, and the whole debate cannot even get off the ground.[66]

What we see then are what are, to my mind, a wide range of insuperable difficulties besetting the therapeutic interpretation on the one hand, and on the other hand the weight of the claim made by the therapeutic interpreters that we must take 6.54 seriously, and not make Wittgenstein "chicken out" or be "irresolute." Only if there were compelling reason to think that there was no good way for the orthodox reading to take the measure of the final paragraphs of the *Tractatus* would we have any reason to regard the therapeutic reading as an interpretation with any merit.

V. Throwing Away the Ladder

Therefore the final debt I have to discharge is to say how we are to understand the final paragraphs. In the light of what has gone before, this is actually quite straightforward. As I read them, the authors with whom I am concerned tend to run together three different worries: whether it makes sense to talk at all of "features of reality" that cannot be put into words, whether that which cannot be said can be thought, and whether Wittgenstein can be regarded as having successfully specified features of reality by using sentences that are confessedly nonsensical.[67] These are all important worries, and, although I am primarily concerned here with the third, and although it is the third point to which they direct most of their attention, as providing the linchpin for their argument for a therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*, I should at least briefly address the other two.

(1) When Wittgenstein introduces the notion of features (*Zügen*), he says that he is doing so in the sense in which we speak of someone's facial features (4.1221). Although that is obviously only an analogy, it is a useful one. Someone's features are precisely those which are familiar to everyone, and, in a straightforward sense, we may know what someone looks like, even though we are characteristically unable to put what we know into words—at least in the sense that it is only with great difficulty that we can describe someone we know to someone else in such a way that they will be able to recognize them from our description, while we ourselves manifest our knowledge of what they look like by our practical everyday instant recognition of them. In such a situation, there are features of reality with which we are all familiar, and which we are typically unable to put into words, but where we manifest our grasp of those features in our everyday transactions with people. The major difference between this and Wittgenstein's concern with features of reality which show themselves in our use of words, and where we show our knowledge and understanding of those features in our ability to use language significantly, is that in the latter case we are *in principle* unable to *say* what those features are and can manifest our grasp of those features *only* in our mastery of the significant use of language.[68] However, since Wittgenstein provides strong arguments why this is so, the onus is very much on those who recoil from the idea of ineffable features of reality to show why that recoil is more than a prejudice.

(2)

> If this work is of value, it consists in two things. First, that thoughts are expressed in it, and the value will be greater the better the thoughts are expressed.[69]

> 4.1 A thought is a significant [*sinnvolle*] proposition.

> 6.54 . . . anyone who understands me finally recognizes that my sentences are nonsense [*unsinnig*].

There is a clear, and surely deliberate, tension between these three claims that Wittgenstein makes, whatever we do with that tension. The simplest resolution of the tension would be to say that the first of these quotations was intended ironically, as the first stage in the therapeutic process, and that eventually we would recognize that Wittgenstein had not been expressing thoughts at all. But, although the simplest resolution, it is surely highly implausible. "The Preface" is the most unnatural element in the book to read ironically, particularly in the case of the present text, where Wittgenstein continues:

> Here I am conscious of having fallen far short of what is possible—simply because my powers are insufficient to master the task. May others come and do it better.[70]

To interpret the last sentence ironically would involve ascribing to Wittgenstein a perverse sense of humor that would be completely out of character. The natural way to read the sentences from this part of the Preface is that Wittgenstein is presenting the book as the product of hard *intellectual* labor, but whose outcome presented him with an intolerable problem of putting into words what he had seen—particularly as it was integral to what he had seen that any direct presentation of that outcome was impossible.

One thing is clear: we cannot present Wittgenstein as holding that the sentence "Objects form the substance of the world" is nonsense, and hence that one could not say "Objects form the substance of the world," but that nevertheless *that* was what he thought.[71] If "Objects form the substance of the world" is nonsense, "Wittgenstein thought that objects form the substance of the world" is nonsense. What we have to say is something along the lines of Wittgenstein's letter to Russell, in which he wrote:

> A prop[osition] e.g. $\varphi(a, b)$ or $(\exists\varphi, x, y)$ doesn't say that there are two things, it says something quite different; *but whether it's true or false*, it SHOWS what you want to express by saying "there are 2 things."[72]

This careful formulation avoids saying that "There are two things" either says or shows anything—it is and remains simply nonsense, while at the same time acknowledging the (psychological) fact that there are circumstances in which we find precisely these words appropriate. Although that is obviously initially a psychological fact, there is no reason why that fact may not itself be induced by genuine understanding.[73]

Let us suppose that there is that which is shown by our significant use of language, but something that, for the reasons I sketched in the opening section of this article, cannot be expressed propositionally. Let us suppose further that Wittgenstein believes himself to have insight into what can only be shown, and wishes to communicate what we has seen. This is certainly the natural way to read

both the *Tractatus* and all of the surrounding remarks made by Wittgenstein at the time. Should we call the having of such insights "thinking"? On a legalistic interpretation of §4, no. But that only shows that §4 is concerned with giving an account of *thinking that p*. The concept of *thinking* is, however, a fluid concept, and there are a wide variety of contexts in which it is entirely appropriate to speak of someone thinking where you cannot render what is going on simply by a direct propositional content to their thought. Did Schubert think when he composed *Winterreise*? And, if he did, does that mean that a series of propositions accompanied his composition *sotto voce*? Do chess players think? If so, do we have to suppose that they will always be able to produce propositions that justify their moves? Is it the case that a user of metaphor will always be able to produce a propositional prose equivalent of their metaphor? In the light of this the most we can conclude from this excursus into "What cannot be said, cannot be thought" is something that ought to be common ground between the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus* and their "therapeutic" opponents—namely, that if "Objects form the substance of the world" is nonsense, then whatever it was that Wittgenstein sought to convey when he wrote this, it was not his thought that objects form the substance of the world. But that is a very long way from saying either that he was deluded in thinking that he was conveying something by writing this, or else that his only purpose in writing this was to tap into an illusion to which we are all prone, in order subsequently to expose it as such.

How are we to understand the final paragraphs of the *Tractatus*, and in particular the metaphor of "throwing away the ladder" at 6.54? For Conant this is simple:

> The sign that we have understood the author of the work is that we can throw the ladder we have climbed up away. That is to say, we have finished the work, and the work is finished with us, when we are able to *throw* the sentences in the body of the work—sentences about "the limits of language" and the unsayable things which lie beyond them—*away*.[74]

Here he has just made clear that what he means by this is that the book up to this point is an exercise whose purpose is purely to lead us to recognize that these sentences are simply nonsense, and hence that "throwing them away" is being freed from the illusion that they contain profound insights into the nature of logic, language and reality.

   The only thing that gives any plausibility to this interpretation is the assumption that you can do nothing with a nonsense sentence, that you cannot use it to communicate—or rather that the only thing that you could use it for is the minimal use required by the therapeutic reading, that you could use it to bring someone to see that it was nonsense. This assumption is supposed to be justified by the stress on the fact that there is no such thing as "substantial nonsense": all nonsense is "simply nonsense." However, the indisputable point that, as far as meaning is

concerned, all nonsense is on a par only justifies the claim that you can do nothing with a nonsense sentence if one refuses to draw any distinction between the meaning and the use of a sentence. But, whatever can be said for a simple refusal to draw *any* distinction between the meaning of a sentence and the use someone makes of it, it is at the very least highly unTractarian not to draw one.[75] If, however, we think again of Bronstein's annotation, then it is clear that "Bj10 would have been even stronger" lacks any meaning—is simply nonsense—and, what is more, is nonsense in virtue of the criterion preferred by Diamond and Conant. That is to say, it is nonsense "because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts" (5.4733). But equally clearly that does not prevent Bronstein from giving the sentence a use—a use in which he leads us to appreciate certain features of reality. It is by analogy with this that we may best understand both what Wittgenstein is up to in the body of the text, and also what he means by "throwing away the ladder."

In his Introduction, Russell wrote:

> In accordance with this principle the things that have to be said in leading the reader to understand Mr Wittgenstein's theory are all of them things which that theory itself condemns as meaningless. With this proviso we will endeavour to convey the picture of the world which seems to underlie his system.[76]

Ignoring any pedantic scruples we may have about Russell's use of the word "theory," this seems to me exactly right, and right on a fundamental point where Diamond and Conant are wrong. What Russell is saying here is something that they cannot in the nature of the case say. That is, Russell presents the reader as being led by Wittgenstein's use of nonsense sentences to see something, and then, *as a result of what they have been led to see*, coming to appreciate that the sentences that led them there were nonsense. The question here is: "What leads us to recognize that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are nonsense?" It is to that question that I believe Conant and Diamond can give no adequate answer. When we say that "There are objects" is nonsense, we are not saying that that string of words is necessarily nonsense. As Wittgenstein stresses, this string of words is not nonsense in itself. There are plenty of ways in which this sentence could have a meaning: for instance my dictionary gives as a possible meaning of the word "object," "a deplorable spectacle," and there is no good reason to regard the sentence "There are objects," taken in that way, as anything other than a straightforward significant proposition. Clearly that meaning is irrelevant—what we mean when we say "There are objects" is nonsense is that these words can be given no *appropriate* meaning. But what in this context is meant by "no *appropriate* meaning"—appropriate to what?

There are two natural answers to this question, neither of which seems available to Conant or Diamond. The first, most obvious, answer is that the word "object" is to be given the meaning that is consistent with Wittgenstein's use of the word

in the rest of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein is clearly using the word in a way that is far from the everyday use, but that emerges from the problem-context in which he and Russell were working. It is therefore the word "object" being used in a way whose meaning is contextually established by Wittgenstein by the remarks he makes using the word. The sentences in which he establishes that meaning—above all the second main section of the *Tractatus*—are, however, among the clearest examples in the whole book of sentences which the reader is intended to recognize as simply nonsense. On the orthodox interpretation, such as that indicated by the passage from Russell just quoted, that is not an insuperable problem. These sentences are "the things that have to be said in leading the reader to understand Mr Wittgenstein's theory": nonsense sentences are here assigned a role in bringing the reader to see Wittgenstein's picture of the relation of language to reality, and we can gather how he is understanding such a word as "object" from its place within that picture. However, by contrast, these sentences, as far as meaning is concerned, are just gibberish—and simply to be rejected on the basis "nonsense is nonsense." Hence it is impossible to see how we gather from them how Wittgenstein is understanding the word "object" in such a way that we can judge that *on that understanding* "There are objects" is nonsense. We have on this account been deprived of the yardstick of correct usage to condemn particular sentences as nonsense in accordance with that usage.

The second answer is that indicated by Russell—that the sentences of the *Tractatus* "condemn themselves" as nonsense. It is that initially paradoxical answer which goes to the heart of what Wittgenstein is about in the *Tractatus*. As we shall see, it is also an answer that, by implication, is not available to Conant and Diamond—"piggly wiggle" cannot by any stretch of the imagination be seen as "condemning itself as nonsense."

The appearance of paradox emerges if you put the answer in the following crude form: "Once you understand the sentences, you realize that they imply that they are themselves nonsense." It is at bottom because Conant and Diamond believe that the proponents of the orthodox reading of the *Tractatus* are committed to something like that crude formulation that they are led to reject that reading.[77] Of course, the crude formulation cannot stand: if the sentences are nonsense, there is no such thing as understanding them, and equally it makes no sense to talk of them as "implying" anything whatever.

To replace that crude formulation by something better we need to look at the concrete detail of what is going on. The *Tractatus* presents itself as a long and sustained argument for the general form of proposition given at §6, a variable ranging over every possible significant proposition. However, we see that none of the sentences that have led to the general form of proposition at §6, nor even §6 itself, can be made to conform to the formula given there: the sentence "Every proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions" cannot be made out to be analyzable as itself a truth-function of elementary propositions. Hence, if the purpose of establishing the general form of proposition was to give an exhaustive

account of what we could significantly say, it seems that on its own terms it is something that cannot be significantly said. This is the paradoxical situation we need to understand: that §6 apparently gives us the grounds we have for declaring §6 to be nonsense. If §6 is indeed nonsense, then it does not tell us what the general form of proposition is, and hence seems to give us no grounds for believing that it itself is excluded from the general form of proposition. There are a large number of sentences of the *Tractatus* that, like §6, are in this way directly "self-refuting"— sentences that apparently lay down formal conditions that any significant proposition must satisfy, but where the propositions themselves could not satisfy the very conditions they posit.[78] The intriguing question is whether 6.54 is not, on reflection, as self-refuting as any other proposition of the *Tractatus*. Now the fact that a sentence is "self-refuting" in this way does not prove it is nonsense. All that can be concluded from such self-refutation is that if the proposition is significant then it is necessarily false. After all, there are a large number of sentences—"Every sentence is nonsense," "Every significant sentence is in the passive voice" . . . —that have the requisite power of self-refutation, but where that does not show that the propositions in question are nonsense, simply that they are blatant falsehoods. We seem to be saying that it is only in so far as we give credence to §6 that it reveals itself to be nonsense! The notion of a sentence that "says of itself that it is nonsense" still remains an elusive and unsatisfactory notion.

We therefore need to give a somewhat different account of what is going on, when we talk of the sentences as "condemning themselves as nonsense". We need a reading that takes seriously the idea that, whether or not the reader realizes it, from the very outset Wittgenstein is self-consciously using sentences that are nonsensical. The reason for this is neither perversity nor some therapeutic goal, but because of his conviction that what he wished to communicate could not be conveyed by normal means, but only indirectly. This conviction was prompted initially by reflection on Russell's theory of types and the way in which Russell, in order to set up the type theory, was constantly forced to use sentences that violated the very restrictions that the theory itself imposed. It is in *Principia Mathematica* that we may find the prototype for the "self-refuting sentences" of the *Tractatus*. But what Russell was unwittingly forced into, Wittgenstein was doing self-consciously. The confused presentation we find in *Principia*—the appeals to the meanings of signs in order to establish the rules for their significant use as though we had access to those meanings independently of the way the signs for those meanings functioned, the implicit use of quantifiers that range over entities of different type etc.—were for Wittgenstein not accidental but integral to the very project Russell had embarked on. As Wittgenstein continually stresses, the kinds of things that Russell was talking about were things that could not be described in language using significant propositions, but which were instead *shown* by the way the symbols of the language actually work.

The purpose of the *Tractatus* is to specify what it is that can only be shown in this way, and why it can only be shown. If he is to do so, and do so in a way that

actually works, he must depart from the "only strictly correct method" (6.53) of bringing someone to see that they had given no meaning to what they had said when they attempted to say what could only be shown. He then has no alternative but to stop working to rule and to use sentences that are nonsense, but to use them in such a way as to bring to the reader's attention both those features of the way that language works that cannot be put into words, and why they cannot be put into words. This "incorrect" method can work precisely because we are all tacitly aware of those features—as is shown by our ability to negotiate the significant use of language. If Wittgenstein succeeds, then the reader will come both to appreciate what those features are, and why they cannot be described in significant propositions. This will lead to a reappraisal of the sentences that led to this point— that they themselves cannot be regarded as expressing significant propositions, precisely because if they were so regarded they would have to be describing those very features that can't be described. The sentences serve to draw attention to those features of the way language relates to reality that condemn the sentences themselves as nonsense. Thus §6 serves to draw attention to the criteria that we actually employ in the concrete case for deciding what is and what is not a significant proposition, for distinguishing sense from nonsense, and what those criteria amount to. If it succeeds, then we realize that, for that very reason, §6 cannot be regarded as a correct *statement* of the general form of proposition, which is now seen as something that can only be shown, shown by the way we do in fact distinguish what is and what is not a significant proposition. Hence it is a mark of having understood Wittgenstein that "anyone who understands me finally recognizes my sentences as nonsense." The nonsense sentences of the *Tractatus* serve as the catalyst whereby the reader comes to see what can only be shown. These sentences serve as a ladder leading to our seeing these features, but doing so in such a way that we appreciate that the sentences that have led us there, the ladder we have climbed, cannot be seen as appropriately describing what they initially seemed to describe, because *no* sentences could appropriately do that. We therefore finally "throw away the ladder": we recognize what it is that these sentences have brought us to see, but finally dispense with the sentences themselves after recognizing that, far from offering us a true metaphysical theory, they are simply nonsense.

How does what I have just said differ from what Conant and Diamond are saying? They diverge in the following vital respect. For them the book is purely designed to expose an illusion: the sentences of the *Tractatus* are sentences that are not designed to lead to any metaphysical insight, other than that the metaphysical project they are concerned with leads to nonsense and hence is impossible. There is nothing that "shows itself," nothing ineffable, and the idea of "what shows itself" is part of the ladder to be thrown away. However, the crucial element in what I have said is that it is precisely because the sentences of the *Tractatus* can, for all their nonsensicality, draw attention to what shows itself, that they succeed in finally leading the reader to recognize them themselves as nonsense. Remove the idea of what shows itself and you remove the dialectical structure of the entire book—

the way in which Wittgenstein first leads us to see what can only be shown in order then to see that since what we have seen can only be shown, the sentences which led us there cannot be regarded as significant propositions, but as sentences condemned as nonsense by what they themselves have led us to see—a ladder to be dispensed with once it has fulfilled its function. The reader then says of Wittgenstein what he says of solipsism: "What Wittgenstein is after [*meint*] is quite right, only it can't be said, but shows itself" (5.62).

However, to reiterate, the *only* reason we are being given for rejecting the idea that there is that which can only be shown, but not said, is that the sentences in which Wittgenstein seeks to bring this to our notice are nonsense, *einfach Unsinn*. That fact, however, would lead to the rejection of the idea that they can serve to allow the reader to see what can only be shown, only if it were to follow from the fact that a sentence had no meaning that it could have no use. Whereas in fact we use nonsense sentences all the time, and to good purpose.

Notes

1 *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Culture and Value), p. 38. My translation.
2 I depart from custom here in translating "*Satz*" as sentence, not because I have an axe to grind but simply because there is an oddity to my ear in describing something which is nonsense as a proposition.
3 Letter to Russell, August 19, 1919.
4 *Tractatus*, Introduction, p. 22. Since Wittgenstein was highly unspecific in his angry reaction to Russell's Introduction to the book, it is impossible to be dogmatic as to what he had in mind, but it may well be this part of what Russell wrote that most prompted Wittgenstein to describe the Introduction as "superficiality and misunderstanding" (Letter to Russell, May 6, 1920). In his first extended discussion of "what could be shown but not said," the notes dictated to G.E. Moore in Norway in 1914 (*Notebooks 1914–16*, p. 108), Wittgenstein had already blocked off Russell's "resolution" of the difficulty: "In order that you should have a language which can express or *say* everything that *can* be said, this language must have certain properties; and when this is the case, *that* it has them can no longer be said in that or *any* language." It should be noted that in earlier parts of the Introduction Russell had expressed himself in ways that were both more insightful and at least apparently more sympathetic to Wittgenstein's concerns.
5 James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. I, ed. Percy Fitzgerald, London, 1888, p. 394. The reference to St. Paul is to II Cor. 12, 3–4.
6 It is worthwhile stressing something that is emphasized in the excellent discussion between A.W. Moore and Peter Sullivan, "Ineffability and Nonsense," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 2003, 77:1, pp. 165–223. There is extraordinary diversity, and disagreement, among the authors who are grouped together by the advocates of the "therapeutic" reading of the *Tractatus* as "orthodox" commentators. As a result, a tendency in this debate to cite one "orthodox" commentator who makes an infelicitous remark as evidence that this is what orthodox commentators believe is radically misguided. In particular, the differences in the way the crucial passages are interpreted by "orthodox" interpreters, such as Peter Hacker, who regard Wittgenstein's position as indefensible, and those, such as Elizabeth Anscombe, who seek to defend it, are every bit as great as the differences between them and the advocates of "the New Wittgenstein."
7 *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, South Bend, Ind., St. Augustine's Press, 1971. See in particular chapter 13.

8 "Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein" (hereafter "Saying and Showing"), *Essays on Wittgenstein in honour of G.H. von Wright*, *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 1976, vol. 28, Amsterdam, pp. 54–70.

9 Cf., e.g., Cora Diamond, "What Does a Concept-Script Do?," in *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, Mass.,, MIT Press, 1991.

10 For a representative series of articles, see Alice Crary and Rupert Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*, London, Routledge, 2000.

11 One reason for thinking that there are distinct strands in Wittgenstein's thought here is that some of the ideas that follow are much more directly tied than others to the way Wittgenstein thought language worked in the *Tractatus*. As a result, some of the ideas will survive the rejection of particular aspects of the Tractarian account of the relation of language to reality more readily than others. Above all, some of these ideas depend upon the specific version of the general form of proposition that we find in the *Tractatus*, whereas other strands in Wittgenstein's thought here will survive into *Philosophical Investigations*, where he explicitly rejects the idea of the general form of proposition.

12 Because of this variety, it is, I believe, a definite mistake to try to reduce the ways in which we are meant to learn from the nonsensical sentences in the *Tractatus* to one single formula. Thus when A.W. Moore writes: "Does he not . . . intend his sentences to produce their effect by means of the reader's ultimate failure, in trying to construe them as the network of truth-evaluable statements that they appear to be, to make anything of them?" ("Ineffability and Nonsense," p. 183), that description seems to fit some parts of the *Tractatus* (e.g. "The world is my world") much better than others. There is a great deal in Moore's article with which I am sympathetic. However, if I understand him, he seems to wish to reduce what Wittgenstein wishes us to learn from the *Tractatus* to "a capacity to recognise as nonsense not only the nonsense in the *Tractatus*, but other, similar 'metaphysical twaddle'" (p. 184). If that were all, it is no surprise that he is led to say, borrowing a phrase of David Wiggins, that "suddenly it seems that what makes the difference between [the traditional reading and the new reading] has the width of a knife edge" (p. 180). But although recognizing philosophical nonsense for what it is was undoubtedly a central aspect of what Wittgenstein was wishing to bring us to see, it is clear to me that in addition to this negative task Wittgenstein also had in mind a positive goal which he later characterized as "grasping the essence of the world" (*Philosophical Remarks*, p. 85): "philosophy as custodian of grammar can in fact grasp the essence of the world, only not in propositions of language, but in rules for this language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs." I take the dispute between the traditional reading and the new reading to be over the question whether there is this positive aspect to the *Tractatus*, in addition to its undoubted negative aspect.

13 *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, p. 27.

14 It is instructive to compare this aspect of Wittgenstein's thought with Quine's frequent insistence on the "inscrutability of reference."

15 Letter to Russell August, 1919, from *Cambridge Letters*, p. 126. The opening quotation is Russell's comment to which Wittgenstein is replying.

16 Preface, p. 27.

17 Cf. Peter Sullivan, "The Totality of Facts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2000, vol. 100.

18 Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, p. 108.

19 "Function and Concept", in Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. B. McGuinness, London: Blackwell, 1984, p. 147.

20 If we were to read "Nothing is F" as "No thing is F," it would then be equivalent to the absurd "Anything [or 'Any thing'] that is F is not a thing."

21 It should be mentioned that for Wittgenstein the dodge of trying to render "There are objects" by "$(\exists x)\ (x = x)$" is ruled out by his argument that identity is not a relation.

Cf. my article "Wittgenstein on Identity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1977/8, vol. 78.

22 I am almost exclusively concerned with the logical aspects of the showing/saying distinction. There is considerable evidence that Wittgenstein himself regarded the final remarks about ethics and religion as the most important aspect of the *Tractatus*. By comparison with the earlier parts of the book, I find these remarks deeply unsatisfactory. Sir Arthur Sullivan wanted to be remembered for his church music, but it does not follow that people who have preferred the Savoy operas have made any mistake.

23 In the rest of this article I shall not be concerned with the remarks about ethics and religion, but there is a question to be addressed to Diamond in particular. She does not for me succeed in making her position clear in articles like "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of the *Tractatus*" (her contribution to *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 149–173) but there appears to be a sharp contrast between the brusque "Nonsense is Nonsense" approach that she adopts in general in her interpretation of the *Tractatus*—the approach that I am principally concerned with here—and the far gentler treatment of the "nonsense" remarks about ethics and religion—*here* we do seem on her view to have nonsense sentences which nevertheless point to something. The question is: is there an inconsistency here? If so, which of her positions should be modified? If not, *how* are her remarks to be reconciled?

24 I leave it as an open question whether Wittgenstein may not be joining up with the tradition of mystical theology in the final remarks about God at 6.432. My main concern is with the earlier references to what cannot be said but only shown.

25 Cf. 5.5562:

> "If we know on purely logical grounds that there must be elementary propositions, then this must be known by everyone who understands propositions in their unanalysed form."

26 *Tractatus*, Preface, p. 27.

27 Cf., e.g. Peter Carruthers, *The Metaphysics of the Tractatus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 5: "Nevertheless, Wittgenstein thinks that tautologies and contradictions (and even, in some obscure way, the nonsensical propositions of philosophy, since these can help us to see the world aright—6.54) can *show* us something about the essential structure of language and the world." Or Cf. R.J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2nd edn, London, Routledge, 1987, p. 102: "3.25 A proposition has one and only one complete analysis." This proposition seems to be about propositions and say of them that they have one and only one complete analysis. We can call this the *manifest* content of the proposition—using this phrasing to leave open the question whether we have a genuine propositional content. We next notice that this sentence is quite literally nonsensical, but then this very recognition is supposed to show us something. The peculiarity of this situation is that what we are shown is just what was manifestly (though not genuinely) said.

28 "Throwing away the Ladder," in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 181.

29 "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 1997, vol. 22, p. 64.

30 "*Fool*: Have more than thou showest, /
Speak less than thou knowest, /
Lend less than thou owest, /
Ride more than thou goest, /
Learn more than thou trowest, /
Set less than thou throwest; /
Leave thy drink and thy whore, /
And keep in-a-door, /
And thou shalt have more /

Than two tens to a score. /
Kent: This is nothing, fool. /
Fool: Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer; you gave me nothing for't. Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle. /
Lear: Why, no, boy; nothing can be made out of nothing" (*King Lear*, I.iv).

31 Because of that variation, I am more concerned to express my disagreement with a position than a particular author. For instance, many of the remarks made by Diamond in particular could be interpreted from my point of view *in meliorem partem*, and many of the authors who ascribe to what I am calling the "orthodox" or "natural" reading express themselves so incautiously that I would side with Diamond against them. At the very least, she has done *Tractatus* studies the service of stressing that we must take seriously that when Wittgenstein says "nonsense," he means "nonsense" and not, e.g., "nonsense in a technical sense," whatever that may mean.

32 Thomas Ricketts, "Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense," in H. Sluga and D. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, section V. (In line with the previous note, this passage *could* be read in such a way that it could be accepted by the most "traditional" interpreter of the *Tractatus*.)

33 James Conant, "Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and the Early Wittgenstein" (hereafter "Frege and Early Wittgenstein"), in *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 176 f.

34 It seems to me that Russell's presentation of the Theory of Types is a much more plausible target for Wittgenstein's criticism than Frege, but even Russell would not *say* that there was such a thing as significant nonsense. The most that could be said was that he was unwittingly treating sentences that, by his own lights, were nonsense as if they made sense.

35 If the reference is to *Grundgesetze* I §32, then he claims there that he has set up his *Begriffsschrift* in such a way that every "legitimately constructed name of a truth value has a sense," because he has ensured that all the names of which it is composed have a meaning (*Bedeutung*). It is unclear to me where this differs from what Wittgenstein himself goes on to say.

36 "Concept and Object," *Translations from the Writings of Gottlob Frege*, trans. M. Black and P. Geach, London, Blackwell, 1952, pp. 193–194.

37 "Saying and Showing," p. 55.

38 One should also consider in this connection, the following passage from Frege's *Posthumous Writings*:

> the word "true" has a sense that contributes nothing to the sense of the whole sentence in which it occurs as a predicate. / But it is precisely for this reason that this word seems fitted to indicate the essence of logic. Because of the particular sense that it carried any other adjective would be less suitable for this purpose. So the word "true" seems to make [or "be trying to make"] the impossible possible: it allows what corresponds to the assertoric force to assume the form of a contribution to the thought. And although this attempt miscarries, or rather through the very fact that it miscarries it indicates what is characteristic of logic. And this, from what we have said, seems something essentially different from what is characteristic of aesthetics and ethics. For there is no doubt that the word "beautiful" does indicate the essence of aesthetics, as does "good" that of ethics, whereas "true" only makes an abortive attempt to indicate the essence of logic, since what logic is really concerned with is not contained in the word "true" at all but in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered.
>
> ("My Basic Logical Insights," *Posthumous Writings*, trans. P. Long and R.M. White, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1991, p. 252)

To my ear, this passage has a very Wittgensteinian ring.

39 Note that if the advocates of the therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus* stress that Wittgenstein talks in 6.54 of "anyone who understands me" rather than "anyone who understands my sentences," so too Frege talks of "a reader who would be ready to meet *me* halfway" (my italics).

40 D. Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in S. Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 44.

41 *Great Expectations*, chapter XXIV.

42 "Frege and Early Wittgenstein," p. 176.

43 "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," pp. 156 ff.

44 *Philosophical Investigations*, §308.

45 *Richard II*, II.iii.86.

46 Cf. Frege, *On the Foundations of Geometry and Formal Theories of Arithmetic*, vol. II, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1971: "eine Bildlichkeit des Ausdrucks." (p. 301).

47 In fairness to Diamond, she says (my italics), "you show him that, *as far as meaning goes*, 'piggly wiggle' would do as well as some word he used" ("Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," p. 155).

48 "Frege and Early Wittgenstein," p. 197.

49 "Throwing Away the Ladder," p. 195.

50 See e.g., "Throwing Away the Ladder," pp. 195 f.

51 In the fairy story, the Grandfather Clock can both function as a normal clock and talk and think. In one sense of "understand" children understand that perfectly well, without it striking them that what they are reading must be nonsense.

52 This is Geach's worry about Wittgenstein's extension of his idea of what could be shown but not said to ethics and theology. See "Saying and Showing," pp. 69 f.

53 At one point, Diamond says ("Throwing Away the Ladder," pp. 181 f.): "To speak of features of reality in connection with what shows itself in language is to use a very odd kind of figurative language. That goes also for '*what* shows itself.'" If she had pursued that line of thought further, it might have turned out that I would have had no quarrel with her. From subsequent developments, however, I suspect that the phrase "a very odd kind of figurative language" is intended unnecessarily pejoratively. Such a use of figurative language does of course cry out for careful description.

54 *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis: Gespräche*, Frankfurt, Surhkamp Verlag, 1989.

55 For a fuller discussion see Roger M. White, *The Structure of Metaphor*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, pp. 204–233.

56 Cf. "Frege and the Early Wittgenstein," p. 198: "the illusion of sense is exploded from within."

57 Ricketts. "Picture, Logic, and the Limits of Sense."

58 Cf. also my discussion in Roger M. White, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus a Reader's Guide*, London, Continuum, 2006, pp. 125–130.

59 "Was He Trying to Whistle It?," in *The New Wittgenstein*. Cf. also Ian Proops, "The New Wittgenstein: A Critique," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2001, vol. 9:3, pp. 375–404.

60 Conant also gives the following list, although this is not intended to be exhaustive ("Frege and Early Wittgenstein," p. 216): The Preface, §§3.32–3.326, 4–4.003, 4.111–4.112, 6.53–6.54.

61 The originator of this way of dividing the sentences of the *Tractatus* into two may well be Max Black—who splits the sentences into propositions of "formal syntax" regarded as perfectly respectable, and only nonsense in that they are not "empirical remarks" (p. 381) — and those whose "absurdity is irredeemable" (p. 382 of *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1964, pp. 378 ff.). He did not of course advocate that the *Tractatus* be read "therapeutically," but took 6.54 as simply Wittgenstein announcing his failure to construct the metaphysics he had intended. However, as with Conant and Diamond, the sentences he wishes to salvage

from the charge of being nonsense include many where Wittgenstein himself would have regarded it as particularly important that we should recognize them as nonsense.

62 The traditional reading can and should resist any attempt to divide the sentences of the *Tractatus* into two different camps. Even 6.54 should be regarded as an attempt to bring the reader to see something that can only be shown. When Wittgenstein says "anyone who understands me finally recognizes my sentences as nonsense," it is not as though those sentences are nonsense *per se*. It is not as though we couldn't give them a sense; it is, rather, that, if we do give them a sense, it is not *that* sense which Wittgenstein intends. It is only when we see them as misbegotten attempts to put into words what can only be shown that they are revealed as nonsense: but that too is something that can only be shown, not said. To put the point paradoxically, 6.54 should be regarded as nonsensical as any other sentence in the *Tractatus*.

63 Although Wittgenstein's use of the decimal numbering of his propositions to indicate the importance he attaches to them does not seem to be infallible, it usually makes reasonable sense. It is noticeable, however, how many of the propositions appealed to most by Conant and Diamond are relegated by the numbering system to a relatively subordinate position by Wittgenstein. Apart from "4," all of the propositions on Conant's list have at least two numbers after the decimal place.

> "besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now." / "It's the oldest rule in the book," said the King. /
> "Then it ought to be Number One," said Alice.
>
> (Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, chapter 12)

64 "Throwing Away the Ladder," p. 198.

65 Ibid., p. 198.

66 To see how difficult it is to separate out some propositions as "frame sentences" to guide one in the interpretation of the rest, consider the sentence at 4.1272 "So you cannot, e.g., say 'There are objects' as one says 'There are books.'" This sentence initially appears among the significant claims made in the course of the *Tractatus*. However, Wittgenstein does not mean that you cannot utter these words; what we want to say he means is that you cannot say "There are objects", *giving the words their intended meaning*: but there is no intended meaning, only the illusion of an intended meaning, and the sentence at 4.1272 has to count as much a nonsensical sentence used to bring you to see something as any other sentence in the book. This is one of the main points of 5.4733.

67 It is important to keep such questions separate. Thus Warren Goldfarb characterizes the "irresolute" reading as maintaining that "these sentences, while nonsensical, somehow gesture at something that is going on, some inexpressible state of affairs or true but inexpressible thought" ("Metaphysics and Nonsense", p. 61). That conflates quite different issues: whether nonsense sentences can "gesture at" something, and whether what they gesture at can be characterized as a state of affairs or a truth. The traditional reading should certainly reject the idea that what is shown but cannot be said is a state of affairs, or a truth, if that means the truth of some proposition.

68 It goes far beyond my present brief to explore this question further in this context, but I would agree with those who would resist the idea that grasping such features of reality could be regarded in any way as a matter of recognizing the truth of certain ineffable propositions about the world.

69 *Tractatus*, Preface, p. 29.

70 Ibid.

71 Cf. "Was He Trying to Whistle it?," p. 364: "What Wittgenstein is saying to Russell when he denies that one can say that there are x_0 objects is precisely *pace* Diamond . . .: *if* there are, all right, only *that there are* has to be expressed—has to be shown—in another way, namely by features of our symbolism." Hacker here ascribes to

Wittgenstein a conception which Wittgenstein is always careful to avoid in his remarks to Russell. If Wittgenstein were subscribing to this clearly incoherent position, I would have to side with either his detractors, or with those who seek to give him a "therapeutic" way out. But there is absolutely no reason to ascribe such a self-refuting position to Wittgenstein. There is a great deal in Hacker's article that is very good, and that makes a strong challenge to the therapeutic reading that I have not seen answered. It is therefore to my mind a pity that he unnecessarily ascribes this position to Wittgenstein. He goes on to describe this position as "inconsistent," but it is worse than that: it is absurd, so absurd that it is not credible that it should ever have been Wittgenstein's actual position. Since in his correspondence with Russell, Wittgenstein carefully phrases his position so as *not* to be committed to what Hacker commits him to here, there is every reason not to follow Hacker in this respect, even if in other aspects of what he says I follow him happily.

72 Letter to Russell, August 19, 1919.

73 The word "psychological" tends to be used pejoratively in this context, but without there being any obvious justification for this. It is better to use the word neutrally, at least initially, leaving it open whether we are dealing with a purely pathological phenomenon requiring therapy, or something prompted by a genuine insight.

74 "Frege and the Early Wittgenstein," p. 198.

75 Many commentators have seen the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* as not drawing any such distinction, but although *some* passages suggest that Wittgenstein thought that, if two different uses were made of the same sentence, that *ipso facto* showed they had different meanings, there are other passages which indicate that his position was more subtle and nuanced than that.

76 *Tractatus*, Introduction, p. 11.

77 Of course some people have presented Wittgenstein as so committed: I believe that Fogelin quoted above is saying precisely this.

78 Instructively, these include Wittgenstein's many remarks to the effect that we cannot say such-and such, or that "such-and-such" is nonsense. If these remarks are not to be seen as just banishing strings of words from the language, but "such-and-such" is being banished as a failed attempt to say what cannot be said, then the remarks fail to say what Wittgenstein is after every bit as much as "such-and such" itself. 4.126 gives good examples of such self-refuting remarks. These all have the ring of someone trying to say to us that they can't say "Shibboleth."

3

THROWING THE BABY OUT

A Reply to Roger White

James Conant and Ed Dain

I

If, as the title of this book suggests, the state of *Tractatus* commentary has at times recently resembled something close to a state of war, then it has most of all resembled a war of attrition. Against this background, Roger White's "Throwing the Baby Out with the Ladder" makes for refreshing reading. To be sure, White repeats some of the familiar misconceptions of what resolute readers do or must claim that have marred the debate over the adequacies or inadequacies of such an approach to the *Tractatus* (*TLP*). But he also introduces some novel and interesting lines of criticism that merit serious attention. Foremost among the latter is White's treatment (in Section III of his paper) of three engaging examples that he sees as making trouble for resolute readers, and for their opposition to the—standard—idea that the lesson of the *Tractatus* could consist in its communicating, and our grasping, ineffable insights by way of its nonsense-sentences.

White himself holds some version of what has come to be known as a standard reading of the *Tractatus*, the broad features of which, as White outlines them in the introduction to his paper, are that Wittgenstein's aim in that book is to bring the reader to grasp various features of reality, features which cannot be said, but which show themselves in the senseful use of language. In order to bring us to grasp these features, and also to grasp *why* they cannot be said, Wittgenstein is forced to make use of sentences that are nonsense (p. 22).[1] Hence, the famous remark—the penultimate remark in the *Tractatus*—that "my propositions serve as elucidations [in that] anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical" (*TLP* 6.54).[2]

For White, the principal question facing the standard reading—the question which in White's view has "prompted" the search for alternative ways of reading

the *Tractatus*—is how nonsense could communicate anything at all, or anything positive over-and-above the mere fact that it *is* nonsense (p. 31). More fully, the question is how nonsense could communicate insights in such a way that what insight is communicated by a particular nonsense-sentence (or set of nonsense-sentences) is tied to that nonsense-sentence (or set of . . .) being the particular nonsense-sentence (or set of . . .) it is, and tied in such a way that any reasonably competent reader would be able to arrive at the same insight by its means. Won't any putative account of this end up, if it is successful, showing the way in which the sentence *makes sense*? And if there is no story of this at all, won't Wittgenstein appear to have an obvious and central gap in his methodology?[3]

Resolute critics of standard readings have argued (among other things) that nonsense could be taken to be able to communicate in this way only if it were to be taken (however unwittingly) as making an in some sense illegitimate kind of sense, and that it is this absurd idea of a "substantial" kind of nonsense—a kind of nonsense which has logically determinate parts combined to form a whole which is logically flawed in a very specific way—that allows standard readers to think that they are able to grasp (and then to hold on to, once the ladder is thrown away) various ineffable insights.

White rightly sees that this criticism does not depend on the nature of the insights that are to be communicated: the question is how nonsense could communicate an insight—any kind of positive insight—and not specifically how nonsense could communicate an ineffable insight.

But White also wants to agree with resolute readers that the idea of a substantial kind of nonsense is absurd (pp. 33–34): nonsense is sheer lack of sense, a string of signs which have not been given a meaning in that context and to date, and nothing more than that; it is "plain," "mere," or "simply" nonsense.

So the question for White, given that point of agreement, is how nonsense—thought of as plain nonsense, as sheer lack of sense—could ever communicate anything at all (p. 35). If he can answer that question, then, given his understanding of the motivation that prompts resolute readings, he can undermine the entire rationale for such an approach to the *Tractatus*.[4]

II

That there must *be* an answer to this question, White thinks, is shown by the simple fact that we use nonsense to communicate "all the time" (p. 37), and he provides three examples of what he takes to be the use of nonsense to communicate an insight. White's examples are the following three sentences, or pairs of sentences (in each case, it is the second half that White finds problematic):

(1) Deep as Australia. If there was anything deeper, he'd be it.
(2) Bh8 I like this move a lot. Bj10 would have been even stronger.
(3) Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle.

The first is from Dickens and *Great Expectations*, and is Wemmick's reply to Pip's inquiry as to whether or not Jaggers is very skillful. The second is a chess annotation by David Bronstein. About both of these two examples, White makes the following claims (among others): first, that they are nonsense; second, that although they are nonsense they nevertheless serve to communicate something—an insight; third, that we (or, say, Pip in the first case) cannot express what these sentences communicate merely by repeating the sentences themselves; fourth, that what they communicate could be articulated in a senseful sentence of English; but, fifth, that although what they communicate could be articulated in a senseful sentence of English, grasping what they communicate does not necessarily (and does not even usually or typically) involve actually providing or thinking of (or "translating" the insight into) such a sentence (pp. 32–38, 40–42). The third example is from Shakespeare's *Richard II*: White adduces it as demonstrating that a nonsense-sentence can be "grossly grammatically deviant" (p. 38) and yet still serve as a means of communication in just the way that (1) and (2) do.

In the first instance, the examples are meant simply to establish that nonsense-sentences can communicate insights—even though the insights communicated here are not ineffable—and so they are meant to show that the thought underlying the criticism of standard readings noted above (Section I), the thought motivating resolute readings, that nonsense cannot communicate ineffable insights because nonsense cannot communicate anything at all, is simply false. "No one," White writes of his second example, "is under the illusion that this sentence ['Bj10 would have been even stronger'] is anything other than nonsense," and yet, as White says it clearly could[5] serve to communicate an insight into the actual move made, drawing our attention to those features of that move—say, the fact that the Bishop withdraws from the centre of the action to a position of relative safety and anonymity whilst retaining control of the a1–h8 diagonal—that make it a strong one in the circumstances (p. 41).

But the examples are also supposed to play two further, more positive, roles in White's account of the *Tractatus* itself. First, they, and the second example in particular, are supposed to serve as a model for understanding how the nonsense-sentences of the *Tractatus* itself communicate (p. 43), by "crossing" or "exploiting an analogy" between "two different, incompatible ways of talking" (pp. 42–44). Second, they are supposed to remove the sting from the idea of communicating specifically ineffable insights as well: thus, once we see not only that nonsense can communicate insights, but also (White's fifth point above) that even where those insights could be articulated within a senseful sentence of English, grasping those insights does not—not necessarily and not even typically—involve *actually* providing or thinking of such a sentence, we should see that there is no reason to think that it must so much as *be possible* to provide such a sentence in order to grasp an insight communicated in this way.[6] Hence, the problem here cannot be with using nonsense-sentences to communicate, or with using them to communicate the ineffable. Rather, the problem, White suggests, is whether we could

plausibly ever grasp the insights themselves, regardless of how they are communicated. But here, White thinks, there can be no such problem for Wittgenstein, because the insights Wittgenstein is concerned to communicate are themselves things that we must in some sense already know as competent users of language (p. 44).

So, for White, the examples not only serve to refute the core criticism of standard readings and in so doing remove the rationale for resolute readings; they also, more positively, rehabilitate the central motif of standard readings of the *Tractatus*—the thought that it aims to communicate ineffable insights. As a result, it is here, as White sees it, over the question of whether or not nonsense can communicate anything positive beyond simply the fact that it is nonsense, and not over the question of what exactly nonsense might be, that the real differences are to be found between resolute readings (of the kind favored by ourselves) and standard, ineffabilist, or "natural" readings (as White terms the kind of reading he favors), and it is here too, in White's opinion, that the arguments of resolute readers are most to be found wanting.

III

Several aspects of White's treatment of his examples should make us suspicious: for instance, it is not clear why it should follow from the fact (if it is a fact) that there is no reason to think that *actually* articulating within a senseful sentence what is communicated by these examples is necessary in order for us to grasp what is being communicated by them, that there is no reason to think that it must *be possible* to articulate within a senseful sentence what (if anything) is being communicated by a piece of nonsense in order for us to be able to grasp what (if anything) is being communicated by it, as White seems to suggest; neither is it clear why it should follow from that that there is no reason to be suspicious of the idea of ineffable content at all, or why, for instance, Wemmick should be able to communicate something to Pip with a sentence that neither Pip nor anyone else could use to communicate the same thing. More than any of those things, however, what should make us suspicious here is White's claim that these sentences are nonsense in the first place.

Take, for instance, White's third example, which might appear to be the least promising of all three for making this point, since, according to White, not only is it nonsense, it is also "grossly grammatically deviant" (p. 38). Here, Henry Bolingbroke, having been exiled by King Richard II, has returned accompanied by his army before his term of exile is complete and, met by his uncle, the Duke of York, who is loyal to the King, has greeted the Duke, calling him "grace" and "noble uncle," and has knelt before him. The Duke of York, in response, rebukes him, but Bolingbroke persists, with the words: "My gracious uncle . . .". This time, the Duke responds unequivocally: "Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle; I am no traitor's uncle, and that word 'grace,' in an ungracious mouth, is

but profane," before going on to explain why he considers Bolingbroke to be both a traitor and ungracious.[7]

In this context, it is hard to see why White thinks the Duke of York's remark is nonsense. After all, the sentence does have a clear use: the Duke uses it to tell Bolingbroke that he wishes to be called neither grace nor uncle by Bolingbroke (since there is no honor in being considered gracious by someone who is not themselves gracious and since he does not wish to be a traitor's uncle) and perhaps too that he does not wish to receive (to be favored or graced with) any favors or graces from Bolingbroke. Even the appearance of gross grammatical deviancy dissipates in light of the eloquent play the Duke makes on two uses of the word "grace," as a verb, and as a noun or honorific, in the process conferring upon "uncle" too the former kind of use in addition to its familiar use as a noun.[8] (Compare remarks such as "Don't you 'Sir' me," or "Don't you 'Please, Dad' me."[9]) Still, White is surely right that although some paraphrase (or "translation") of the Duke's remark might occur to us ("Don't you 'uncle' me!"), such a paraphrase is not necessary to understanding what the Duke means to communicate to Bolingbroke. But at least in this case, however, that is not—as White wants us to think—*despite* the fact that what the Duke says is nonsense, but rather because what he says is *not* nonsense. As a result, there is no obstacle to our using the same or similar constructions to communicate the same or similar things with the appropriate context in place: thus, imagine asking some students how Bolingbroke responds to the Duke's remark and being given the (both intelligible and true) reply that not only does Bolingbroke go ahead and uncle him another uncle and grace him another grace, but he fathers him a father as well![10] But given all that—given that we can in these ways see the symbols in the signs—the sentence, as the Duke uses it, cannot be nonsense in the sense of being merely a combination of signs with no determinate mode of symbolizing: it cannot be simply nonsense.

Similar things can be said of White's first example too—so, for instance, Wemmick uses his pair of sentences to communicate to Pip his belief that Jaggers is as deep as they come, while Dickens might perhaps be taken to be communicating quite the opposite: that Jaggers's appearance of depth, to Pip at least, comes simply from Pip's not knowing the source of his own good fortune, in Australia— but the second example is on the face of it quite different, since this example White takes to be "demonstrably nonsense" because the rules for specifying a move in chess give a complete account of the ways in which one can specify a move, and because those rules accord no sense at all to the string "Bj10" (p. 41).

But one might agree with that point about the rules for specifying a move in chess according no sense to this string and still maintain that the sentence makes sense: thus, it is important here that Bronstein does not write "Bj10" to the left of his annotation, in the place reserved for specifying the move actually made—there, it is quite plausible that we would not know what to do with this combination of signs. Instead, however, Bronstein includes this sign as part of his annotation of

the move actually made, and here, by contrast, we do know what to do with it: we know, for instance, where the piece would be placed (and which piece it would be) if we laid a standard 8 by 8 chessboard over a 10 by 10 (or larger) board; we know how we should place those two boards with respect to one another, namely with the bottom left-hand square of one immediately over the bottom left-hand square of the other (and not, say, with one square overlapping all round); we know some of the ways in which we would need to supplement the rules for specifying moves (and for making them) to take account of this new, larger board; and we know how to assess the truth of White's suggestion that were the game suddenly shifted to the larger board the move Bj10 might have been "an outright blunder" (p. 41).[11] Moreover, we know how to parse the sign into component parts, and we know why Bronstein's point would not have been well made by a similar comment about "Bj9" or "Bi10," but would have been by "Bi9," and we can speculate as to why Bronstein chose not to make his point that way—perhaps because it should be obvious to any chess player, without any knowledge of the specifics of this particular game, that the square j10 could only immediately be threatened by a piece on the a1–h8 diagonal, which the Bishop already controls, whereas the square i9 could still be threatened by a Knight on g8 or h7.

The problem for White is that unless we knew (at least some of) these things, unless for instance we were able to see the square j10 as a continuation of the a1–h8 diagonal, the sentence could not achieve its aim of directing our attention to the features of the actual move made that give it its strength; but equally, given that we do know these things, given that we can in all these ways see how the signs are being used, see how they are symbolizing, it is implausible to maintain that the sentence is nonsense if that is supposed to mean that it is merely an empty string of signs.

From our perspective, then, White's examples are clearly at odds with the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself, but not because, as White thinks, the former use nonsense to communicate what could also be said whereas the latter use nonsense to communicate what could not (p. 44). Rather, the dis-analogy between White's examples and the *Tractatus* is more extreme than that. White's examples are all examples of sentences that might perhaps at first sight appear to be nonsense, taken out of their contexts of use, but where that appearance quickly gives way on closer inspection to reveal what sense they express. In this respect, the sentences of the *Tractatus* are almost exactly opposite. The sentences of that book certainly do not at first sight appear to be nonsense: we seem to be able to understand them, to argue about them, about whether they are true or false, about what they follow from and about what follows from them. Even on coming to the penultimate remark of the book and Wittgenstein's claim that the sentences of the book are nonsense, and that we are to realize that if we are to understand him, it is not at all obvious that, or why, we should take him at his word on this matter, and as White notes more than one respected philosopher has thought that Wittgenstein was mistaken on precisely this point (p. 23). If we do come to see through the

illusion of sense that his remarks present, that will have taken some serious work, and what it will involve—coming to see that where we appeared to be able to understand, to argue and to reason about those sentences, that appearance depended on our failure to realize that we had not given a meaning to some sign or signs within those sentences, perhaps because we were prevaricating between two different ways of using the signs concerned, neither of which would give us what we wanted—has no parallel in the cases presented by White.

How, then, does White arrive at the opposite view with respect to his examples, at the view that they are really nonsensical, and which view is more appropriate to what the *Tractatus* itself has to say about nonsense? That White does come to the opposite view here might seem all the more puzzling given his repeated insistence that nothing in the bare notion of a violation of logical syntax conflicts with the idea (the central idea of the austere view of nonsense) that nonsense is only ever sheer lack of sense, and so that, despite all the "strenuous polemic," there just is no substantive difference after all between resolute and standard readings over the question of what kind of a thing nonsense might be (p. 35). In one sense, though, the answer is simple enough: for us, the notion of meaning is much more closely connected to the notion of use than it is for White, who is prepared to admit a category of nonsense-sentences which nevertheless have a (figurative) use. From that perspective, White can be seen to be purchasing a wider view of the possibilities open to communication at precisely the cost of a narrower view of the scope of meaning. But why is White prepared to admit such a category of sentences at all? Why does White deny that these examples are meaningful?

IV

The examples themselves are, on White's understanding, merely three instances of what he takes to be a common phenomenon—something that happens "all the time" (p. 37):[12] the metaphorical or figurative use of nonsense-sentences, of sentences that have no literal meaning at all. In order to understand better why White takes them to be nonsense, it will be helpful to look to White's account of metaphor itself, and to his earlier discussion of the same or similar examples, in his book *The Structure of Metaphor* (*SM*).[13]

There, White develops an account of metaphor as a "linguistic hybrid," as "a sentence that may be regarded as the result of conflating two other implied sentences" (*SM*, p. 204): one, a primary sentence, describing the actual situation at issue (say, the reckless bravery of Achilles), the other, a secondary sentence, describing a "hypothetical" situation against which the actual situation is to be compared (say, the behavior of a wounded lion) (*SM*, pp. 74–80, 115). The effect of a metaphor is then created by the forced comparison of the two different situations through their juxtaposition within a single sentence, leading us to see the situation described by the primary sentence "as if it were" the situation described in the secondary sentence (*SM*, p. 116). It is that account that leads

White to the claim that metaphor, and ultimately the figurative in general, frequently makes use of sentences that are nonsense.

At the heart of White's account is a method of construal of metaphors that aims to reconstruct, from a range of appropriate alternatives, a pair of primary and secondary sentences, first by identifying and underlining in different styles those words or phrases belonging to the vocabulary of each sentence (the primary and secondary vocabularies), and then separating out the two vocabularies, replacing any gaps in their structures with variables which in turn are then replaced by what White calls "dummy names" to complete the sample sentences.[14] So, to illustrate, one example that White treats at length (*SM*, pp. 77–80, 106–117), is the following sentence from *Othello*:

> His unbookish Ielousie must construe poore Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviours quite in the wrong.

Here, according to White, the word "Ielousie," for instance, belongs only to the vocabulary of the primary sentence and "unbookish" belongs only to that of the secondary sentence, but "must construe," for instance, belongs to both: it is, in White's terminology, "bifurcated."[15] Underlining the two vocabularies in different fashions (straight lines for the primary vocabulary, wavy lines for the secondary), the sentence looks like this:

> His <u>unbookish</u> <u>Ielousie must construe poore Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviours quite in the wrong.</u>

If we then separate out the two vocabularies, in accordance with White's proposal, replacing gaps in their structures with variables, we get the following:

> Primary sentence: His x Ielousie must construe poore Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviours quite in the wrong.

> Secondary sentence: Unbookish y must construe z quite in the wrong.

And, to complete the construal, we can replace the variables with dummy names, making "natural and appropriate" (*SM*, p. 78) or "relevant" (*SM*, p. 83) substitutions from within the range of possible alternatives—White suggests "uncultured" for x, "schoolboys" for y, and "The *Iliad*" for z—and so make explicit the two different readings that the original sentence permits, the forced comparison of which produces the metaphor's effect.

In presenting his method of construal, White is not claiming to describe the process either of construction or of interpretation of metaphors. Rather, the metaphor itself contains words that on one reading function as part of a description and on another reading themselves serve as dummy names in another description:

the phrase "poore Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviours," according to White, itself functions as a dummy name for some hard-to-construe text on one reading of the metaphorical sentence. What the method of construal gives us, then, White claims, is "a technique for bringing out the structure of a metaphor [that] gives us a perspicuous grasp of their significance" (*SM*, p. 110).

That account of metaphor leads White to two conclusions. First, that there can be no such things as metaphorical meanings, which White takes to be meanings uniquely determined by the particular metaphorical sentence in which the words occur, such that the words could not occur in any other sentence with the same meanings. Words do not, for White, acquire special meanings in metaphorical contexts: the *only* relevant meanings are the meanings the words have in the literal sentences whose conflation (in some sense) produces the metaphor. Second, that the metaphorical sentence—the result of such a conflation of primary and secondary sentences—will very often not have a literal sense at all:[16] as White (commenting on Mohammed Ali's famous remark about Joe Frazier, that "they ought to donate his face to the wildlife fund") puts it, "Do we really have any idea under what conditions it would (literally) be true to say that 'they have given Joe Frazier's face to the wildlife fund'?" (*SM*, p. 205).[17] Hence, White's conclusion is that metaphorical sentences very often are simply nonsense: "The typical case of a metaphor," White writes, "presents us with a sentence that, looked at as a literal sentence, is not so much false as nonsensical, and which may even be grammatically incoherent" (*SM*, p. 205).

White develops a battery of arguments for the first of these claims: that meaning has the wrong multiplicity to explain the "double life" that words in metaphors have, that metaphors are open-ended, inviting us to explore comparisons potentially without limit in a way not allowed for by any appeal to meanings, that the normal inferential relationships that hold among literal sentences and that give the practice of ascribing meanings to individual words within such sentences its point do not hold with respect to metaphorical sentences, thus rendering the practice of ascribing meanings to words in these cases redundant, and finally that such metaphorical meanings, being uniquely determined by their context within a metaphorical sentence, would be explanatorily redundant: they could play no part in explaining how we come to understand a metaphorical sentence, and so how we could communicate with such sentences too, since understanding proceeds from the parts to the whole. Moreover, the latter argument, White suggests, if it applies to metaphor, applies just as much to the figurative in general and to the possibility of special figurative meanings.[18]

Ultimately, it is these arguments that White is relying on in deploying his examples against resolute readings of the *Tractatus*. White's claim is that those examples cannot have a metaphorical or figurative meaning because there is not, and cannot be, any such thing. So either the examples have a literal meaning or they are simply nonsense.

V

White's account of metaphor is in many respects quite excellent and there is much about it that represents a significant advance over earlier accounts such as Max Black's. Taken simply as providing a method of construal for metaphors, there is also much about it with which we might agree. But the account itself cannot support the conclusions White wants to build upon it: those conclusions require that there is a readily available and independently fixed notion of literal meaning, one which could be used to provide criteria that any putative kind of meaning could be measured against in order to determine whether it is a kind of meaning at all, and it is far from clear that there is such a standard, let alone one which could function in this kind of way. Moreover, White's argument requires us to squeeze the various possibilities here into just two unpalatable alternatives—either accepting that there are metaphorical or figurative meanings, each of which is unique to the individual sentence-type in which it occurs, or accepting that these sentences are literally meaningful after all, with all that that entails for White—and this clearly falsifies the range of different options for accounting for the sense of the sentences concerned.

More important for our purposes than both of those points, however, is the disparity between White's procedure here for determining whether or not certain strings of signs are meaningful—beginning with a fixed notion of literal meaning, and measuring other putative kinds of meaning against it to determine whether they really count as meanings—and the sort of procedure that might be advocated by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, given the understanding of nonsense espoused there. That understanding, as White wants to agree, is of nonsense as arising out of a failure, on our part, rather than on the part of the sentence as it were, a failure to give to the words in the sentence a meaning. It is a failure that is specific to that context (in other contexts, the words may well have a meaning), and one that may be rectified at any moment simply by giving the words a meaning. Thus, the reason "Socrates is identical" is nonsense, Wittgenstein writes, is because "we have failed to make an arbitrary determination," because "we have not given *any adjectival* meaning to the word 'identical'," because "there is no property called 'identical'" (*TLP* 5.473 and 5.4733).

More than that, Wittgenstein's understanding of nonsense is of something that *only ever* arises in this way. In stressing the notion of nonsense as arising from a failure to give certain words a meaning in a particular context at least up until now, Wittgenstein means to be ruling out the thought that nonsense ever involves anything more substantial than that: it is not the case that nonsense arises from an excess of meaning, say, from the words having the wrong kinds of meanings, meanings that in these combinations produce something that is itself nonsensical. Thus, Wittgenstein writes, that "[t]he proposition ['Socrates is identical'] is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination, *and not because the symbol, in itself, would be illegitimate*" (*TLP* 5.473 (our emphasis)). As a

result, Wittgenstein's view is that there simply are no illegitimately constructed propositions; there are sentences that make sense, and there are combinations of signs that have not been given a use in the context in which they are being uttered, but there is not any third category of sentences having nonsensical senses, or sentences constructed of words whose meanings do not fit one another, or which do not fit their context: "any possible proposition," Wittgenstein writes, "is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of its constituent parts" (*TLP* 5.4733).

That understanding of nonsense is of course intimately connected with Wittgenstein's use of the context-principle: "Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning" (*TLP* 3.3). Again, what is being excluded is the idea of meaningful symbols being combined in such a way that the whole itself has no sense or has the wrong kind of sense: unless the sentence we are dealing with has a sense, we do not really have meaningful constituents at all.

Wittgenstein's understanding of nonsense leads naturally into a particular understanding of how one is to go about determining whether or not some string of signs actually does make sense, and that procedure is emphatically not one in which, beginning from some preconceived idea of what meanings must be like, all one has to do is simply measure the candidate sentence against the criteria embodied in that idea. Part of what Wittgenstein means to be ruling out, when he rules out the thought that nonsense could consist of meaningful parts combined in illegitimate ways, is a particular picture of what a theory of sense or of meaning could do for us: he is ruling out the thought that a theory of sense (meaning) could ever usefully serve such a purpose as that to which White wants to put his conception of literal meaning—for what we are measuring against the preconceived idea will either be something we have already made sense of (and so neither something that one could, having applied the criteria, then learn made sense, nor something that could then be determined by ordinary standards to be nonsense either) or it will be a mere string of signs that we have been unable to see as symbolizing at all (and so not something one could measure against anything, nor something one could then fruitfully learn is nonsense). Rather, Wittgenstein's procedure is one in which we simply have to look at the sentence, in the context in which it is apparently being put to use, and determine from that whether or not the signs really do have a significant use. Thus, Wittgenstein writes that "[i]n order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense" (*TLP* 3.326)—we must look at the context of significant use—and this is no less true if our question is not merely about how the sign is symbolizing, or what symbol it is, but about whether or not it is signifying at all.

Now back to White. The trouble for White is that, for all his careful attention to a wide range of complex examples in developing his understanding of the way that metaphor works, when it comes to his conclusion that metaphor very often makes use of sentences that are nonsense, and so the crucial moment in his account

as far as its relevance (and the relevance of White's examples) to the *Tractatus* is concerned, White simply falls back on a preconceived notion of literal meaning and uses that as a measure by which to gauge whether or not metaphors could actually make sense. Of course, even on White's account, we still have to turn to the individual sentences themselves, but all we have to look for is whether or not they have a literal meaning; if they do not, we know already that there is no other kind of meaning they could have. In this, White's procedure far more closely resembles the sort of view of a theory of meaning and what it could do for one that Wittgenstein, in articulating his understanding of nonsense, means to be ruling out, than it resembles the procedure Wittgenstein is actually advocating. But if instead, turning back to White's three examples, we follow Wittgenstein's procedure with respect to them—if we look at the context of use and ask how the signs there might be symbolizing—we come to the sort of conclusions arrived at in Section III above: without the preconception in place, we can see clearly how the signs are symbolizing.

White's conclusions in this respect themselves falsify what is best about his own account of metaphor. For what White's method of construal gives us seems, on the kind of view Wittgenstein is advocating, to be precisely a method of identifying or gaining a clear view of the way in which the signs within a metaphor are symbolizing. It presents us with a series of devices for making clear to ourselves the structure and significance that any particular metaphor has. And in fact that seems to be precisely what White himself claims for his method of construal, his method of constructing primary and secondary sentences for a metaphor: in White's words, it provides "a perspicuous device for bringing out the nature of metaphor," "a technique for bringing out the structure of metaphor [that] gives us a perspicuous grasp of its significance" (*SM*, p. 110). It is, one might say, a kind of *Begriffsschrift* for metaphors: a kind of notation that can help us see the structure already present in the original sentence more clearly than we might otherwise be able to, a way of marking up the original sentence that presents us with a clear view of the ways in which the signs there are symbolizing.

White thinks we can do that—gain a perspicuous grasp of the significance of a metaphor—and yet the metaphor can still be nonsense, and he thinks that precisely because he has a fixed notion of what it is for something to make sense, and the significance he finds in metaphors very often is not of that kind. But by the lights of the *Tractatus*, anything you could successfully apply White's method to would *already* be something that made sense. And in fact if we try to apply White's method to sentences where we cannot even see how the signs are symbolizing—sentences such as the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself perhaps, or sentences that the *Tractatus* itself tells us are nonsense, such as the string "There are objects" (*TLP* 4.1272)—it should become immediately obvious that White wants to be able to say things of metaphors, regardless of whether they make sense, that are not plausibly said of nonsense in the sense in which Wittgenstein uses that term. So, for instance, White wants to be able to say that metaphors in some sense "imply"

two other sentences, both of which we want, the forced comparison of which creates the metaphor's effect. But if we take a sentence like "There are objects" it should be clear that no sentences are implied by it: rather, we can at best see the sentence as resulting from the confusion of the grammatical forms of two other sentences, say, "There are apples on the table" and "There are objects on the table," thinking that as in the former case one can also sensefully say "There are apples" so shouldn't one also be able to say "There are objects"? But neither of those two sentences is in any sense implied by the original.

A *Begriffsschrift* gives us a means of identifying and so of treating that confusion, in part by giving us a perspicuous view of the grammar of the original sentences and so a clear view of the different options by which we might give the troublesome sentence a meaning. But the sentence itself shares nothing in common with those other sentences except the bare signs, and nothing is implied by it at all. What White's method applied to metaphor gives us is not two potential means of giving the sentence a meaning, but two sentences of a kind both of which are implied by the original sentence. If we try to apply White's method of underlining to "There are objects," we merely identify different means of giving the signs a meaning, neither of which is what we want, neither of which does what we imagined we wanted from the original sentence. The treatment is effective if we come to recognize these options as the only options available, as accurately capturing the different grammars of the sentences whose confusion lead us into trouble in the first place.

What all of this suggests is that there is a gulf between the understanding of nonsense that operates in White's original treatment of his examples, and anything that resolute readers have wanted to mean by that term, or anything that the author of the *Tractatus* means by that term, and so White's examples, along with the kinds of things he wants to say about them, simply will not transplant from their original context in his discussion of metaphor into the context of his discussion of the *Tractatus*. In the sense in which White uses the word "nonsense," for all his claims that he too means plain nonsense by this term, it should be clear that resolute readers could simply grant almost everything White wants to say of his examples: yes, in that sense, the examples may well be nonsense, and so yes, in that sense, nonsense-sentences may well be used to communicate specific insights that are tied to those particular nonsense-sentences in such a way that any reader might reasonably be expected to be able to arrive at the same insight by their means, and yes too, in that sense, using nonsense to communicate may well be something we do "all the time." But none of that has any bearing on what resolute readers have said about the *Tractatus* or about the standard reading of the *Tractatus*, precisely because that is not the sense in which resolute readers have used the term; as a result, White's conclusions simply do not touch the resolute reading.

VI

We've argued that White's examples are not nonsense, at least not in the sense in which Wittgenstein uses that term and not in the sense in which resolute readers have wanted to use that term, and that, as a result, White's examples will not transpose along with everything White wants to say about them from his discussion of metaphor to his discussion of the *Tractatus*. Hence, White simply doesn't establish the principal claim he wants to make against resolute readers: that sentences that are simply empty nonsense can indeed be used to communicate.

White's discussion of those examples, though, was not only supposed to refute the main allegation against standard readings; it was also meant to provide a story of how the sentences of the *Tractatus* themselves communicate. But when we turn to White's own account of the *Tractatus* in Section I of his paper, we find a series of claims that are hard to square with the official account in Section III that "[w]hat we find in the sentences of the *Tractatus* is . . . precisely the same exploitation of the analogies between two, incompatible ways of speaking" (p. 43) as White suggests is to be found in the Bronstein case.

White's account of that case, despite the fruitfulness of his method of construing metaphor, itself seems fanciful. (For instance, why see it as involving a crossing of grammars at all, rather than an imagined extension of the ordinary grammar, and, if one must see it as a crossing of grammars, why the grammar for numbering houses on one side of a street, which proceeds two-at-a-time, leaving the location of the square with respect to the original board quite mysterious and so robbing the remark of its ability to make the point White sees it as making, and what of the grammar for labeling things with alternate letters of the alphabet which White neglects to mention?) But even supposing we were to grant this account of the Bronstein case, when we turn to White's account of the *Tractatus* and of why one might think there is that which cannot be said and so of why the sentences of the *Tractatus* themselves are nonsense (in Section I of his paper), we find no mention of the crossing of grammars, of the exploitation of analogies between incompatible ways of speaking *at all*. Instead, we find White saying, in saying what is wrong with certain attempts to express the inexpressible, things like this: "If we try to present these four propositions (*TLP* 1.2–2.01) as giving us a condition for the possibility of language, it immediately becomes impossible to state it as a condition for the describability of the world, since, once stated, it provides us with the possibility of forming [an] *ex hypothesi* impossible description"[19] (p. 25), or "What we would like is a genuinely informative account of the relation of a proposition and those states of affairs which make it true, but it can't be given" (p. 26), or (p. 27):

> If we attempt to *say* what is said [*sic*] in [*TLP*] 1.11 we immediately run into the whole gamut of logical paradoxes that Russell was engaged with. . . . Wittgenstein is banishing such paradoxes by declaring the illegitimacy of

such global talk as we find in the opening paragraphs, but engaging in such global talk to effect the banishment. Hence the opening paragraphs are to be regarded as nonsensical sentences attempting to bring us to see something that, on pain of contradiction could not be said, but that was actually shown (but not said) by the way that sentences that *are* significant relate to reality.

In none of these cases does White say that what is wrong with the attempt to express the things White thinks can only be shown is that the attempt involves crossing two incompatible grammars, or pushing an analogy between two grammars beyond breaking point. He says that the attempt to say these things is self-refuting, or uninformative, or contradictory, without ever saying why, for instance, something that "on pain of contradiction could not be said" is something that cannot be said at all and not simply something contradictory, or why something that is uninformative should be thought to be empty nonsense.

Moreover, precisely these kinds of formulations suggest that, far from its being the case, as White suggests, that no one has ever held a substantial view of nonsense, White himself holds just such a view himself, however unwittingly that may be.[20] And, though these are perhaps the most obvious, they are by no means the only moments of White's paper that implicate him in holding such a view. So, for instance, another of White's claims is that the sentences of the *Tractatus* themselves "automatically fall outside the scope of the general form of the proposition, and hence are simply nonsense" (p. 30). But what is it, what kind of thing is it, that is supposed to fall outside the scope of the general propositional form and *hence* is nonsense? Not mere signs. Combinations of mere signs might be said not to fall under the scope of the general propositional form in a sense, but that is not the reason why they are nonsense—they are not *hence* nonsense: mere signs are nonsense because they are mere signs, because they have not been given a meaning in that context—that is what it is to say that they are mere signs—and it is because they are nonsense that they do not fall under the scope of the general propositional form in the sense imagined, not the other way around. But it can't be combinations of symbols either—signs in use. If we are dealing with symbols, with signs in use, then according to the author of the *Tractatus* we are already not dealing with nonsense since symbols occur only in the context of a sentence with a sense, and so here too it cannot be right to say that they do not fall under the scope of the general propositional form and hence are nonsense. But unless White intends the general form of the proposition to be ruling out combinations of symbols, and so is tacitly assuming that there can be such a thing as substantial nonsense, it is not clear what work he could think this remark, and in particular his use of the word "hence" in it, could be doing.

VII

Part of the reason for White's hostility towards resolute readings of the *Tractatus* lies in the thought that the lesson of the *Tractatus*, on such a reading, must be a purely negative one: all one can learn from it, on such a view, is that its own sentences are nonsense. That thought is also shared by Marie McGinn: though McGinn is far more sympathetic to resolute readings than is White, she nevertheless sees such readings as being "notoriously robust," as committed to avoiding "finding in [the *Tractatus*] any positive philosophical insights into how language functions."[21]

The question for both White and McGinn here is how the positive and the negative aspects of the *Tractatus* are supposed to be separated out. How are we supposed to discover that we have given no meaning to the sentences of the *Tractatus*, to discover that we are not dealing with the network of interrelated, truth–apt propositions that we appeared to be dealing with, without thereby gaining a better understanding of the ways in which in doing philosophy we are prone to fall into the illusion of making sense where really we are making none? How are we to make those discoveries without first gaining a clear view of the different ways in which we might give the sentences in question a meaning, or without first gaining a clear view of the sources of the confusion into which we have been led by gaining a clear view of the grammar of the sentences which lead us into trouble? Unless we gained such a view, we would have no reason to accept the diagnosis of the confusion at all.

The choice we are presented with between resolute and standard readings, then, is not one between a view of the *Tractatus* as communicating in some still mysterious way ineffable insights into reality and a view on which it communicates nothing and is therefore purely negative. On a resolute reading the *Tractatus* does not communicate anything, but it is not purely negative for all that. Its value consists precisely in the insights it affords into the ways in which language functions. What White fails to see is where those insights really lie.

Notes

1 Otherwise unidentified page numbers given in parentheses in the text refer to Roger White's "Throwing the Baby Out with the Ladder," pp. 22–65 above.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, references to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*TLP*) are to the Pears–McGuinness translation, London, Routledge, 1974.
3 This is the challenge posed by Conant and Diamond in "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely," in Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss, eds., *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 53.
4 It is not clear from White's contribution to this book how the answer White develops is supposed to relate to Wittgenstein's own view: is it a story Wittgenstein himself might be supposed to have had (and so there is no gap in his methodology) or a story that Wittgenstein did not have but could have endorsed or might be expected to have endorsed? Insofar as White's paper addresses this question at all, the answer it seems to give is that the use of nonsense to communicate is such an obvious and common occurrence that Wittgenstein did not really need a story of how it is possible at all. In

his *Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: A Reader's Guide* (London, Continuum, 2006, p. 130), White is more explicit on this question: "It would be wrong to think that Wittgenstein himself had a neat resolution to the problems that arise here: it is far more likely that he is wanting to confront his readers with a paradoxical situation that he finds just as puzzling as we do". But, as Conant and Diamond point out in their reply to Meredith Williams, there is little that is paradoxical about Wittgenstein's being supposed not to have a story of how his sentences were able to do their insight-conveying work: that is simply a failure to think about what is really a very obvious problem (Conant and Diamond, "On Reading," p. 53).

5 "Could" rather than "does," since what features belong to the actual move made is a matter of speculation, given that White has been unable to trace the source of the example (*The Structure of Metaphor*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 316 n17).

6 That at any rate seems to be the point of White's repeatedly emphasizing (pp. 38, 42) that we do not typically provide a version of the insight in "boring prose" (as he puts it at one point) in order to grasp it, or that we travesty what goes on if we insist that we must do so, and it is a point he must rely upon if he is to assert, as he does, of the fact that, whereas Bronstein is concerned to communicate what could also be said, Wittgenstein is concerned with what could not, that "it is hard to see why that should make a difference" (p. 44).

7 Charles Forker, ed., *King Richard II*, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2005, II.iii.87–89.

8 The example is an instance of anthimeria, in which a term of one grammatical category is coined or "derived" from one of a different grammatical category, most often, as here, a verb from a noun. Such instances abound in Shakespeare: see Forker, *King Richard II*, 2005, p. 89 and p. 299, for further examples.

9 Or compare Clement Freud, the grandson of Sigmund Freud, describing (on BBC radio's *Just a Minute*) his experience of being "out-grandfathered" by the grandson of Winston Churchill on a visit to China, which suggests another sense in which a term for a relation might be given a new and derivative use as a verb.

10 *Richard II*, II.iii.115–118: "And noble uncle, I beseech your grace, / Look on my wrongs with an indifferent eye. / You are my father, for methinks in you / I see old Gaunt alive." (In fact, Bolingbroke uncles the Duke twice in reply (see also l. 106).)

11 What is right is the suggestion that the communication of the insight does not depend on the truth of Bronstein's remark—as White says, in what could be taken to be a rather revealing comment, the move Bj10 may well have been "an outright blunder" (p. 41)— but this is obviously a far cry from the claim that the remark is simply empty nonsense.

12 It is worth noting the extraordinary amount of weight that the Bronstein example has to bear in White's account even with this claim, since, as White acknowledges, it is "virtually impossible to *prove* that a particular figure is nonsense if taken literally," the Bronstein example being in White's view the exception that "*demonstrably* has no literal meaning" (*The Structure of Metaphor*, p. 219).

13 White, *The Structure of Metaphor*: example (1) is raised briefly on p. 31 as part of White's discussion of metaphor; example (2), the Bronstein case, is discussed there on pp. 218–220 in extending White's conclusions to the figurative in general; example (3) is not discussed there, but the phenomenon of anthimeria is, on pp. 220–224 (see especially also pp. 317–318, n21).

14 A dummy name functions as a place-holder with a "natural and appropriate" meaning (*SM*, p. 78): here, for instance, in the example that follows, the name of any hard-to-construe text would do in place of the *Iliad*. White's claim ultimately will be that it does not matter if the place-holder, the dummy name, really does pick out such an example (here, of a hard-to-construe text) or not: we can treat the original phrase in the metaphorical sentence as itself functioning as a dummy name, and so we can see the metaphorical sentence itself as permitting two different readings along the lines of a primary and secondary sentence, and hence as a kind of "duck–rabbit" sentence (*SM*, pp. 111–117).

15 Example (1) is introduced as an instance of the "rich and striking effects" of bifurcation.

16 And even where it does have a literal meaning, White's claim is that that literal meaning plays no role in the production of the metaphorical effect (*SM*, p. 226).

17 These two points are the burdens of chapters 10 and 11, respectively, of *The Structure of Metaphor.*

18 It is here that White originally deploys his Bronstein example, example (2) above, as an instance of a figurative use of language that "*demonstrably* has no literal meaning", and it is in this context too that White discusses the phenomenon of anthimeria (*SM*, pp. 220–224). White's argument with respect to the latter in effect takes the form of a dilemma: if such examples are not nonsense, then either they employ meanings unique to those particular sentences (in which case, such meanings cannot play any explanatory role in an account of the phenomenon itself, or of how we are able to understand such sentences) or they involve giving the words new literal meanings (in which case, we will be unable to explain the "creative power" of such sentences) (*SM*, pp. 317–318, n21). It is not clear what White would want to say of a case such as "Trieste is no Vienna": whether he would treat it an instance of nonsense, or as a word having acquired a new, literal meaning, as he thinks is the case with the use of "trialled" as a verb but not with the use of "strangered" as a verb.

19 Although White earlier notes that there is an oddity about "describing something which is nonsense as a proposition" (p. 59, n2)—an oddity that leads him to modify his translation of *TLP* 6.54 accordingly—White nevertheless uses the word *proposition* here, as elsewhere in this section, to describe what he also claims is nonsense.

20 White's claim is actually that no one ("Frege, Carnap, or whoever") explicitly claims that there is such a thing as substantial nonsense, and that the most that could be said of someone was that they were "unwittingly treating sentences that, by his own lights were nonsense, as if they made sense" (p. 62, n34). In itself, that would be unsurprising, since the idea of substantial nonsense is, after all, absurd. (It has to be said, though, in White's case, in the case of the remarks quoted in the preceding paragraph, it does not seem very unwitting.) White seems to think that Conant has implied more than that, that Frege actually explicitly claimed there is such a thing as substantial nonsense, but it is hard to see how White gains that impression from the passage of Conant's that White quotes in support of it (p.33).

21 *Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Logic and Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), p. ix.

4

CONTEXT, COMPOSITIONALITY, AND NONSENSE IN WITTGENSTEIN'S *TRACTATUS*

Silver Bronzo

> Understanding without contextuality is blind;
> understanding without compositionality is empty.
>
> *Diego Marconi[1]*

This paper aims to show that the *Tractatus* can be coherently committed, at one and the same time, to a strong version of the context principle (sufficiently strong to entail the austere conception of nonsense) and to a version of the principle of compositionality. It is quite natural to interpret these two semantic principles in a manner that renders them mutually incompatible. Taking my cue from some remarks in the *Tractatus*, I will try to develop alternative understandings of the two principles according to which they are compatible with one another and indeed positively interdependent. I hope to show that (1) there is good reason to attribute to the *Tractatus* the alternative understandings of each of these principles that I will develop below, and that (2) these alternative ways of understanding the two principles are philosophically superior to those that render them mutually incompatible.

I

In order to get an overview of the textual problem that I will address in this paper, it will help first to take a brief glance at three sets of quotations from the *Tractatus*.

In the *Tractatus* we find seemingly clear formulations of both the context principle and the principle of compositionality. It is a standard practice to attribute the earliest formulation of the context principle to Frege's *Grundlagen*:[2] "it is only in the context of a proposition that words have any meaning."[3] The *Tractatus* appears to repeat this quite faithfully. This brings us to our first set of quotations:

It is impossible for words to occur in two different ways, alone and in the proposition. (2.0122)

[O]nly in the context of the proposition has a name meaning. (3.3)

An expression has meaning only in a proposition. (3.314)[4]

These quotations have struck many commentators as providing textual support for the attribution of the context principle to the *Tractatus*.

The principle of compositionality—which is also generally attributed to Frege[5]—is usually taken to state that the meaning of a sentence is a function of the meanings of its constituent words and their mode of combination. The *Tractatus*, again, seems to insist on this point. Hence our second set of quotations:

The proposition is articulate. (3.141)

I conceive the proposition—like Frege and Russell—as a function of the expressions contained in it. (3.318)

One understands it if one understands its constituent parts. (4.024)

The translation of one language into another is not a process of translating each proposition of the one into a proposition of the other, but only the constituent parts of the propositions are translated. (4.025)

It is essential to propositions, that they can communicate a *new* sense to us. (4.027)

A proposition must communicate a new sense with old words. (4.03)

A characteristic of a complex symbol: it has something in common with *other* symbols. (5.5261)

Commentators differ as to how mutually compatible these respective apparent commitments of the *Tractatus* are—and thus as to how mutually compatible these two sets of quotations are. To some, it has seemed that the possibility of their reconciliation becomes further threatened if the *Tractatus* is taken to be committed to a very strong version of the context principle. Moreover, the attribution of some very strong version of this principle would appear to be an inescapable consequence of the interpretation of the *Tractatus* endorsed by New Wittgensteinian or resolute readers. Thus, to some it has seemed as if these interpreters of the *Tractatus* deprive us of the possibility of making coherent sense of the work as a whole.

Proponents of this interpretation have argued that the work as a whole is committed to an austere conception of nonsense, as opposed to a substantial conception.[6] According to a substantial conception, there are two logically distinct kinds of nonsense: *mere* nonsense, which obtains when we utter words to which we have assigned no determinate meaning (such as "*Piggly Wiggle Tiggle*"); and *substantial* nonsense, which obtains when a sentence is composed of meaningful words put together in a way that violates the requirements laid down by a theory of sense. Different theories of sense will define different classes of substantially nonsensical propositions. A particularly clear example of such theories is the theory of logical syntax often attributed to the *Tractatus*.[7] According to this theory, words have meaning in isolation; moreover, even when occurring in isolation, they belong to a determinate logical category: proper names, first order one-place predicates, first order relations, etc. The rules of logical syntax determine which words, belonging to which category, can be legitimately combined. A sentence such as "Socrates is wise," for instance, is a permissible formula because it combines a proper name with a first order one-place predicate. "Socrates is identical," on the other hand, illegitimately combines a proper name with the sign of identity, and is therefore nonsensical—nonsensical in a more interesting or substantial way than a sentence such as "Socrates is *frabble*," which is nonsensical merely because it contains a word to which no meaning has been assigned.[8] According to the austere conception, on the other hand, there is no such thing as a theory of sense—no such thing as substantial nonsense deriving from the transgression of the limits drawn by such a theory. The only kind of nonsense there is is mere nonsense. We utter nonsense when we have not decided, or not made clear to ourselves, in which way we want to use our words. Some passages in the *Tractatus* seem to advocate quite straightforwardly this latter conception of nonsense. This brings us to our third set of quotations:

> A *possible* sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted. ("Socrates is identical" means nothing because there is no property which is called "identical." The proposition is nonsensical [*unsinnig*][9] because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol is in itself impermissible.)
> In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic. (5.473)

> We cannot give a sign the wrong sense. (5.4732)

> Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts.
> (Even if we believe that we have done so). . . . (5.4733)
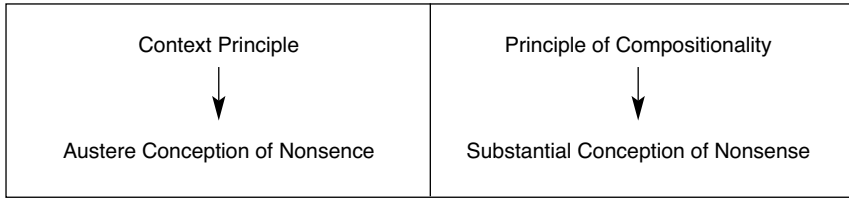
The foregoing three sets of quotations, taken together, suffice to show that there are at least *prima facie* reasons for thinking that the *Tractatus* simultaneously endorses the context principle, the principle of compositionality, and the austere conception of nonsense. The question that will guide this inquiry is: is there *room* to read Wittgenstein as simultaneously incurring all three of these commitments without *eo ipso* turning the *Tractatus* into an incoherent book? Or, in other words: *can* the context principle, the principle of compositionality, and the austere conception of nonsense fit together into a coherent picture?

There is a deep tendency to assume that the answer to this question must be negative. It is not unnatural to think that the two principles enunciated in the first two sets of quotations are equivalent to the following two philosophical views— views that result when these principles are elaborated, as they are below, so as to be *necessarily* incompatible with one another:[10]

- *Contextualism*. The meaning and the understanding of a sentence are *prior* to the meaning and the understanding of the parts of the sentence. *First* we understand the whole sentence, and *then* we segment it to obtain the meanings of its parts. The meaning of a word is obtained from the segmentation of the meaningful proposition, the content of which must be given *in advance*.
- *Compositionalism*. The meaning and the understanding of the parts of the sentence (of words) are *prior* to the meaning and the understanding of the whole sentence. First we grasp the meanings of each word, and then, by looking at the way they are put together, we grasp the sense of the whole sentence. The meaning of a sentence is constructed out of the meanings of its words, as a wall is constructed out of building blocks.

Now, contextualism quite clearly entails the austere conception of nonsense. If the meaning of a word consists in its contribution to the meaning of the sentence, and is indeed obtained through the segmentation of the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs, then there simply is no such a thing as combining meaningful words in meaningless ways. If the sentence is meaningless (nonsensical), its words are meaningless too. According to contextualism we have no independently given "building blocks" to combine with one another in a way that transgresses the combinatorial rules of logical syntax or any other prescription issued by a "theory of sense." The words of a nonsensical sentence are logically inert, mere marks on the paper or waves in the air. Compositionalism, on the other hand, seems to entail the possibility of forming instances of substantial nonsense. If words have meaning in isolation, why shouldn't we be able to combine them, with their meanings, in both meaningful and nonsensical ways?

The conclusion towards which the preceding paragraph would appear to tend is the following: the only way to maintain a coherent conception of propositional meaning and understanding is to choose between the right-hand or the left-hand side of the following diagram:

Context Principle	Principle of Compositionality
↓	↓
Austere Conception of Nonsence	Substantial Conception of Nonsense

Either we endorse the context principle, which entails the austere conception of nonsense, *or* we endorse the principle of compositionality, which entails the substantial conception of nonsense. I will assume that, if the context principle and the principle of compositionality are equivalent to contextualism and compositionalism respectively, as outlined above, this dilemma is unavoidable. My aim, in what follows, is to see if it is possible to arrive at understandings of the context principle and the principle of compositionality respectively such that they are (1) compatible with one another, (2) compatible with the austere conception of nonsense, and thus (3) entail the falsity of the substantial conception of nonsense. (This means that one of my aims in what follows is to see if we can arrive at an outline of a coherent reading of the *Tractatus* as it stands.) To make good on the first of these three conditions will involve us in the long-running debate regarding whether it is possible to reconcile the two semantic principles. The second and third conditions place a constraint on possible strategies of reconciliation.

I will begin with an examination of a tentative reconciliation that does *not* satisfy the austerity-requirement I have imposed. In order to find what we are looking for, it is sometimes helpful to be clear about what we are *not* looking for.

II

In a recent article Hans-Johann Glock has offered a critical examination of Wittgenstein's views about nonsense, the context principle, and compositionality.[11] He argues that the context principle, under a "strict" or "literal" interpretation, entails the austere conception of nonsense;[12] and that there are passages, in both the *Tractatus* and the later work, in which Wittgenstein endorses quite unambiguously the context principle, "strictly" understood, as well as the austere conception of nonsense.[13] However, according to Glock, these are both implausible positions. The context principle flies in the face of the fact that words do have meanings in isolations, for example in dictionary entries;[14] moreover, such a principle rules out the compositionality of language, which is necessary for accounting for the basic facts that sentences are complex and that we understand new sentences made up of familiar words.[15] The austere conception of nonsense, Glock maintains, is utterly counter-intuitive: there are many kinds of nonsense, one of which is "combinatorial nonsense," i.e. nonsense derived by combining meaningful words in illegitimate ways.[16] According to Glock, Wittgenstein was aware, in both his earlier and later

works, of the shortcomings of these positions. Wittgenstein acknowledged, already in the *Tractatus*, the compositionality of language, and he allowed for substantial or "combinatorial" nonsense, especially in the *Investigations*.[17] According to Glock, there is indeed a tension between the right-hand side and the left-hand side of the diagram in the previous section—a tension that permeates Wittgenstein's work, both early and late.[18] The tension can be eliminated by adopting a "weak" or "non-restrictive" interpretation of the context principle. Consequently, Wittgenstein's view can be made coherent if we find sufficient reasons for attributing to him such a weakened version of the context principle.

The weak version of the context principle that Glock proposes differs from the restrictive one in the following way: according to the restrictive version, a word has meaning only when it *actually* occurs in a significant proposition, whereas according to the liberalized version a word has meaning only if it is *capable* of occurring in significant propositions:

> [Words] must be *capable* of occurring in a proposition. . . . A proposition is the minimal unit by which a move is made in the language-game; only propositions can *say* something. . . . There is a *general* dependency of words on sentences in that the practice of explaining words is a preparation for their employment in sentences. On the other hand, any *particular* sentential employment presupposes that the component words have a meaning in advance, on account of an antecedent practice.[19]

There is a general dependency between the meaning of a word and the use of the word in propositions. Its *function* is to contribute to the expression of *thoughts*, to the *saying* of something. Its meaning is "determined by how it can be used within sentences";[20] this is, according to Glock, the "kernel of truth" in the context principle.[21] But a word can have a determinate function without *actually* fulfilling it, as "a person . . . can have a role without actually *fulfilling that role* at any given instant."[22] A word can have the function of contributing in such-and-such a way to the content of meaningful propositions without actually making such a contribution—either because it is not occurring in a proposition at all, but in isolation, or because it is occurring in a (substantially) nonsensical proposition. The weakened version of the context principle is therefore compatible with the substantial conception of nonsense. It is also compatible with a qualified version of compositionalism: the meaning of words is *prior* to the meaning of each *particular* sentence of which they are parts; they contribute to their content in accordance with the building-blocks picture. The qualification consists only in the fact that we must acknowledge as a necessary precondition the *general capacity* of words to occur in significant propositions.

Hence, Glock reconciles the context principle and the principle of compositionality by proposing interpretations of these principles that question their respective identifications with contextualism and compositionalism. Both

principles are shown to be to some extent *weaker*, or more qualified, than the two versions of them which respectively entail the mutually incompatible positions with which they are associated in the diagram above. But this cannot be the form of weakening or qualification that we are after, if we wish to pursue our guiding question. In that case, we need the context principle to be "strong enough" so as to exclude the substantial conception of nonsense; and we need the principle of compositionality to be "weak enough" so as not to entail the substantial conception. Only in this way can we hope to find a coherent interpretation of Wittgenstein's work that takes at face value—as Glock doesn't[23]—his explicit and repeated endorsements of the "strict" version of the context principle and of the austere conception of nonsense.[24]

III

Our initial exegetical impasse originated from the identification of the two semantic principles with contextualism or compositionalism, which are incompatible because they assign priority either to words or to propositions. The assumption lying behind such forms of identification is that there must be *a priority* along these lines to be found here, somewhere. I am going to question this assumption. I will adopt a sort of *reductio* procedure, by taking contextualism and compositionalism at face value, and then asking: does either of these positions provide an *intelligible* notion of *language*? I'll try to show that the answer is negative. No priority can be given to either the contents of propositions or to the meanings of words, if we don't want to lose sight of the phenomenon of language altogether. The context principle and the principle of compositionality, properly construed, articulate two necessarily interconnected aspects of language. On a proper construal, they are not only compatible but positively interdependent. The *Tractatus*, I will suggest, can help us to achieve such an understanding. Moreover—I will attempt to suggest—the *Tractatus* holds that the resulting form of interdependence is one that rules out substantial nonsense.

First of all, we need to be clear about what kind of priority compositionalism and contextualism each respectively place on either the meanings of words or the meanings of propositions. Many of the expressions that tend to occur in formulations of these positions suggest that the priority is temporal: "*first* we understand the proposition, *then* we segment it into its constituents parts"; "*first* we grasp the meanings of words, and *then* we proceed to put them together and obtain the meanings of propositions"; "words must have meaning *in advance* of the propositions in which they occur," etc. But how do we know what we understand first? By introspection? Or through psychological experiments? It doesn't seem that either of the two rival positions wants to make an empirico-psychological claim of this kind. The priority they invoke is conceptual rather then temporal. They are interested in the conditions of possibility—or, as I prefer to say, the conditions of intelligibility—of the phenomenon that they want to explain in terms of the

conceptually prior item. The relation of conceptual priority has this in common with the relation of temporal priority: it is asymmetrical. The conceptually "posterior" term depends, for its possibility or conceivability, on the conceptually prior term, and not the other way around. This means the prior term is intelligible *by itself*, without *any* reference to the dependent term. So contextualism would appear to be committed to holding that the meanings of complete sentences are intelligible without any reference to the meanings of the words composing them; those meanings are indeed *explained* in terms of the meanings of sentences, which must therefore be already given. Compositionalism, on the other hand, would appear to be committed to holding that the meanings of words are intelligible without any reference to the meanings of the sentences in which they occur; the latter sort of meaning is indeed *explained* in terms of the meanings of words, which, again, must be given in advance. Is either contextualism or compositionalism right in advancing either of these priority claims? In this and the next section I will deal with contextualism; later I will dwell on compositionalism.

———————

In order to test the claim of contextualism, I propose that we try to imagine a *completely non-compositional language*. Such a language would consist in sentences whose meaning is grasped as a whole, without any articulation: they don't have distinguishable parts that contribute through *their* meanings to the meaning of the whole. Richard Heck, in a recent paper,[25] has proposed an illuminating way of trying to conceive such a language. What follows is a modification of Heck's example.[26] Let's imagine, for the moment, that we have a language consisting of a finite numbers of sentences, say 3000. Let's suppose that a natural number is associated with each sentence and that each sentence, with the associated number, is written down in a book. Each speaker carries with her a copy of the book and communicates with other people by uttering numerals. I see you in the street and shout: "31!" You look it up in the book and find the correspondence: "31 = It's a nice day today." You then look for the sentence "You are right!" and shout to me the corresponding number: "28!" We smile to each other and walk past.

Now, it is clear that, in the peculiar situation I have described, some communication has taken place: the speakers made themselves understood to each other. Moreover, the sentences by means of which they communicated are non-compositional: even though the numerals "31" and "28" are phonetically or graphically complex, they are devoid of logical or semantic articulation. It is not that the utterance "31!" means what it does in virtue of what the signs "3" and "1" mean. There is no correspondence between the phonetic and graphic parts of the utterance and the parts of the thought it expresses. The point I want to make is the following: the speakers in the situation I have described are merely using a *code*, whose expressive capacity is parasitic on the existence of a *language* that *is* compositional.

I am appealing to a slightly different version of the distinction between codes and languages that has been formulated by Wilfrid Sellars in the following passage:

> [A] code, in the sense in which I shall use the term, is a system of symbols each of which represents a complete sentence. Thus . . . there are two characteristic features of a code: (1) each code symbol is a unit; the parts of the code symbol are not themselves code symbols. (2) Such logical relations as obtain among the code symbols are completely parasitical; they derive entirely from logical relations among the sentences they represent. . . . Thus if "Ω" stands for "Everybody on board is sick" and "Δ" for "Somebody on board is sick," then "Δ" would follow from "Ω" in the sense that the sense of the sentence represented by "Δ" follows from the sentence represented by "Ω."[27]

The symbols of the code that Sellars describes in this passage are *units* devoid of semantic structure. Moreover, they are mere "flags" for the English sentences they represent. All their semantic properties—most notably their inferential relations— derive from the semantic properties of the English sentences they stand for. "Δ" follows from "Ω" only because the English sentence represented by "Δ" follows from the English sentence represented by "Ω." The same, I am suggesting, is true of the expressions of the system of communication that I described above. "28!" is an appropriate answer to "31!" only because the English utterance represented by the first symbol is an appropriate answer to the English utterance represented by the second symbol. The imagined speakers communicate with one another by means of a code-book consisting of *translations*; and the sentences into which the code formulae are translated belong to a language (i.e. English) that *does* exhibit compositional structure. It might perhaps be the case that they communicate *only* by means of the code; but they *think* in a compositional language, and understand each other because they know the translations of the code formulae into the *compositional* language they master.

It would not be sound to object that the case I constructed is irrelevant because I supposed the code to contain only a *finite* number of formulae. An infinite number of formulae doesn't turn a code into a language. We can suppose that the code book is a magic one, a sort of infinitely long dictionary containing a translation of *all possible* thoughts; or that the code book, by happy coincidence or divine predisposition, happens to contain a translation of all the thoughts in which the person who owns it actually traffics over the course of her lifetime.[28] Moreover, the situation does not change if we suppose that the speakers in the example I constructed memorize the code, so that the translation of the code formulae comes immediately and automatically to their mind. That would simply make them into very skillful readers and users of the code.

This attempt to imagine a completely non-compositional language has there- fore failed. We tried to follow a suggestion from Richard Heck; but what we ended up with was a mere code, which can serve as a vehicle for communication only because the people who use it have already mastered a compositional language.

Michael Dummett, in the context of his criticism of the position that Hans Sluga attributes to Frege, arrives at similar conclusions by discussing a structurally similar example. Sluga—at least as presented by Dummett—takes Frege to hold a view that incarnates contextualism as I described it pretty faithfully. Propositions are first grasped as unarticulated wholes; the subsequent segmentation is a mere notational device for representing the logical relations between sentences—logical relations that the unarticulated sentences have anyway.[29] Dummett asks us to imagine the following case. He doesn't know a word of Basque; he hears a Basque sentence (presumably he guesses that it is Basque from the context, or someone tells him that it is) and is told *what the sentence means*, say "The pigeons have returned to the dovecote." Dummett can't segment the sentence into parts and recognize the same parts as occurring in other sentences with the same meaning, as in the sentence "There are two *pigeons* over there." Someone might want to claim that Dummett has non-compositional understanding of the Basque sentence, and use this case as a starting point for making sense of the idea of non-compositional languages. But Dummett comments: "I should not be said to *understand* the sentence: this is a case where the notion of understanding an expression comes apart from that of knowing what it means."[30] The point is that he knows what the Basque sentence means as the speakers in our previous example know, with the help of the code-book, what the code formulae mean. Dummett makes clear that the situation does not change if we suppose that he doesn't need a translator, because he has internalized a "translation-book" which gives, in English, the meaning of each complete Basque sentence:

> Suppose, now, that, in a way I cannot account for, I find that, whenever I hear a sentence of Basque, it comes to me what it means as a whole, without my gaining any insight into how it splits up into words or how they go together; and, equally, that when I am prompted to say something to a Basque speaker, it comes to me what sounds to utter, again without any idea of the structure of the sentence. Viewed from the outside, I manifest an ability to speak the language; but it is natural to say that I do not really understand or know Basque.[31]

Dummett's non-compositional mastery of Basque sentences does not amount to genuine understanding of them and to genuine knowledge of Basque. Moreover, such a mastery is completely parasitical on the (compositional) understanding of the English sentences that they encode:

> in saying that I knew that a certain Basque sentence meant that the pigeons had returned to the dovecote, we should be saying only that I knew that it meant the same as "The pigeons have returned to the dovecote," so that my "understanding" of the Basque sentence was parasitic on my understanding of the English one.[32]

The merely parasitical character of Dummett's "understanding" of the Basque sentences becomes apparent if we attend to the nature of his "understanding" of their logical relations: Dummett can see that the Basque sentence for "There are pigeons in the dovecote" follows from the Basque sentence for "The pigeons have returned to the dovecote" only because he can see that the former *English* sentence follows from the latter.

The moral I would like to draw from these examples is that contextualism is wrong in maintaining that we can conceive a language devoid of compositional structure. As the *Tractatus* says, "The proposition is articulate" (3.141)—meaning *essentially* articulate, and *logically* (rather then merely phonetically or graphically) articulate.

However, someone might think that it is too early to draw this conclusion and to recommend the *Tractatus*'s conception of the constitutively articulate nature of language. The two examples I discussed were intended to show that when we try to imagine a completely non-compositional language we end up imagining, at best, a code, whose meaningful employment is parasitical on the knowledge of a genuine language. But perhaps the opposition between compositional languages and parasitical non-compositional codes was simply built into the examples. The charge, in other words, is that our failure to imagine a completely non-compositional language was simply a symptom of our lack of imagination and of our preconceived ideas about what can count as a language. A good starting point for correcting these preconceptions—our objector might suggest—is to look at the *later* Wittgenstein, who was notoriously a severe critic of the "dogmatism" of the *Tractatus*.[33] Let's look, for example, at the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein asks us to conceive the language-game of the builders, which consists *only* of four words or "calls" (i.e., "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam"), as a "complete primitive language."[34] Wittgenstein warns us that we shouldn't think of the calls of the builders, say "Slab!," as elliptical versions of longer English sentences, say "Bring me a slab!," any more than we should conceive of "Bring me a slab!" as a *lengthening* of "Slab!"[35] So Wittgenstein seems to be claiming that the builders have a *language* in the proper sense of the term, even though quite primitive—a language that is non-compositional if anything is. Moreover, this primitive non-compositional language would *not* be a mere code. Unlike the characters in our previous examples, the builders do not use their "calls" as signals standing for articulate sentences of a compositional language they master. The four calls are *all* the builders have. There is no *other* language standing behind their calls. The calls *are* their language. And such language is non-compositional.

I think, however, that we should not be so hasty in jettisoning the Tractarian suggestion about the essential articulateness of language. A number of commentators such as Rush Rhees, Stanley Cavell. and Warren Goldfarb have questioned the possibility of *really* imagining the language-game of the builders as a *complete* language.[36] These authors stress that if the four calls really were *all* that the builders have to say, then they would appear more similar to marionettes or automata than

to creatures who use a language. To imagine a language, as we are told in the *Investigations*, is to imagine a form of life.[37] In order to attribute a language to the builders we need to make sense of their life, to make it intelligible to ourselves. And this is *difficult* if we are asked to assume that they use words *only* for uttering the four calls on the building arena—they don't use words to rehearse, at the end of the day, what they have done, or to make plans, to express joy or tiredness, to refer to facts or tell stories. It seems uncontroversial to say that the builders use *signals*. We are told, similarly, that some monkeys use a small number of vocalizations for alarming the group about the presence of different sorts of predators: one signal for "eagle," one for "snake," and one for "leopard." The point I am questioning is whether we could conceive of a *language* that consists *exclusively* of signals—signals that are never put together to form complex, articulate sentences.[38]

When we try to use Wittgenstein's builders to make sense of the idea of a completely non-compositional language we face a dilemma. Either (*a*) we describe their life in such a poor way that the four calls are really *all* they have—in which case, as the cited commentators have pointed out, we will be strongly reluctant to attribute to them the mastery of a language and mindedness altogether; or (*b*) we will "enrich" their form of life to the point where we can make sense of them as fully minded creatures; we will be able, therefore, to credit them with beliefs, desires, and intentions as we do the rest of us. We can very well postulate that, for some strange reason, they express such propositional attitudes by means of unarticulated expressions; but it is clear that, at that point, we will have simply fallen back into the case of the code. Our civilized and humanized builders think in a compositional language, and encode what they want to say in non-compositional expressions.

We speakers of language often make use of expressions, signals, and gestures that are more or less clearly devoid of compositional structure. These are a motley of different things, which range from shouting "Hey!" to a person walking down the street in order to get her attention, to gestures of greeting, injury, and disdain, to single-word sentences such as calls ("Silver!") and commands ("Stop!"). The contrast I have been drawing between codes and genuine language might give the impression that I am committed to regard all these different kinds of "monolithic" communicative acts as instances of the employment of codes. The *Tractatus might* indeed be committed to such a view. The book says, for example, that "[e]ven the proposition, 'Ambulo,' is composite" (4.032). And it might be willing to say, in a similar vein, that *either* the order "Stop!" contains "hidden variables" and is therefore articulate, despite appearances, *or* that it is a mere flag for the articulate English sentence: "I order you to stop doing that" (or, more precisely, a flag for the corresponding *perfectly* articulated sentence that can be given in a proper *Begriffsschrift*). My suggestion, however, is that we can endorse the Tractarian insight about the essential articulateness of language without endorsing these controversial conclusions. All we need to do is recognize the *parasitical* character of our non-compositional forms of communication. This does not mean that all

such forms of communication are parasitical on the mastery of a compositional language *in the same way* in which *codes* are parasitical. It means, instead, that those forms of communication, *like* the expression of a code, stop being recognizable as what they are when we subtract from the background of their significant employment the mastery of a compositional language. Recognizing their parasitical nature will be *sufficient* for dissolving the inchoate impression that they could serve as starting points for making sense of the idea of a completely non-compositional language.

IV

I have criticized contextualism for maintaining that the meanings of sentences are conceptually prior to the meanings of words. This amounts to claiming that logical articulation is a merely contingent and, at least in principle, dispensable feature of sentences. Taking my cue from the *Tractatus* (3.141), I argued that, on the contrary, exhibiting a compositional structure—i.e., being articulated into logical parts—is a constitutive feature of language. (Apparent counterexamples, such as code-formulae and single-word sentences, are really parasitical cases.) This argument against contextualism is, at one and the same time, a motivation for a certain understanding of the principle of compositionality: language must be compositional (i.e., logically articulate), if it is to be recognizable as language at all.[39] My aim, in this section, is to show how different this *conceptual* motivation for the principle of compositionality is from a standard style of argument in support of the compositionality of language. Such standard arguments concede to contextualism the conceptual point. They concede—and indeed assume—that it *makes sense* to talk of completely non-compositional languages, and then go on to argue, from some more or less plausible empirical hypotheses, that *human* language must be compositional.

   The following passage by Donald Davidson, which is a *locus classicus* in the literature on compositionality, can be taken as a representative example of what I called "standard arguments" for the compositionality of language:

> When we regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of the sentence, we have an insight not only into what there is to be learnt; we also understand how an infinite aptitude can be encompassed by finite accomplishments. For suppose that a language lacks this feature; then no matter how many sentences a would-be speaker learns to produce and understand, there will remain others whose meanings are not given by the rules already mastered. It is natural to say that such language is *unlearnable*. This argument depends, of course, on a number of empirical assumptions: for example, that we do not at some point suddenly acquire an ability to intuit the meanings of sentences on no rule at all; that each new item of vocabulary, or new grammatical rule, takes some finite time to be learned; that man is mortal.[40]

The mastery of a natural language is, for Davidson, an "infinite aptitude": a speaker of language has the capacity to form and understand an infinite number of sentences. Compositionality is required for explaining such an aptitude only on the background of some *empirical assumptions* about human beings. According to Davidson, there seems to be *nothing incoherent*—nothing defying conceivability— in the idea of a non-compositional language in which the meaning of each sentence is given by a specific rule. Mastery of such language would require an infinite number of accomplishments: we would need to learn as many rules as the sentences that can be formed, i.e., infinitely many rules. Since our mind and life are finite, and we lack magical powers, this is not possible. Our capacity to master a language must then be explained compositionally: we learn a finite number of linguistic rules that exhibit a compositional structure (say semantic and syntactic rules, i.e. a lexicon and a grammar), and this suffices to give us the capacity to understand an infinite number of sentences.

According to Davidson, compositionality is motivated only for finite, non-magical creatures like us. By contrast, in the previous section I argued that the very idea of a non-compositional language is problematic. It is not clear what we are asked to imagine when we are told of sentences whose meaning is given non-compositionally by specific rules. The best I could do, in this respect, was to imagine deciphering rules for the formulae of a code.

Davidson's argument has been the object of various criticisms. But the motivations for compositionality emerging from many of these criticisms can still count as standard arguments in the sense I have explained. Some authors have argued, for instance, that Davidson's assumption about our capacity to form and understand an *infinite* number of sentences is questionable, and that the real motivation for the compositionality of natural languages does not depend on such an assumption.[41] Here are two possible ways of motivating the compositionality of natural languages that do not depend on Davidson's assumption, but that equally belong to the class of the standard arguments:

1. The sentences of a natural language, even though finite in number, are still *too many* to be mastered by a human mind in a non-compositional way. Our minds could not learn and store as many semantic rules as the possible sentences of a natural language.
2. Even if it were possible for our minds to learn and store a rule for each possible sentence of a language that we are able to understand, that is not what *actually* happens. Natural languages, as is sometimes said, are productive. When we hear a sentence, or want to form a sentence, we don't apply a specific linguistic rule; we simply apply our knowledge of the lexicon and of the grammar of the language.

These two arguments for compositionality presuppose, like Davidson's, the intelligibility of a contrasting case: a non-human and extremely powerful mind that supposedly can master completely non-compositional languages.

Given what else happens in the book, there are reasons for supposing that the author of the *Tractatus* would not find the implicit contrast case here to be an intelligible one. Even if we bracket the details of the *Tractatus*'s conception of language, there is therefore good reason to attribute to the *Tractatus* the conceptual argument for the compositionality of language rather than the standard one. Moreover, if we lift the bracket, a further reason is to be found in the *Tractatus*'s insistence on the articulate character of the proposition—which, I suggested, we should read as a *constitutive* claim. And yet a further reason is to be found in the *Tractatus*'s (closely related) discussion of our capacity to understand new sentences without the need of specific rules or, as the *Tractatus* says, specific "explanations." According to a standard argument, this is a remarkable fact about human language. According to the *Tractatus,* it is a constitutive fact about language. When Wittgenstein says,

> I understand the proposition, without its sense having been explained to me (4.021)

he is not just pointing to, as it were, a fortunate coincidence: he is not remarking that it *had better be so*, because we would otherwise need a specific explanation for each sentence we encounter—a pretty inconvenient situation. Equally, when he writes

> It is essential to propositions, that they can communicate a *new* sense to us (4.027)

or

> A proposition must communicate a new sense with old words (4.03)

he is not pointing out theoretical *desiderata* that must be met *if* we want to account for our linguistic capacity without appealing to implausible empirical assumptions. Wittgenstein is rather unfolding here the concepts of "proposition" and "understanding a proposition." A string of signs whose sense had to be explained to us, would not be a *proposition* in the proper sense of the word, nor would we *understand* it as we understand a genuine articulate proposition. A system of communication in which the understanding of each sentence requires the mastery of a specific rule would have the features, and the parasitical character, of a code.

We might say that, according to the *Tractatus*, it is *necessary* that we understand propositions without their sense being explained to us. But we need to be clear about the *force* of the necessity here involved. The necessity is not conditional on the fact that we want to exclude implausible empirical assumption such as magic, divine intervention, or the capacity to learn and store an infinite or extremely large number of rules. The idea that there is an alternative here—the magical under-

standing of propositions as unarticulated wholes—is the very idea that the *Tractatus* is problematizing.[42] The necessity involved in the passages that I have quoted concerns the very applicability of our concepts of "proposition" and "understanding a proposition."[43]

V

I have contested the claim, advanced by contextualism, that the meanings of sentences are conceptually prior to, and therefore conceptually independent of, the meanings of the words of which they are composed. I have also tried to show how the criticism I articulated amounts to a conceptual motivation for a certain understanding of the principle of compositionality—i.e., for the idea that sentences are logically articulate and that we understand them when we see how each of their parts gives its own semantic contribution to the expression of the complete thoughts that they convey. I am now going to criticize compositionalism, which champions a different understanding of the principle of compositionality: the meanings of words, it is claimed, are conceptually *prior* to, and therefore conceptually *independent* of, the meanings of the sentences that they compose.

My criticism of this claim will be brusque. According to compositionalism, the fact that words are used to make up sentences is related in a *merely contingent* way to the words' meaningfulness (as in contextualism the fact that sentences are segmented into logical parts is related in a merely contingent way to the sentences' meaningfulness). Compositionalism appears therefore to be committed to the conceivability of the following scenario:

> *The crude compositionalistic scenario.* We can have a list of words to which a *meaning* has been assigned; but such words are not part of a language—i.e., of a system of signs for the expression of complete *thoughts*. Equivalently, we can encounter a creature to which we attribute *knowledge* of the lexicon of a language, even if it clearly is not a *speaker* of the language—it lacks the capacity to combine words to *say* something, to perform complete linguistic acts.

It doesn't seem very difficult to show that such a scenario is only apparently coherent. Suppose an archeologist claims to have discovered a find containing the lexicon of an ancient language, of which she purports to give a translation. To each symbol contained in the find, the archeologist associates an English word or an English turn of phrase. But—here comes the curious part of the story—she denies to have gathered evidence that the symbols she claims to have translated were ever used to form complete sentences. But this is outrageous. On *what basis* does she translate a given symbol with, say, the English word "fish" if she has no evidence that such a symbol was ever used to express *thoughts* about fishes—e.g. the thought that eating a fish makes you no longer hungry, or that there are many

fishes in such-and-such a lake, or that the theft of a fish is punished in such-and-such a way? What is her basis for claiming that the signs she has "identified" and "translated" are *meaningful semantic units* at all, rather then decorative motifs? Similarly, let's suppose that an ethologist claims to have taught her parrot the English lexicon. Take any English word you want, her parrot knows what it means. However, she immediately concedes that the parrot is unable to understand any sentence composed out of the words of which "it knows the meaning." Again, it would be difficult to take the person making this claim about the parrot's knowledge of the meanings of words seriously.[44]

Given such paradoxical implications, it can seem mysterious how compositionalism might ever appear as an attractive position. Indeed, those who are aware of these implications and want at the same time to preserve the general approach of compositionalism will try to rule out the possibility of the crude scenario by means of appropriate qualifications. The account offered by Glock is a good example of such a strategy: by acknowledging the *general* dependence of the meanings of words on the meanings of sentences, he effectively rules out the possibility of the crude compositionalistic scenario, while purporting to preserve the crucial tenets of compositionalism. I'll come back to Glock's position in Section VI. For the moment, it will suffice to point out two factors that initially tend to push philosophers towards compositionalism—even in its crudest and unqualified form—when they fail to be sufficiently clear about its paradoxical implications.

One factor is our impulse to search for a reductive account of our linguistic capacity. Compositionalism appears to be in a position to promise a reductive, bottom-up explanation of our capacity to understand and form sentences, and indeed of the very acquisition of language. The picture underlying this appearance is that of the meanings of words as independently conceivable building blocks: we understand the sentences we hear because we have the *antecedent* (i.e., conceptually independent) capacity to identify the semantic building blocks of which they are composed; our capacity to understand the meanings of sentences *presupposes* our capacity to understand the meanings of words, *and not the other way around*. Hence the appearance of the availability of a noncircular explanation. Reflection on the real implications of compositionalism—which I tried to condense in the crude compositionalistic scenario—should lead us to question our impulse to look for an explanation of this kind.

A second factor that accounts for the appeal of compositionalism is our tendency to think of natural languages on the model of the mathematical constructions that we call "formal languages." When we build a formal language, say the language of predicate logic, we start by specifying recursively the terms of the language (the "vocabulary") and a semantic function that assigns an interpretation, or semantic value (a "meaning"), to each term. But it is clear that this can be done even though we *never* go on to give a recursive definition, and an interpretation, of the well-formed formulae of the language (the "sentences"). Nothing seems to

rule out the possibility that we may simply stop at Stage 1 (interpreted terms) without ever proceeding to Stage 2 (interpreted well-formed formulae). Stage 1 seems conceptually independent from Stage 2. Again, reflection on the paradoxical implications of compositionalism should lead us to question the assumption that formal languages are (in this respect, at least) good models of natural languages. Such mathematical constructions tend to distort, rather than illuminate, what it is for a word to have a meaning.

VI

Compositionalism may be described (to borrow a term used by John McDowell in his work on the philosophy of perception) as a "factorizing" conception of our linguistic capacity.[45] The user of language is presented as a sort of two-headed creature: we have knowledge of the meanings of words, and, in addition, we have knowledge of how to use those words to express complete thoughts. When we perform successful linguistic acts we simultaneously exercise both kinds of knowledge. When we utter words in isolation or instances of substantial nonsense, we exercise the first, but not the second, kind of knowledge. The second kind of knowledge is presented as dependent on the first one; but nothing seems to exclude that it is, at least in principle, merely *optional* in relation to it.

The alternative conception that I want to attribute to the *Tractatus*, on the other hand, can be described as a form of "disjunctivism." According to epistemological disjunctivism (as elaborated, especially, by John McDowell[46]), either something is a perceptual experience by being a disclosure of how things are in the world, or it is at most the *illusion* of a perceptual experience. There is no epistemic highest common factor between veridical perceptual experience and perceptual illusion. Similarly, according to what we might label "semantic disjunctivism," *either* words are used in a meaningful way by being employed for the expression of meaningful propositions, *or* they are not used in a meaningful way at all—they are used at most with the *illusion* that we are using them meaningfully. There is no logical or semantic common factor between the use of words in the expression of thoughts and the occurrence of words outside the context of significant propositions. The capacity to use a word with a meaning, and the capacity to use it in the expression of thoughts, are linked by a necessary, internal relation. Something is not recognizable as an exercise of the first capacity without it also drawing on our competence to exercise the second capacity.

The *Tractatus*, I am suggesting, rejects compositionalism by acknowledging the conceptual dependence of the meanings of words on the meanings of sentences. It does so by adopting a strong version of the context principle entailing the austere view of nonsense: words have meaning *only* in the context of significant propositions. Moreover, as I argued in previous sections, the *Tractatus* is also characterized by a simultaneous and symmetrical rejection of contextualism: it acknowledges the conceptual dependence of the meanings of sentences on their

logical articulation. For the *Tractatus*, the exercise of the capacity to understand and form complete sentences is, at one and the same time, the exercise of our capacity to use *sub*-sentential elements in the expression of thoughts. The dependence goes both ways, and is therefore an interdependence. The two capacities (of making *sense*, and of using sub-sentential *words* for making sense) come in one single package. Instead of speaking of two necessarily interconnected capacities it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of two aspects of a single capacity—the capacity to speak and understand a language.

This is the picture of our linguistic capacity that I want to attribute to the *Tractatus*. It is also the picture I would want to recommend in my own voice, with two amendments: (*a*) we should speak of "complete linguistic acts" instead of "propositions," in order to do justice to, among other things, non-constative uses of language; and (*b*), as I argued at the end of Section III, we should allow for various kinds of non-compositional uses of language (such as single-word sentences) as parasitical cases.[47] To properly explore the implications of these amendments would take us well beyond the scope of the present paper (into later Wittgenstein's criticisms of the *Tractatus*).

I have tried to show that the Tractarian picture, by acknowledging the interdependence between the meanings of words and the meanings of sentences, is philosophically superior to both contextualism and compositionalism. I have not claimed, however, to have shown that it is the *only* alternative to both contextualism and compositionalism.

All the arguments I have offered thus far leave room for a position like Glock's —which I would describe as a *hybrid* position. Glock's adoption of a weak or "non-restrictive" version of the context principle is sufficient for ruling out the crude compositionalistic scenario. He acknowledges a conceptual dependence (even though of a *general* sort) between the meanings of words and the meanings of the sentences in which they can occur. As we have seen, he claims that the meaningfulness of a word presupposes the existence of the general practice of using the word for the expression of complete propositions. Words, he maintains, must be *capable* of contributing to the sense of propositions; the meaning of a word "is determined by *how* it can be used within sentences," by "the role that the word *would* play [but does not *need* to play] in propositions."[48] On the other hand, Glock's position, like compositionalism, is a factorizing conception of our linguistic capacity.[49] The weak version of the context principle he adopts leaves room for words to have meaning outside the context of significant propositions (and to retain that intrinsic meaning that they have acquired even when imported into an allegedly nonsensical propositional context). Glock *wants* a semantic highest common factor between the use of a word in the expression of complete thoughts and the employment (or *non*-employment?) of the word in isolation or in substantially nonsensical combinations. The user of language is still presented as a two-headed creature: one head can speak (the one that knows the meanings of words), even though the other head (the one that knows how to use words to

express thoughts) remains silent. The difference between Glock's hybrid position and compositionalism is that, according to Glock, the second head must always be present—even though in silence—behind the speech of the first head; it must always be *capable* of speaking in unison with its twin companion. The crudity of compositionalism lies in the fact that, unlike Glock's view, it does not exclude the eventuality that the first head may keep speaking even when the second head has been cut off, or never grew.

Now, it is clear that the verdict between the disjunctive picture I have been recommending and attributing to the *Tractatus* and Glock's hybrid position (which acknowledges a merely general dependence of the meanings of words on the meanings of sentences by endorsing a non-restrictive version of the context principle) will depend, crucially, on the appraisal of the independent reasons that respectively support the restrictive conception of the context principle and the austere conception of nonsense. I will not enter into such a discussion here.[50] I will just try to show how the materials present in the preceding discussion can lead us to question some of the apparent motivations of Glock's position. My aim here is not to *refute* this position but (more modestly) merely to reduce its attractiveness.

(1) One of the reasons Glock offers for rejecting the restrictive version of the context principle is that it allegedly has the unattractive consequence that, if we endorse it, we would have to deny that "sentences are complex signs," that "their meaning depends on the meaning of their constituents," and that "understanding the components and mode of combination of a sentence is a necessary condition for a genuine understanding of the whole sentence."[51] But we have seen that these denials are implications of contextualism, not of the restrictive version of the context principle. We can maintain, quite literally, that words have meaning only in the context of meaningful propositions, and that propositions are essentially articulate. All we have to do is reject the claim that the meanings of sentences are conceptually prior to the meanings of their constituent words.

(2) We have seen that a deep motivation of compositionalism is the promise of a reductive, bottom-up explanation of our capacity to speak and understand a language. Sometimes Glock makes it seem as if the weak version of the context principle he favors allows for a fulfillment of this promise. He maintains, for example, that "any *particular* sentential employment presupposes that the component words have a meaning in advance." The meanings of sub-sentential components, being available "in advance," seem to provide an *explanation* of our capacity to understand the sentences that they compose. However, Glock is also committed to the idea that the meanings of the component words depend, in turn, on their general employment in propositions. That is to say, the meanings of the component words presuppose, in turn, their general employment in propositions. If it is a reductive explanation that we are looking for, we will already be disappointed by this apparent circularity; moreover, it is hard to see how the distinction between the "particular" and the "general" level of the dependence might help to show that the circularity is only apparent. Glock's hybrid position—*like* the disjunctive

picture I recommended—is *not* in a position to promise the satisfaction of our desire of a reductive explanation of the capacity to speak a language. Glock therefore misrepresents the dialectical situation to the extent that he suggests that his view, unlike the disjunctive conception, leaves room for an explanation of this kind.

(3) At this point, we may start to become suspicious about the motivation for the hybrid position Glock favors. The weak version of the context principle, in Glock's hands, seems to be doing two things at once. In virtue of its being a version of the *context principle*, it acknowledges a conceptual connection between the meanings of words and the meanings of sentences, thus ruling out the crude compositionalistic scenario; *and*, in virtue of its being a *weak* version of the context principle, it seems to leave room for a reductive explanation of our linguistic capacity. But it can't do both things at once. By ruling out the paradoxical implications of compositionalism, the weak version of the context principle rejects—to no less an extent than the strong version does—the only framework that seems suitable for satisfying our craving for a reductive explanation of linguistic mastery. The hybrid position seems to be driven by a simultaneous desire to reject the framework (because of its paradoxical implications) and to keep it (because it seems suitable for satisfying our craving). It is a merit of the strong version of the context principle, I submit, that it rejects this framework in a wholehearted way. This can help us to *question* our craving for a reductive explanation, and therefore to achieve a more stable satisfaction. The hybrid position, on the other hand, seems perfectly contrived for the purpose of keeping this craving alive in the face of Wittgenstein's criticism of it: it appears to promise its satisfaction, while anaesthetizing our awareness of the paradoxical implications of the framework that such a satisfaction would require.

VII

In this last section of the paper, I sum up the results of the paper and connect them back to the *Tractatus*.

I have argued that the *Tractatus* can endorse, at one and the same time, a strong version of the context principle (entailing the austere conception of nonsense) and a version of the principle of compositionality. It can maintain, quite literally, (1) that words have meaning *only* in the context of significant propositions; and (2) that propositions are essentially *articulate*—which means that their sense is complex, that they are made up of semantic parts that they share with one another, and that we understand them when we understand how each of their parts contributes to the complete thoughts they express. The *Tractatus* can coherently embrace both of these principles by rejecting the respective ways in which contextualism and compositionalism seek to interpret them. In order to accomplish this, the *Tractatus* needs to reject—and, I have suggested, *does* reject—both the claim that the meanings of sentences are conceptually prior to the meanings of words, and the

claim that the meanings of words are conceptually prior to the meanings of sentences. On this Tractarian understanding of the two principles, the context principle and the principle of compositionality articulate two necessarily interdependent aspects of our linguistic capacity. Nothing is recognizable as an exercise of the capacity to use words (i.e., sub-propositional elements), without its also being recognizable as drawing on the capacity to make sense (i.e., to express propositional senses); and vice versa. I suggested that this *Tractarian* picture can be improved, while retaining much of its spirit, by speaking of "complete linguistic acts" instead of "propositions," and by allowing for non-compositional uses of language as parasitical cases—parasitical, i.e., on the mastery of a compositional language.

I argued that this *Tractarian* picture is superior to both contextualism and compositionalism. I don't claim to have argued, however, that it is the *only* way to avoid these two problematic positions. The criticisms I mounted against contextualism and compositionalism leave room for a Glock-style hybrid position, which apparently acknowledges a strong conceptual interdependence between the meanings of words and the meanings of sentences, but in a way that seeks to attenuate the character of this interdependence so as to leave room for substantial nonsense. I have tried to show how the philosophical attractiveness of such a position diminishes once it is placed within the range of alternatives I have distinguished. Finally, I have tried to show that, in any case, it is not a position we can legitimately attribute to the *Tractatus*.

I want to close by giving a quick look at two passages in the *Tractatus* that bring out quite clearly the interdependence between a strong version of the context principle and the principle of compositionality. Each of the following passages will appear very puzzling as long as we maintain that the two semantic principles must be equivalent to contextualism and compositionalism respectively. The first passage runs as follows:

> The thing is independent, in so far as it can occur in all *possible* circumstances, but this form of independence is a form of connection with the atomic fact, a form of dependence. (It is impossible for words to occur in two different ways, alone and in the proposition.) (2.0122)

This passage occurs quite early in the *Tractatus*, before the topic of language (as the system of the totality of propositions) is officially introduced. But the second sentence makes clear that what Wittgenstein says about "things" on the ontological level is meant to apply equally to words in their representing relation to the world. Wittgenstein does indeed allow here that a thing is independent. This might be taken to mean that a thing can occur in isolation, without being part of a fact—or, equivalently, that a word can have meaning in isolation, without being part of a proposition. But if this were what Wittgenstein is saying, how could he maintain, at the same time, that the independence of the thing/word is "a form of dependence" on the fact/proposition in which it occurs? The air of paradox

disappears when we take Wittgenstein as saying that things essentially occur in facts, as meaningful words essentially occur in propositions. Facts and propositions are necessarily complex, articulate: they are made up of parts, and such parts can occur in *other* facts or in *other* propositions. The parts, therefore, are independent from any *particular* complex in which they occur; but they must occur in *some* fact or other, in *some* proposition or other. They would not be what they are—that is items that can make up a fact or a proposition—if "they could occur in two different ways, alone and in the proposition."

The second passage I want to consider clarifies what Wittgenstein means by "logical articulation" and shows how both the context principle and the principle of compositionality are built into this notion:

> The proposition is not a mixture of words (just as the musical theme is not a mixture of tones).
>   The proposition is articulate. (3.141)[52]

Words and tones, as marks on the paper or waves in the air, can surely occur in isolation. We can put such items together and obtain sequences of words and sounds. Surely these are (in a sense) complex phenomena and are (in a sense) made up of parts. However, they don't exhibit *articulation*. Articulation is not mere complexity, or, if you like, it is a special sort of complexity. A proposition or a musical theme are "complex," and have "parts," in a different sense in which "mixtures of words" and "mixtures of tones" are complex and have parts.[53] A proposition has unity: it expresses a thought; a melody also has unity: it expresses a *musical* thought. Only what exhibits this kind of unity can be articulate in the *Tractatus*'s sense. A proposition, as I have tried to argue, is necessarily articulated into parts, and the same might be said of a melody. (Can we conceive of melodies consisting of a *single* note?) The parts of a proposition contribute to the articulation of its content, and make the same contribution to the articulation of the contents of other propositions. Analogously, the parts of a melody (i.e., its notes) contribute to the expression of a musical thought, and make the same contribution to (have the same "musical meaning" in) other melodies. But if we deprive these words and these tones of their significant context, they become mere marks and sounds, devoid of meaning. Conversely, if we start with words and tones as they are given to us in isolation, we will through their mere concatenation never be able to achieve unified wholes, but rather always only mere "mixtures." The kind of "component" a word or a tone is, and the kind of "context" that a proposition or a melody is, are here seen to be interdependent notions that stand on the same level. This is just what compositionalism and contextualism, in their opposite ways, each deny, thereby obstructing our understanding of the ways in which the author of the *Tractatus* wishes jointly to affirm both a version of the principle of compositionality and a version of the context principle.[54]

Notes

1 Unpublished paper, quoted in J. Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*," in E.G. Reck, ed., *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 432 n34.

2 Some authors, however, trace the earliest formulation of some relevant version of the context principle back to Jeremy Bentham. See, most notably, W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1953, p. 39; W.V.O. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 72; P.M.S. Hacker, "The Rise of Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy," in H.-J. Glock, ed., *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p. 259. Quine and Hacker attribute to Bentham the idea that "sentences are the primary vehicles of meaning," the "minimal move[s] in the language game" (cf. J. Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. J. Bowring, Edinburgh, W. Tait, 1843, vol. VIII, pp. 188, 321–322, 333). They also stress the importance of Bentham's use of "paraphrastic" definitions for terms naming "fictitious entities"; Quine, in this connection, explicitly attributes to Bentham the introduction of contextual definitions (cf. Bentham, *Works*, vol. VIII, pp. 126–127, 246–247). Given the limited ambitions of this paper, I won't try to access the relations between these areas of Bentham's work and the context principle as it appears in Frege and the *Tractatus*.

3 G. Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J.L. Austin, 2nd edn, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1953, p. 73. See also pp. x, 71.

4 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922. All quotations from the *Tractatus* will follow this translation, unless otherwise specified.

5 For recent discussions of such attributions, see F.J. Pelletier, "Did Frege Believe the Context Principle?," *Journal of Logic, Language and Information*, 2001, vol. 10, pp. 87–114, and T.M.V. Janssen, "Frege, Contextuality and Compositionality," *Journal of Logic, Language and Information*, 2001, vol. 10, pp. 115–136. The fact that the two principles (or some versions of them) are both present in Frege's work raises exegetical problems that are similar to those that are addressed in this paper in connection with the *Tractatus*. Some commentators have tried to account for this problematic aspect of Frege's work by adopting a developmental approach: the early Frege endorsed the context principle; the mature Frege changed his mind and embraced the principle of compositionality. I am myself suspicious of this strategy. Such a strategy, in any case, is not available for the *Tractatus*, because, as we are going to see, both principles are there present *within the same book*. The *Tractatus* pushes the question of the compatibility of the two principles beyond the reach of a developmental approach. I believe that at least some of the results of the present discussion of the *Tractatus* (pointing out the essential interdependence of the two principles) can also be applied to the interpretation of Frege's philosophy; but this is not something I can try to establish in this paper.

6 The following sketch of the distinction between the two conceptions of nonsense draws especially on J. Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*," pp. 380–381; C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, pp. 95–113; J. Conant and C. Diamond, "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely," in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss, eds., *The Lasting Significance of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 47–49.

7 See, for instance, P.M.S. Hacker, "Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 2003, vol. 53:210, pp. 1–23.

8 The history of the interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy offers plenty of other examples of theories of sense. He has been taken to hold, at different stages of his career, that some sentences are nonsensical because they are not verifiable, or because they lack bipolarity, or because they violates the rules of logical grammar, or because they violate

the rules that determine their correct context of utterance. For a discussion of this history, see J. Conant, "Why Worry about the *Tractatus*?," in B. Stocker, ed., *Post-Analytic Tractatus*, Burlington, Ashgate Press, 2004, pp. 167–192.

9 I don't follow the Ogden translation here.

10 As I further clarify below, in this paper I will use the term "priority" and its cognates to designate an asymmetrical relation: if A is prior to B, B cannot in turn be prior to A. On the other hand, I will use the term "interdependence" to designate a symmetrical relation: if A and B are interdependent, A depends on B and B depends on A. Moreover, I will not discuss the attempt to reconcile the two semantic principles by distinguishing different orders of priority, so that the meaning of sentences would be prior in *one* order, while the meaning of words would be prior in a *different* order. (Cf. M. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 4, where it is notoriously stated that sentential meaning is prior in the "order of explanation," whereas sub-sentential meaning is prior in the "order of recognition.") In this paper I am concerned only to argue against priority claims on behalf of either of these principles in the asymmetrical sense that I have just specified.

11 H.-J. Glock, "All Kinds of Nonsense," in E. Ammereller and E. Fisher, eds., *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp. 221–245.

12 Ibid., p. 225.

13 Cf. ibid., pp. 224, 225, 227 for the claims about the *Tractatus*, and pp. 229, 237 for the claim about Wittgenstein's later work.

14 Ibid., p. 226.

15 Ibid., pp. 226-–227.

16 Ibid., pp. 22, 229–230.

17 Ibid., pp. 222–223, 228–229, 231, 235.

18 Glock seems reluctant to stress this conclusion about the coherence of Wittgenstein's thought. I am sympathetic with the reluctance, but that is the conclusion that follows from his claims.

19 Ibid., p. 229.

20 Ibid., p, 229.

21 Ibid., p. 229.

22 Ibid., p. 228.

23 Glock is bound to hold that we should simply *bracket* as temporary slides, or submit to a sanitizing reinterpretation, all the passages that do not fit with the weak version of the context principle that he is attributing to Wittgenstein.

24 Glock's formulation of the "weak" version of the context principle is reminiscent of what Dummett described as the "trivial truth" in the dictum proposed by Quine as an interpretation of Frege's context principle, that "the sentence is the primary unit of significance" (Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, p. 3). Cora Diamond has criticized Dummett's discussion of Quine's dictum, arguing for a much less trivial way of understanding it: its bite comes from the exclusion of substantial nonsense. This is, according to Diamond, the non-trivial way in which Frege and Wittgenstein understood the principle (Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, pp. 108–109). Ed Dain has applied Diamond's criticism of Dummett to Glock's discussion in "Contextualism and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 2006, vol. 25:2, pp. 92–96, and "Wittgenstein, Contextualism and Nonsense: A Reply to Hans-Johann Glock," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 2008, vol. 33, pp. 111–125.

25 R. Heck, "What Is Compositionality?," unpublished. I should warn from the beginning that I am making a somewhat devious use of Heck's paper. Heck develops a series of examples for *illustrating* the idea of a non-compositional language, regarding the intelligibility of which Heck raises no doubts. I think, on the contrary, that his examples work very nicely for *problematizing* the idea of a non-compositional language.

26 Heck's original (purported) example of non-compositional language is a language consisting entirely of numerals, where each numeral denotes a Gödel-number associated with a formula of arithmetic. The suggestion is that this would be a non-compositional language that can express all arithmetical propositions.

27 W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 26.

28 There are indeed difficulties in making such suppositions (Does it make sense to talk of the set of all possible thoughts? Or of the set of thoughts a person had in her life? How many thoughts did I have in the last five minutes?); but I think they can be bracketed for the purposes of the present discussion.

29 See M. Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 295. Dummett is referring to H. Sluga, "Frege and the Rise of Analytic Philosophy," *Inquiry*, 1975, vol. 18, pp. 137–143.

30 Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy*, p. 308.

31 Ibid., p. 309.

32 Ibid., p. 309.

33 See F. Waismann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, ed. B. McGuinness, trans. J. Schulte and B. McGuinness, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979, pp. 182–186. For an account of the dogmatism of the *Tractatus* as the tendency to lay down philosophical requirements on what language *must* be instead of *looking* at the actual phenomenon of language, see Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, pp. 19–36.

34 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd edn, Oxford, Blackwell, 1958, §§2, 6.

35 Ibid., §19.

36 See R. Rhees, *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 45, 128, 129, 192; S. Cavell, "Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*," in H. Sluga and D.G. Stern, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 273, 275, 278, 279, 289, 290; W. Goldfarb, "I Want You to Bring Me a Slab: Remarks on the Opening Sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*," *Syntheses*, 1983, vol. 56:3, pp. 269–272.

37 See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §19.

38 It might be objected that monkeys are really different from automata and marionettes, and that it is not clear that they don't speak some form of language and enjoy some form of mindedness. I am perfectly sympathetic with this idea. Monkeys, like us, come into the world and die, are hungry and cold and excited and terrified, enjoy sex and lying in the morning sun, take care of each other and of their offspring. It is in virtue of these and many other facts that we regard their signals as much more akin to language, and much more expressive of mindedness, than the signals released by automata or thermometers. The idea that monkeys have a form of life is far more intelligible to us than the idea that automata or marionettes have one—for the latter don't even seem to *have* a life. If one wishes to grant that monkeys do have a language, then my claim above amounts to the following: *all we can get* without compositionality is the form of mindedness and the form of "language" that monkeys—and other non-human animals—have. That is, we don't get a language in the full and proper and uncontroversial sense of the term.

39 The criticism of contextualism I developed is *not*, however, a motivation for the particular interpretation of the principle of compositionality given by compositionalism, according to which the meanings of sub-sentential elements are conceptually *prior* to the meanings of sentences (see Section V below).

40 D. Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd edn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 8.

41 See, for instance, R. Grandy, "Understanding and the Principle of Compositionality," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 1990, vol. 4, pp. 558–561.

42 Compare, by contrast, Heck's insistence, in the paper I already referred to, that "magic is always a possibility."

43 In some passages Frege seems to regard compositionality as a *constitutive* feature of language and thus to sit in the same camp where I have suggested we should place the *Tractatus*. For example, in a letter to Philip Jourdain ("Letter to Jourdain, Jan. 1914," in *The Frege Reader*, ed. M. Beaney, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p. 320), he argues that, without compositionality, the expression of any thought would require the adoption of a specific convention, so that "language in the proper sense would be impossible." Other passages are more delicate: they will place Frege in the Tractarian camp or in the opposite Davidsonian camp according to whether we see Frege as arguing, respectively, for the compositionality of *language as such*, or (merely) for the compositionality of *human* languages. Cf. for instance "Logic in Mathematics," in *Posthumous Writings*, ed. H. Hermes, F. Kambartel and F. Kaulbach, trans. P. Long and R. White, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979, pp. 225, 243; "Compound Thoughts," in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. B. McGuinness, trans. M. Black et al., Oxford, Blackwell, 1984, p. 390.

44 It might also be helpful to reflect on the following question: When do we say that a person has learnt the meaning of a word? The obvious answer seems to be: When she has acquired the capacity to form and understand appropriate *sentences* containing the word. Dictionaries, by the way, are designed precisely to help to confer such a capacity.

45 See J. McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998, chapters 17–18.

46 See McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, chapters 17–18; *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2009, chapter 13.

47 According to the amended view I am recommending, the capacity to make sense still *depends* on the capacity to meaningfully employ sub-propositional elements, but some of its exercises are not *direct* exercises of the second capacity: they merely indirectly draw on that capacity. For example, when I direct at you the order "Stop!" I am making sense, but I am not directly exercising the capacity to make logically articulated sense. (Early Wittgenstein, as noted above, would have to deny this: he would not be able to recognize "Stop" as a complete meaningful linguistic unit, unless he took its surface form to disguise a further underlying multiplicity of logical structure.) However, the capacity to make articulate sense is still operative: I would not be performing the same linguistic act if, for example, I could not use sentences containing the word "stop" as a sub-sentential element. (The amended view I am recommending is compatible, I think, with the criticisms that the later Wittgenstein came to level against his former view about the essentially articulate nature of the proposition; see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§19–20, and *Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. J.C. Klagge and A. Nordmann, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 54–55.)

48 Glock, "All Kinds of Nonsense," p. 229.

49 It is perhaps worth remarking that Glock's hybrid position and the disjunctive conception, in spite of occasional similarities in verbal formulation, in fact make quite different appeals to the capacity to use words in meaningful propositions. According to Glock, when we utter substantial nonsense, we *presuppose* the capacity to use words in meaningful contexts; however, we don't *draw on* that capacity—because, *ex hypothesi*, we are not *actually* making sense. That capacity is required to be in the background any time we utter a word with a meaning; but it doesn't play any actual role in our succeeding to use the word with that meaning on a particular occasion; the background is semantically inert. This comes out vividly if we consider an alleged instance of substantial nonsense containing an obviously ambiguous word, say "The bank is a prime number." The word "bank," according to Glock, is used with its usual meaning. But

which one? Does the meaningful employment of the word presuppose the capacity to use it in the expression of thoughts about financial institutions or about riverbanks? In Glock's framework, the issue can be settled only by appealing to the bare psychological fact of the speaker's linguistic intention to use the word this way rather than that. So his view implies that it is actually the nature of this intention that fixes the meaning of the word: our capacity to use a word with a particular meaning in certain (substantially nonsensical) contexts depends, in fact, on nothing more than this intention—the successful exercise of the one capacity (to mean something by the word apart from the character of its context) proceeds quite apart from any effort to engage the other capacity (to use it in a manner in which its sense contributes to the sense of the proposition as a whole). According to the disjunctive conception, on the other hand, we could not exercise the capacity to use words with meanings if we did not also *bring into operation* the capacity to use those words in a manner that contributes to the sense of meaningful propositions. So when Glock says things like "Words must be *capable* of occurring in propositions" and "[the meaning of a word] is determined by *how* it can be used within sentences," he in fact means something quite different (and much weaker) by these dicta than what is required by semantic disjunctivism.

50 Such a discussion would have to cover topics such as the following: (1) What does it mean for a word to occur in isolation? Are dictionary entries, for example, instances of words occurring meaningfully in isolation? (2) Does the substantial conception of nonsense rely on a plausible conception of linguistic intentions? (3) Does the substantial conception of nonsense rely on a plausible picture of necessity—as constraining the use of language from the outside, rather than being constitutive of it? (4) Does the substantial conception offer a plausible account of Wittgenstein's anti-metaphysical aims? When Wittgenstein claims that a certain metaphysical-looking statement is nonsensical, is he emitting a verdict that follows from a "theory of sense" that he is endorsing? Some of these topics have already been discussed at length by New Wittgensteinian or Resolute Readers.

51 Glock, "All Kinds of Nonsense," pp. 226–227.

52 See also L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G.H. Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd edn, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979: "A proposition is not a blend of words" (5.4.15); "Nor is a tune a blend of notes, as all unmusical people think" (11.4.15).

53 Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. A. Kenny, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974, part I, §1, where Wittgenstein remarks that there is a *difference in kind* between the sense in which a meaningful proposition has "parts" and the sense in which, say, a loaf of bread is made up of "parts."

54 I wish to thank James Conant, Ed Dain, Michael Kremer, and Annalisa Paese for conversations, comments, and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. I am very grateful to the members of the Preliminary Essay Workshop and to the members of the Wittgenstein Workshop at the University of Chicago for their questions, criticisms and suggestions. Finally, I wish to thank for their helpful comments the editors of the present book, Rupert Read and Matthew Lavery.

5

TOWARD A *USEFUL* JACOBINISM

A Response to Bronzo

Matthew A. Lavery

I

There are many excellent parts of Silver Bronzo's essay, "Context, Compositionality, and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*": a helpful exposition of the historical development of the context principle and the principle of compositionality into conflicting philosophical-semantic positions, an astute delineation of issues essential to the ongoing scholarly debate about reading "nonsense" in the *Tractatus*, and a clever attempt to model the therapeutic approach to that problem favored by the resolute reading he champions. I will not argue against his claim that "alternative understandings of the two principles according to which they are compatible with one another and indeed positively interdependent" (p. 84)[1] are more coherent in their ability to describe a variety of actual speech phenomena than is the way he shows each fails to do independently if they are taken as mutually exclusive. Instead I want to question the (idea of) "philosophical superiority" he assigns to his analysis, and to explore how relevant this term can be when applied to the broader issues at stake in his essay.

It is clear from the outset that Bronzo's aim is not to address any confusion in the use of a term, provide an insight to a psychological or "medical" problem that might arise in the course of language acquisition, or even to bring to light an unappreciated element of the *Tractatus* as a composition. It is instead to promote the New Wittgensteinian/resolute reading of the *Tractatus* by privileging the austere conception of nonsense that is vital to it over the concept of substantial nonsense that grounds the standard[2] reading against which it is contrasted.[3] The most powerful "argument" Bronzo offers for a New Wittgensteinian reading of the *Tractatus* comes in his effort to "*question* our craving for a reductive explanation [of our linguistic capacity], and therefore to achieve a more stable satisfaction"

(p. 104) than the one that is achieved by choosing between mutually exclusive versions of the context principle and the principle of composition for an explanation of certain linguistic phenomena like "our capacity to understand and form sentences" (p. 100) and "various kinds of non-compositional uses of language (such cases as single-word sentences)" (p. 102). This is paradigmatic "philosophical therapy," precisely the sort of maneuver that resolute readers see as the central method of the *Tractatus*. As Bronzo has it, the urge to spell out the context principle and the principle of composition as philosophical-linguistic positions was an error from the start, and his resolution of them dispels a psychic need for the explanation of how language works by replacing the incoherence of either as a separate *explanans* with the coherency of co-dependent principles in a description of language as it actually happens.[4]

I am left, however, with a sense of discomfort about the essay because, in its adherence to the resolute "program," it epitomizes a failing of resolutists who make the mistake of feeling that a "justification" for that reading needs to be given at all. This takes the resolutist away from home, as it were, playing on the turf of the standard reader in the games of textual and anecdotal evidence, etc., where not only are they sometimes at a historical disadvantage but they are also entertaining questions that simply do not bear on the real value of a resolute *Tractatus*. The value of resolutism, for me anyway, is that it moves us away from "philosophizing" (read here in Wittgenstein's famous, "negative sense")—away from abstract questions of truth values, for instance—and *toward* action in the lived world in a clear-headed way free from philosophical or academic pretension.[5]

While exactly this kind of "freeing-up" from philosophical pretensions *seems* to be the end-goal of Bronzo's therapy, I do not think it successfully achieved on the program he provides, for two reasons:

1. As noted above, the resolution of the context principle and the principle of compositionality that he indicates and offers is only a preliminary move in a larger philosophical game—the *ascription of meaning* to the *Tractatus* via choosing between competing sets of interpretations; a fundamentally troubled hermeneutical exercise that necessarily perpetuates problematic "philosophical" approaches to chimerical problems of textual analysis, etc. (and that, I think, is done only at some tension with the resolute "program" in general).
2. Even considered on its own, i.e. without the context of privileging one reading of the *Tractatus* over another, resolving the two principles still leaves us on the philosophical mouse-wheel, calling on a philosophical impulse to supposedly quench a philosophical thirst.

In the sections that follow, I'll briefly discuss and elaborate upon these two points.

II

In the first enumerated section of his paper, Bronzo[6] lists his aims (p. 88):

> to arrive at understandings of the context principle and the principle of compositionality respectively such that they are (1) compatible with one another, (2) compatible with the austere conception of nonsense, and thus (3) entail the falsity of the substantial conception of nonsense.

Were he to have left off after (1) there is a *chance* that his therapy would succeed in achieving a kind of philosophical quietude (see Section IV below). However, having tied his resolution of these principles to privileging a conception of nonsense, he has made *this* philosophical investigation merely an initiation into another one from which an exit is not to be found. (Especially once he describes the substantial conception of nonsense as "false," rather than nonsensical.) Thus the supposed philosophical quietude achieved—the result upon which the "philosophical superiority" of his reconciliation of them is made to rest—is only a liminality followed almost immediately by another state of philosophical perplexity: to borrow the *Tractatus*'s famous closing metaphor, it is an extending of the ladder, not a jettisoning of it.

To reiterate: Bronzo's establishment of coherent semantic principles might *not* lead to this perpetual state of philosophical perplexity were it not tied to a resolution of what nonsense in the *Tractatus* is, which, as he convincingly argues, is one of the key questions in the *Tractatus* wars that precede (and will most probably go on after) his essay. In essence, it is a proxy question for the more clearly philosophically problematic question of what the *Tractatus means*.

There are several reasons why attributing a meaning to the *Tractatus* is a deeply problematic philosophical enterprise; chief among them is its dependence upon a mentalistic picture of "meaning," that is to say one that ultimately requires one to hold that it is possible to know "what was in Wittgenstein's mind" when he wrote that book (and that this can be determined by knowing what was in his mind when he wrote x, y, or z work, or made such and such remark marshaled as evidence, etc., etc.).[7] And while it is natural for one philosophical question to lead to another, for Bronzo's coherent principles to be philosophically superior to the mutually exclusive ones it contrasts against—using the idea of philosophical therapy as a model—any chain of philosophical conundra it initiates will have to actually terminate in quietude. But as the ongoing debate between resolutists and standard readers (in fact, the existence of this book!) suggests, this doesn't seem to be the case with *Tractatus* interpretation.[8]

Let me be clear, I am not advocating for some kind of dissolution of meaning here—I'm not saying, for instance, that anyone is justified in claiming that the *Tractatus* means whatever he wants it to mean. What I am saying is that trying to resolve what *Wittgenstein* intended for it to mean is unnecessary (and often an

unhelpful distraction) in determining how to interface with it,[9] and that, by hitching his conclusions to this task, Bronzo undercuts the ability to claim any philosophically therapeutic superiority for his analysis at all. By contrast, resolutism is at its best when freed from a narrow, textual conception of the *Tractatus*'s meaning; it suggests that the only necessary "meaning" we need to attach to it can be found in what we actually do "off of the ladder."[10]

III

In this section I will try to show that nothing *philosophically* superior is achieved even if we divorce the third of Bronzo's aims from the first two. In fact, I suggest that there is nothing meaningful *at all* achieved by privileging austere nonsense over substantial nonsense *absent* the goal of privileging one reading of the *Tractatus* or another.

Dissatisfaction with the substantial conception of nonsense is not surprising. By itself, substantial nonsense amounts to nothing; like any bit of language (if it were a bit of language), any bit of substantial nonsense matters for nothing if it is not "put into play" in the lived world.[11] But my claim that it doesn't amount to anything at all applies even if one tries to "put it into play"—if one takes up an ineffabalist position—precisely because it *cannot* be put into play. The idea that reference can be made to entities or conditions beyond our experience, but that they cannot fully enter into human discourse, is, frankly, bizarre. At most, ineffabalism is a delusion (though even this term may lend it too much psychological viability) that something beyond experience (as if that weren't difficult enough to understand on its own) can be *mutually* tapped into by many people.[12] At the least it is a wink and a nod, a "knowing" glance that individuals are sharing in something —for lack of a better word—magical.

What comfort is the austere conception of nonsense? Does it connect with life in a way that renders it superior to holding that substantial nonsense amounts to something? At least austere nonsense has had an important psychological role attached to it within the resolute reading: as one rung of the Wittgensteinian ladder to be ultimately jettisoned—that it does in fact move one to abandon abstract philosophizing and do other things.[13] It is important to note, though, that making this claim does not entail actually doing anything with resolute nonsense.[14]

It is true that some efforts have been made to link "austerity" to such lived-world activities as dissecting political spin or "double-speak."[15] I have great respect for these efforts, and do not wish to diminish them, but, in these cases, the philosophical background is relevant only as a kind of gateway for an audience with a certain disposition, or in that it has provided a kind of training in close-looking on the part of the dissector. If a resolutist's point of view or disposition is the key element to the ability and/or willingness to proffer such a dissection, then more to its credit. But *must* one have such a point of view or disposition to participate in or benefit from such a dissection? The essential point is undiminished:

even if it *prompts* clear-headed thinking in the real world, agreeing with resolutism, holding the austere conception of nonsense, *is not the same* as performing this kind of action.

By comparison, consider guidebooks, on how to take up an effective study of Zen, for instance. None of these books counts as the action itself, and, while a guidebook may help initiate one to the principles and practices of a certain pursuit, encourage her to undertake it, or suggest a valuable perspective or mindset to be taken into it, simply reading or mastering the guidebook can never *take the place* of that action—I would otherwise simply have to read about gardening to grow my own food. Similarly, while it may be tempting to claim that adopting an austere view of nonsense is *correlated* with practically useful skills, this correlation—even if true and demonstrable—does not in itself constitute something "philosophically superior" to holding a substantial view of nonsense.

More to the point, without tying one conception of nonsense to something else, it is difficult for me to see not only what would be superior in holding one view of nonsense over another but more importantly what it is to *hold a position* on nonsense *at all*. It may be tempting to claim that the austere conception of nonsense is philosophically superior to holding the substantial conception of nonsense because it helps one avoid other philosophical (or even practical) trouble. That position would look something like this: "Holding the position that there can be such a thing as substantial nonsense allows for philosophically seductive practices such as latching onto a metaphysical view of religion (versus the decidedly *anti*metaphysical conception of it championed by many Wittgensteinians— famously Winch, for example) and thus, for instance, really believing that praying is like having a telephone conversation with an invisible old man in the clouds. This then leads to more bizarre practices that hinge upon the believed-in reality of cloud-world, and detachment from life on Earth. Given this, a position on nonsense that holds that all nonsense is pure nonsense, and that, therefore, there are no things that are placed in principle beyond our experience, etc. leads *indirectly*, but no less certainly, to less problematic action, hence benefit (and therefore philosophical superiority) on Earth." Here, however, there are at least two problems. First, it would be a clearly troubling slippery slope to argue that meta-physical dispositions (not only) *needs must* (but also *even tend to*) lead to detachment from the world (some kind of "Heaven's Gate" Cult scenario). Second—even overlooking the slippery-slope—the tail wags the dog, here. People don't pray, e.g., *because* they have a certain view of nonsense. Instead, their "view of nonsense" is "determined" after looking at their practice (and usually by somebody else), and this is even *if* one felt some need to ascribe some position on nonsense to them. If I were to ask a penitent in the middle of intense prayer, "What is your position on nonsense?," that person would most likely have no idea what I was talking about or why I asked the question. Furthermore, if I tried to explain the context, it seems just as likely to me that she would fail to see any necessary link between her praying and the substantial conception of nonsense.

IV

It could be argued that Bronzo has simply mislabeled the pro-austerity conclusions drawn from his resolution of the context principle and the principle of compositionality. Perhaps they were not aims, but *consequents*, of this effort, and consequents that he is happy have occurred. That is to say, one could claim that the impossibility of quietude I point to in Section II, above, can be short-circuited if one removes the intentional link between the coherent semantic principles and a pro-resolutist reading of the *Tractatus*. If I am right in Section III, above, then the idea of philosophical superiority depends upon (1) only: whether Bronzo's reading of coherent semantic principles is "philosophically superior" to the two mutually exclusive ones.

My first response is to say that coherence certainly seems a positive outcome, and that Bronzo's reading has broadened our understanding of language in practice. But "philosophically superior"? This could only be said given certain particular provisos. First, it is superior but just as much aesthetically as philosophically, and both in only the most trivial way. Second, it is philosophically superior, but only for one in the very particular kind of philosophical muddle of seeking a one-off explanation of language . . .

. . . but even here I cannot completely banish the thought that Bronzo has done one in this kind of muddle a disservice by holding up logical cohesion as an acceptable "answer" to the problematic philosophical impulse. To use a phrase of Wittgenstein's, "the decisive movement of the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one we thought quite innocent":[16] the problem of the *impulse* has not really been addressed, just the supposed, tenuous *resolution* of that impulse. Really, the point of philosophical therapy should be to dispel the impulse to seek out such things as an all-inclusive explanation for language completely. Instead, suggesting that there can be some logically determined "superior" position to be had just as well may encourage more "philosophizing" where no philosophizing is appropriate, while so much applied critical thinking of the sort philosophers can do so well, and are well-trained in, is desperately needed elsewhere. For instance, Bronzo certainly seems successful in demonstrating the insufficiency of Glock's "resolution" of this impulse, but, as his essay doesn't simply end by dispensing that resolution, it seems quite clear the impulse itself is no less diminished. Thus, despite the desire to the contrary, we are left on the ladder—I'm tempted to say "possibly a bit less" if it is in fact possible to be *less* on a ladder than one was before—even after Bronzo's best efforts to the contrary.

V

I think it likely that Silver Bronzo shares some of the concerns I laid out in Section II; and that this is why he has developed such a novel and interesting approach to advocating resolutism. Likewise, the careful craftsmanship of his essay suggests that,

if he did not address the concerns I put forward in Sections III and IV, this is only because he saw them as tangential to his broader objective. With thinkers like him in the game, it seems likely that the New Wittgenstein debate will continue to produce interesting and insightful argumentation. However, the success of his essay for this reader has been to redouble the thought that we Wittgensteinians, and the world in general, will be better off if we stop talking about how to get off the ladder and rather just endeavor *to* get off it (and this is the directive at the end of the *Tractatus*, no?).

A full embracing of the "end of philosophy" directive of §7 of the *Tractatus*— "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent"—and that I am, I hope, articulating here, has been called "Jacobinism" (by Goldfarb—in a different, unpublished version of the paper included in this book—and others).[17] And while there are possibly negative associations of this historical metaphor—that it is "very nihilistic and ultimately destructive"[18]—this is a crude misreading that fails to grasp what seems to be the point of such non-philosophical remarks as this one, from Wittgenstein in a letter to Norman Malcolm:

> What is the *use* of studying philosophy if all it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc. & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of *everyday life* [my emphasis]?[19]

This question loses its force if read simply as an admonition to examine *questions of* rather than prompting *action in* the real world, whether or not it is what Wittgenstein "meant." With a well-honed skepticism about philosophy itself, and a commitment to avoiding easy answers and seeing problems through to the end (even if that end is to realize that there is no problem to begin with), Wittgensteinians are ideally prepared to transfer the benefits of a properly trained "philosophical disposition" to problems outside of philosophy. The energy and intelligence so well displayed in Bronzo's wrestling with issues of *Tractatus* interpretation are desperately needed outside of the academy at a time of great global peril. Regardless of how one gets there, this, it seems to me, is what lies beyond the ladder.[20]

Notes

1 For the sake of convenience, I will give references to Bronzo's paper in this book parenthetically in text.
2 Perhaps "irresolute" is a better word here in that it allows for the understanding that these readings are not monolithic, even if often lumped together for their opposition to some of what the equally diverse resolute readers claim (though it has the drawback of suggesting that these approaches were developed as a response to their counterparts). On this score, and to avoid going over ground that has been more than adequately covered in both Goldfarb's and White's essays in this book, I do not give yet another history of the development of both "camps" in the text above. All that needs to be

established, and I think the essays in this book do this admirably, is that the (at least) two readings make clear that there are a number of competing, *viable* interpretations of the *Tractatus*.

3 I will not belabor the point here that the dichotomy between the standard and resolute readings has been argued by many to be false. I do note, however, that Bronzo is at best incomplete in answering those for whom "it has seemed as if [resolutists] deprive us of the possibility of making coherent sense of the work as a whole" (p. 85) although he acknowledges this as an explicit aim: "(This means that one of my aims . . . is to see if we can arrive at an outline of a coherent reading of the *Tractatus* as it stands.)" (p. 88). He seems to take it for granted that providing a coherent concomitance of compositionality and contextualism leads necessarily to a coherent *Tractatus*, but this in itself does not answer *all* concerns about a resolute reading, for example that resolutism seems to require one to exempt certain portions of the text from its overall self-destruction at 6.54.

4 An inkling of the misgivings I will go on to describe is given here: Bronzo says that "It is quite natural to interpret these two semantic principles in a manner that renders them mutually incompatible" (p. 89). But, for whom is it *natural* to *interpret semantic principles*? It is only from a philosophical starting point that a philosophical therapy needs to be conducted here. Most people understand and use language without ever questioning it in a non-trivial way at all. Even the great majority of teachers of grammar aren't troubled in any way by, e.g., opposing semantic rules.

5 It is important to note that doing the first—dissolving temptations to philosophize—does not entail doing the other—taking action in the lived world. I discuss this in more detail in Section III.

6 When referring to papers published in this book, I shall put the page numbers in the text rather than in endnotes.

7 This issue was discussed in greater length in a paper I gave at the 2007 Joint Session in Bristol. Many thanks to the moderators and participants of that session for their contributions to the subsequent development of those thoughts and, thus, to this essay.

8 Central to this claim is the idea that the sustained existence of coherent, mutually exclusive interpretive communities establishes the impossibility of selecting one of them as "correct" when each reasonably and coherently marshals similar kinds of evidence from similar sources (which each would have difficulty maintaining itself as a dialogic community if it could not do). While this might seem to suggest that any issue debated by mutually exclusive communities cannot be resolved—for example, "debates" between historians and holocaust deniers, or even evolutionists and creationists—it is safe to say that in many cases there are forces motivating the persistence of communities (xenophobia, for example, or a desire to gain or maintain political power) other than the desire to "get it right" or even to prove a point. In these cases, what is offered as "evidence" is often only the flimsiest sort of propaganda, even if clung to fiercely by one set of interlocutors. Suffice it to say that *outside of abstract intellectual debates* it is most often the case in arguments such as these that one group is just patently wrong, even if they are strongly motivated to not admit it.

9 Likewise, none of this should be taken to suggest that authorial intention isn't relevant at all, in any context. But: can we talk about authorial intent, and how much bearing can it have on a work's meaning, when the author is no longer around and the meaning is in question? Turned away from this kind of abstract, philosophical question, one is able to explore different readings to see how each may *link up* with life, even in a piecemeal fashion—finding some of the standard reading helpful here, the resolute reading there, etc. It should be noted that I think the standard reading has very little to offer, unless one accepts a typical claim of standard readers, namely that on the resolutist reading one must discount the logical insights the text offers. On the other hand, the resolute reading offers a novel approach to doing philosophy that has already borne fruit. (I am indebted, again, to Rupert Read for reminding me of this point.)

10 And here we have the bulwark against a kind of progressive deconstruction of the *Tractatus*: were someone to derive a fantastical "interpretation" from it (that it presented an argument for the oppression of a particular minority, for instance)—the kind that could not support the same sustained dialogical communities that "resolutism" or "the standard reading" have—it would also happen that this interpretation wouldn't succeed in linking up with life at all, at least not any kind of life any of us would recognize.

11 Of course the way that language is "put in play"—as Wittgenstein's work so often demonstrates—is highly varied, often extremely subtle and unexpected, and often not obvious. Keeping this in mind, I do not mean this sentence as a kind of theoretical claim, rather as a statement of an obvious fact. An example from the contrast class would be something like burning a slip of paper on which a machine had printed a word chosen at random from a database (versus, for example, burning a *book*!).

12 It should be obvious how such talk would necessarily run into the type of deconstruction of "private language" that Wittgenstein famously makes in *Philosophical Investigations*.

13 By contrast, one of the most problematic aspects of the substantial conception of nonsense is that it encourages more use and exploration of substantial nonsense, i.e. once one introduces that idea of substantial nonsense, she seems to have to rely upon more and more substantial nonsense to give further exposition.

14 It is important to foreground here my awareness that this paragraph could be seen as an attempt to do the same thing I criticize Bronzo for doing: offering a kind of backdoor argument *for* resolutism. And while I have no particular stake in championing resolutism, if an appreciation for its novelty, etc., and a distaste for ineffabalism render me a resolutist, then so be it. As it is, I couldn't care in the least to argue for a "correct" interpretation of the *Tractatus* (on its conception of nonsense), or whether the Jacobinistic stance the *Tractatus* prompts me to is "justified" by it.

15 The best examples of this, in my thinking, are those of my co-editor, see particularly chapters 6, 7, and 8 of *Philosophy for Life*, London, Continuum, 2007, and his *Applying Wittgenstein*, London, Continuum, 2007.

16 See §308 of *Philosophical Investigations*.

17 See Anat Biletzki's *(Over)Interpreting Wittgenstein*, London, Kluwer, 2003, p. 101.

18 Ibid., p. 101.

19 See p. 425 of Monk's *The Duty of Genius*, New York, Macmillan, 1990.

20 I am indebted to Rupert Read and Silver Bronzo for helpful comments on previous versions of this essay, and for their patience in accommodating my revisions.

6

THE DIALECTIC OF INTERPRETATIONS

Reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

Oskari Kuusela

> In a certain sense one cannot take too much care in handling philosophical mistakes, they contain so much truth.
>
> It is never a matter of simply saying, this must be given up.
>
> <div align="right">(Ms112, 99r / Zettel §460, except the last sentence)[1]</div>

This motto is not meant to signal my (over)confidence in identifying what is mistaken or true in the interpretations of the *Tractatus*. But it seems that a fair amount of recent discussion on the *Tractatus* has been carried out in forgetfulness of these cautionary words by its author. The focus has been on excluding particular ideas from the discussion as mistaken, rather than on trying to find ways to incorporate what might be correct in them, even if problematically expressed. Such an approach is in a genuinely philosophical conflict with my own for which a central question is how to understand and do justice to what seems correct in both the negative and positive views advanced by the interpretational parties. (This is not a matter of searching for philosophical compromises, however.) This essay proceeds by playing against each other extant interpretations and tries, in this way, to make progress in solving relevant interpretational problems. Although this method relies heavily on what has already been said by Wittgenstein's interpreters, it is not meant to suggest that finding a satisfactory interpretation of the *Tractatus* wouldn't require bringing new ideas to the discussion. But sometimes novelty may be a matter of combining in a previously unseen way what is already familiar.

More specifically, since the 1990s much of the discussion on the interpretation of the *Tractatus* has assumed the form of a dispute between the proponents of a traditional metaphysical reading and a novel so-called resolute one.[2] According to the former, Wittgenstein's aim is to determine the limits of language by

articulating a theory of the essence of linguistic expression.[3] According to the latter, Wittgenstein's goal is, rather, to question the very possibility of such a theoretical account. But although this characterization of the main interpretative contrast seems accurate as far as it goes, when considering the arguments presented in the debate, one soon feels the need to characterize various positions more precisely. Only in this way is it possible to determine the effectiveness and import of these arguments. Types of resolute readings, for example, seem to differ in their capacity to respond to critiques from the more traditional direction, as I will explain.

   In this essay I seek to develop, by examining exegetical as well as philosophical weaknesses and strengths of different interpretations, a version of the resolute reading that incorporates a certain strand of the traditional readings. This strand is their attribution to Wittgenstein of an intention to impart certain very general logical insights, the possibility of which, however, I seek to explain without recourse to the notion of a nonsensical or ineffable theory or truth. As explained in the conclusion, the interpretation put forward here is designed as a response to the conflicting demands that a philosophically viable and at the same time exegetically plausible interpretation of the *Tractatus* is required to meet. I begin with a discussion of the traditional interpretation.

I. Hacker's Ineffability Interpretation and the Role of Nonsense

A leading contemporary proponent of the traditional reading is Peter Hacker.[4] His answer to the problem of why Wittgenstein wrote a nonsensical book, and the philosophical significance of the nonsense he produced, can be summarized as follows. While obvious nonsense is of no real philosophical significance, in the more interesting category of not immediately apparent nonsense a distinction can be drawn between misleading and illuminating nonsense. The former is unself-conscious nonsense that attempts to say what can't be said and in so doing merely misleads. The latter is self-conscious nonsense that serves the purpose of leading the reader to the comprehension of the nature of language and reality, as revealed in what propositions with a sense show but can't say. In the process of illuminating such matters this kind of nonsense is also intended to reveal its own nonsensicalness. Hacker writes: "Illuminating nonsense will guide the attentive reader to apprehend what is shown by other propositions which do not purport to be philosophical; moreover it will intimate, to those who grasp what is meant, its own illegitimacy" (Hacker 1986, pp. 18, 19[5]). Thus, although Hacker recognizes that, in Wittgenstein's view, a nonsensical sentence neither says nor shows anything, he takes Wittgenstein to maintain that something can be intimated, intended, or meant by such a sentence. As he writes: "Apparently what someone means or intends by a remark can be grasped even though the sentence uttered is strictly speaking nonsense" (Hacker 1986, p. 26; cf. p. 18). Indeed, according to Hacker, it is "immediately obvious" on the basis of the *Tractatus*'s text that Wittgenstein "did think that one can *mean* something that cannot be said, but rather expresses

itself in a different way—namely, is *shown* by the features of our language" (Hacker 2000, p. 386; 2001, p. 122).

This account of the function of nonsense seems problematic, however. No doubt a nonsensical sentence can *appear* to have a sense, because one is accustomed to the words which are used in it or for other psychological reasons. (One may associate something with the sounds or ink marks in question.) But insofar as the nonsensicalness of a sentence means that it symbolizes or represents nothing, it remains ultimately unclear how anything meaningful can be expressed by a nonsensical sentence. Indeed, if what well-formed propositions show can't be stated by means of language (*Tractatus* 4.121), then one can't even want to state what such propositions show by means of language. For, if what a nonsensical statement tries to say makes no sense, then it makes no sense to desire to express "that thing" either. In this case there is no real but only an illusory object of desire, as in the case of desiring that mwb£qlkhtp★io. In other words, since a nonsensical sentence has, by definition so to speak, no meaning for its author or for anybody else, there is no meaning to grasp or to desire to communicate with such a sentence. This problem with Hacker's interpretation of the role of the *Tractatus*'s nonsensical sentences can be characterized more specifically as follows.

Essentially, Hacker takes the *Tractatus* as intended to convey what the book would most naturally be taken to convey—a philosophical theory of language and the bounds of sense (see Hacker 1986, pp. 56 ff.)—were it not for the author's statement that the book is nonsense. In a certain sense, readings of the type Hacker represents may therefore be described as not taking entirely seriously the presumed nonsensicality of the book. One maintains simultaneously that something—for example, what propositions show—can't be described but provides a description of it anyway. This is what Diamond has provocatively characterized as chickening out and what Goldfarb has suggested calling "irresoluteness" instead.[6]

More specifically, according to Hacker, the book contains a theory of representation (the picture theory of proposition) from which it follows that formal properties of symbols can't be talked or thought about (Hacker 1986, pp. 20, 21). Consequently, many remarks in the book, i.e. those appearing to talk about the formal or necessary features of language or of the world, are nonsense. But in Hacker's view, this doesn't mean that, according to Wittgenstein, such remarks couldn't lead us to the comprehension of truths of some sort. Rather, the theory, or the line of argument which leads the reader to realize the nonsensicalness of the book constitutes the famous ladder of the *Tractatus*. To climb up the ladder is to follow the argument of the book, and to throw the ladder away is to draw the conclusion that what is said in the book is nonsense. After one has thrown away the ladder something remains, however. The journey through the book provides the reader with an understanding of the essence of language and the world, of "what cannot be said, but manifests itself in what can be said", i.e. shows itself (Hacker 2000, p. 365; 2001, p. 117; cf. 1986, p. 26). As Hacker writes: "one is left holding on to some ineffable truths about reality after one has thrown away

the ladder" (Hacker 2000, p. 357; 2001, p. 105). And: "there are, according to the author of the *Tractatus*, ineffable truths that can be apprehended" (Hacker 2000, p. 368; 2001, p. 123; cf. 2000, pp. 353, 357). Although Hacker, therefore, takes Wittgenstein at one level to reject the notion of philosophical truths, he nevertheless takes him to retain it at the level of ineffable truths. Hence, also the nomination "ineffability reading" for Hacker's interpretation.

But it is the self-destructive nature of Wittgenstein's presumed argument that makes it problematic. For, in the end the notion of such an argument seems incomprehensible. There is no such thing as a nonsensical argument, because one can't draw any logical conclusions from what looks like an argument but is really nonsense. Indeed, insofar as Wittgenstein's doctrine of language could demonstrate the nonsensicalness of philosophical doctrines concerning the necessary features of language and the world, he would have managed to construct a very extraordinary doctrine: one capable of demonstrating its own nonsensicalness. (Finally, we would have a bootstrapping success story in philosophy!) But this leads to a paradox: if the doctrine is nonsense, it doesn't demonstrate anything; in order to demonstrate something it must not be nonsense.

Thus, on Hacker's interpretation, the *Tractatus* ends in a paradox. If one takes seriously the nonsensicalness of nonsense, one must admit that nonsense can't express any thoughts or truths, including thoughts about what propositions show. Yet, Hacker has no suggestions beyond this as to what we should learn from the paradox of the book. Rather, it is the book's paradox or inconsistency that, according to him, explains the later Wittgenstein's dissatisfaction with it. "That the book is inconsistent, that its position can't be upheld, is undeniable—as its author later realized. It is, as he remarked, like a clock that does not work" (Hacker 2000, p. 383, n10; 2001, p. 104, n9). But is it plausible that Wittgenstein would have been unaware of such a straightforward inconsistency that makes the point of the book plainly incomprehensible? I find this hard to believe.[7] Indeed, if the book contains a paradox of the above type, it is difficult to see how Wittgenstein could have described it as a clock that doesn't tell the right time, rather than as a bag of junk professing to be a clock. (For Wittgenstein's clock comparison, see Anscombe 1971, p. 78; cf. Hacker 2000, p. 359; 2001, p. 108). Here it is also important that there is no textual evidence that, according to Wittgenstein, his book fails *because of its paradox*, whatever faults he came to see in it. Certainly, the last remark of the book, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," taken as it stands is not a statement or acknowledgement of a paradox. Rather, it seems a tautology.[8]

So, perhaps Wittgenstein didn't conceive the role of the *Tractatus*'s nonsensical sentences along the lines of the metaphysical interpretation, as attempting to convey ineffable theoretical insights about language that would then constitute a foundation for an activity of philosophy as logical analysis. (It is hard to see how, on such a reading, the activity of logical analysis could ever get off the ground given that the theory on which it is based is nonsense.) In order, therefore, to avoid

the sterility of the outcome of the ineffability interpretation, and to find out what the paradox *might be meant to do* or *make the reader to do*, we seem required to break with the idea that the *Tractatus* intends to put forward a theory. At this point it is in place to note a certain relevant ambiguity of "to mean." Although "Milk me sugar" (as it stands) doesn't mean anything, for example, gape and stare at me, I can nevertheless say it and *mean* it to have the effect on you that you gape and stare at me—in contrast to, for example, the effect that you should milk me sugar (see *Philosophical Investigations* §498). Similarly the *Tractatus*'s nonsensical sentences might be intended to have a particular effect on the reader, which, however, don't entail that what they seem to say is meaningful, in particular that they have an ineffable meaning.

An alternative to Hacker's interpretation of the role of nonsense in the *Tractatus* has been suggested by the resolute reading[9] to which I now turn.

II. Conant's and Diamond's Reading: Rethinking the Role of Nonsense

James Conant and Cora Diamond reject the view that the goal of the *Tractatus* would be to provide insights into ineffable metaphysical truths. Rather than trying to indicate anything about such truths, the book is designed to enable its reader to get rid of the temptation to put forward philosophical doctrines by showing that such attempts lead to nonsense. As Conant puts it: "the aim of Tractarian elucidation is to reveal (through the employment of mere nonsense) that what appears to be substantial nonsense is mere nonsense," where substantial nonsense would serve the "conferral of insight into inexpressible features of reality," just as Hacker takes nonsense to lead us to understand what sensible propositions show.[10]

An advantage of this interpretation is that it doesn't involve the problematic notion of a nonsensical theory or ineffable truth. The nonsensical sentences of the book are not thought to bring to view any philosophical truths. They are merely meant to make manifest their own nonsensicalness and that of the apparent philosophical doctrines which find their expression in these sentences. Thus, the goal of Wittgenstein's book is to change the way its reader conceives of philosophy. It is designed to introduce a philosophical method or a program for philosophical clarification which consists in making apparent that and how philosophical sentences, which we are inclined to take as making sense, dissolve into nonsense upon closer examination. (I will call this method "elucidation-with-nonsense"). Conant explains the idea as follows: "The *Tractatus* seeks to bring its reader to the point where he can recognize sentences within the body of the work as nonsensical, not by means of a theory that legislates certain sentences out of the realm of sense, but rather by bringing more clearly into view for the reader the life with language he already leads—by harnessing the capacities for distinguishing sense from nonsense . . . implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language that the reader already possesses" (Conant 2002, pp. 423, 424). Thus, the

nonsensicalness of philosophical doctrines as well as of each individual sentence of the *Tractatus* is to be exposed by relying on the readers' non-theoretical or pre-theoretical understanding of what it makes sense to say (Conant 2002, pp. 423, 424).[11] In Conant's and Diamond's view, unlike Hacker's, the term "nonsense" in the *Tractatus* therefore is not a theoretical term whose content is determined by a theory of language articulated by Wittgenstein.

Relating to this, Conant and Diamond emphasize the piecemeal character of Wittgenstein's clarifications. What the *Tractatus* offers is not a general criterion of sense on the basis of which the nonsensicality of statements of a particular type may be determined in a wholesale manner. Rather, to determine whether a statement is nonsensical requires the investigation of what kind of use exactly is made of it or of the expressions that make up the statement. "On our view of the *Tractatus*, we are not supposed to derive from some theory of meaning (or from anything else) conditions of logical legitimacy of some sort, violation of which would put us into a position to infer nonsensicality or to infer that some word or words in a sentence lacked meaning" (Conant and Diamond 2004, p. 60). Diamond writes: "There is no once-and-for-all demonstration in the *Tractatus* that sentences of such-and-such sorts are nonsensical: the task of clarifying propositions is a one-by-one task." And: "Only the activity of philosophical clarification, or of attempting philosophical clarification, can reveal whether, in a particular case, there is or isn't something that we mean."[12]

Corresponding to their rejection of the view that the *Tractatus* articulates a theory, Conant and Diamond maintain that the book doesn't contain an argument. There is no argument the reader is, first, supposed to understand and be illuminated by, but which then collapses into nonsense, while—somehow—leaving the reader in an illuminated state, as if the collapse hadn't taken place. Instead, there is only the illusion of an argument (see Conant 2002, p. 422). Thus, the nonsensicalness of the *Tractatus* doesn't create a problem for Conant and Diamond, as it does for Hacker. Accordingly, given that Conant and Diamond don't take the book to contain an argument, they don't read the last remark of the *Tractatus*, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," as a *conclusion*. Rather, it is an invitation to philosophize in a certain way. The *Tractatus* puts forward a program for future philosophy, but this future doesn't start only *after* this book. It is meant to begin with the book itself, with the reader's response to it: with her beginning to philosophize in a novel way. This is then what the book is meant to *do* to its reader. It is meant to make her begin anew in philosophy.

This last observation provides us with yet another way of contrasting Conant's and Diamond's interpretation with Hacker's, it being characteristic of the latter that it emphasizes a distinction between philosophy as it is preached and as it is practiced in the *Tractatus*. According to Hacker, the *Tractatus* is the swansong of the old metaphysical philosophy. It promises something new, but doesn't yet exercise this new philosophy (Hacker 1986, pp. 12, 27, 156). Conant and Diamond, by contrast, read the *Tractatus* as exemplifying a new way of philosophizing: "His

aim, in writing that book, was to bring metaphysics to an end; and the method of clarification he thereby sought to practice, to achieve that end, was to be one that was itself free of all metaphysical commitments" (Conant and Diamond 2004, p. 84). More specifically, according to Conant, rather than laying down a theoretical foundation for a philosophical program, the book exemplifies or exhibits a program for philosophical clarification: "The *Tractatus* doesn't put forth a doctrine but only an example of an activity."[13] I will return below to this contrast between the interpretations which, spelled out in a different way, will be of importance to the interpretation I seek to articulate.

III. Hacker's Critique of Resolute Readings and Beyond

While having inspired many to study the *Tractatus* from a new point of view, Conant's and Diamond's reading has also raised vehement objections. Probably the most well-known of these is Hacker's critique in *The New Wittgenstein*, where he raises a number of objections against resolute readings (mainly Diamond's). In this essay I'll discuss only what seem to be the most serious objections, these being at the same time the ones relevant for the development of the interpretation I propose.[14]

A key difficulty for the resolute reading, Hacker argues, is that it leads to the loss of the philosophical insights into the logic of language Wittgenstein's book appears to contain.[15] In the light of the resolute reading, what should one think, for instance, about the insight apparently given expression in the book that logical constants in Frege's and Russell's sense do not represent, a conception which Wittgenstein characterizes as his fundamental idea (*Tractatus* 4.0312)? Does the book contain a critique of Frege's and/or Russell's views on logic? Does it seek to clarify what they get wrong, advancing positive views on logic such as the mentioned view regarding logical constants or the view of the propositions of logic as tautologies, rather than maximally general truths? To Hacker it seems that if the book is nonsense that doesn't hint at ineffable truths, then all such "hard won insights into the nature of logic" are lost (Hacker 2000, pp. 368, 369; 2001, pp. 123, 124; cf. p. 108). As he sums up his concern: "Throwing away the ladder is one thing, throwing away the baby together with the bathwater is another" (Hacker 2000, p. 369; 2001, p. 124).

But is it true that a resolute reading necessarily leads to throwing away the logical insights that the *Tractatus* seems to contain? Contrary to what Hacker suggests, it is not that resolute readers haven't discussed the *Tractatus*'s logical views, or recognized the need to deal with them.[16] Unless they are contradicting themselves, it must therefore be possible for them to address such issues, and a resolute reading doesn't make it necessary to deny that the *Tractatus* constitutes a contribution to (the philosophy of) logic. This leads us to the question: how are logical insights expressed in the *Tractatus*? How should one explain the possibility of logical views being expressed in a book whose author declares it to be nonsense?

We may begin addressing this issue by asking: does doing justice to the *Tractatus*'s logical insights require one to hold that Wittgenstein puts forward a *theory* (true/false theoretical assertions or claims) about logic, as Hacker maintains? That is, can one proceed from the acknowledgment that the *Tractatus* contains insights about logic to the assertion that: "The author of he *Tractatus* was explicitly committed to a host of claims about logic, language, thought, and the logical structure of the world, which cannot be stated in well-formed sentences, but are shown by them" (Hacker 2000, p. 383, n10; 2001, p. 104, n9). In other words, if one accepts that Wittgenstein's book contains insights about the logic of language, is one forced—and indeed justified—to consider these insights as the expression of ineffable truths and Wittgenstein as committed to claims that can't be stated? Crucially, if there are other ways to express philosophical insights besides making claims or theoretical assertions, as I will argue in the following section, then there is a gap in Hacker's argument against the resolute reading. His conclusion that the *Tractatus* must be seen as putting forward an ineffable doctrine doesn't follow. Furthermore, as explained in Section I, a theory-account seems to fare very poorly as an explanation of the book's communication of logical insights. This is a reason to doubt that the logical insights in the book must constitute a set of claims.

Similarly, contrary to what Hacker seems to assume, it doesn't in any obvious way follow from Wittgenstein's acknowledging that there is something that can't be said that there are ineffable *truths*. More specifically, it doesn't follow from there being something that propositions show but can't say that there are truths that can't be stated. To make this transition from there being something propositions show to there being ineffable truths is to treat showing as if it were an alternative vehicle for the expression of true thoughts, as Conant points out (Conant 2002, p. 421). But this is either to ignore Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing, or to make saying and showing collapse into each other, given his identification of what propositions say with what can be true or false (*Tractatus* 2.21, 4.021, 4.022). Here it is also notable that Wittgenstein himself makes no attempt to spell out a sense in which what propositions show would constitute a truth of some kind, philosophical or otherwise. Thus, just as it is an interpretational idea without any direct textual support that the *Tractatus*'s failure lies in it containing a paradox, so the view that what is shown is a kind of truth is not supported by any explicit textual evidence.

What about possible resolute ways of making room for logical insights in the *Tractatus*? From the point of view of resolute readings, Wittgenstein's logical clarifi-cations are, essentially, to be understood as aiming to *remind* the reader of something she already knows as a language user. What then needs to be worked out is how such reminders could be seen as leading to appropriate kinds of insights about the logic of language. For, even if the conception of clarifications as reminders is accepted, there are further questions concerning the more specific nature of such clarifications, for example concerning their relation to true/false theoretical statements.

A potential problem concerning the nature of reminders relates to the idea of their piecemeal character. Although I do regard Conant's and Diamond's recognition of the piecemeal nature of clarifications as very important, it doesn't seem to exhaust what Wittgenstein was trying to achieve in the *Tractatus*, or how he conceived philosophical clarification at this time (see Section V below). That is, the characterization of clarification as a piecemeal activity seems incomplete as an account of the *Tractatus*'s view of what logical clarification can achieve. This, I believe, is what makes it hard to see how one could resolutely respond to Hacker's challenge relating to the *Tractatus*'s logical insights. What is at stake is the generality of logical clarifications, the problem being that Conant's and Diamond's view of logical clarification as a case-by-case activity leaves it unclear how one could establish anything general about the logic of language or the logical role of expressions. General insights, of course, are what a logical theory would establish (although a nonsensical theory can't establish anything), and even if one accepts that piecemeal clarifications can offer some kind of logical insights, one might still worry about the generality that can be reached this way. This concern about how to explain the generality of the *Tractatus*'s logical insights might be seen as a way to rearticulate Hacker's worry about resolute readings.

More specifically, against the idea of clarification as a piecemeal activity one might object that, when Wittgenstein makes the point that logical connectives do not stand for anything, he is not merely concerned to point out, for example, that to construe "and" as a name in some particular proposition leads to logical difficulties or nonsense. Rather, his point is meant to apply universally to *all* instances of the use of an expression as conjunction. Whenever a sign plays the logical role of conjunction it is not functioning as a referring expression. Similarly, his point is that negation *never* adds anything to the sense of a sentence, i.e. negation never names anything and nothing in reality *ever* corresponds to the negation sign. And finally, in exactly the same way his conception of the general propositional form (that propositions are (re)presentations or pictures of states of affairs) seems intended to apply universally to *all* propositions. But, if one adopts this view, doesn't it make one's interpretation irrevocably irresolute; is one not here relapsing to ineffable truths about the nature of language? For, what could possibly back up the conception of a general form of propositions but a logical theory? (See Goldfarb 1997, p. 72.) To get clearer about this, and the problem about the generality of clarifications, it is useful to distinguish between different types of resolute readings with respect to what kind of guidelines or constraints they take Wittgenstein to lay down for logical analysis, or the related question of whether the early Wittgenstein assumed that there is something like a canonical concept-script: a notation that can be applied to clarify *any* logical unclarity, and which is, in this sense, "reflective of *the* logical order of thinking," as Floyd formulates it (Floyd 2007, p. 195; see also Floyd 2001).

Here one group of resolute readers, including Conant and Diamond, maintains that the *Tractatus*'s conception of logical analysis does ultimately assume there to

be a general propositional form shared by all propositions which is assumed in logical analysis. This conception of the logic of propositions guides logical analysis as a requirement of what completely analyzed propositions must be like. Diamond writes about the *Tractatus*: "What is metaphysical there is not the content of some belief but *the laying down of a requirement*, the requirement of logical analysis. . . . The metaphysics of the *Tractatus*—metaphysics not ironical and not cancelled—is in the requirements which are internal to the character of language as language, in [there] being a general form of sentence, in all sentences having this form" (Diamond 1991, p. 19).[17] This is also where Conant and Diamond take the *Tractatus*'s failure to lie: "there was an entire metaphysics of language embodied in his earlier method of clarification" (Conant and Diamond 2004, p. 84). More precisely, although it wasn't Wittgenstein's intention to put forward a theory of language, he did, nevertheless, do so unwittingly, relapsing to philosophical theorizing. As they write:

> Resolute readers hold that Wittgenstein, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, did not take the procedure of clarification, as he then conceived it, to depend on anything more than the logical capacities that are part of speaking and thinking. The activity of truth-functional analysis was taken by him not to depend on any theory of language put forward in the book; similarly with the use of translation into a "concept-script" in which logical equivocation was impossible. It is important here to distinguish between taking Wittgenstein to have unwittingly failed to have got free of metaphysical preconceptions (as resolute readers may) and taking him to have *intended* to put forward a metaphysical view (as standard readers do).
>
> *(Conant and Diamond 2004, p. 64)*

So, Conant and Diamond do attribute to Wittgenstein, in connection with their account of the *Tractatus*'s failure, a commitment to certain very general views about the logic and nature of language, although they don't think his *purpose* was to put forward a theory of language. The result of distinguishing in this way between Wittgenstein's intentions and his actual achievement is that the *Tractatus* no longer appears (in Goldfarb's words) to wear its inconsistency on its sleeve. Now Wittgenstein's mistake can be thought of as an expression of "'deep tensions' in the work" (Goldfarb 1997, p. 64; see note 7). His doctrine is contained in his views on philosophical clarification as logical analysis, a method that was supposed to take us beyond philosophical doctrines. As I've put it elsewhere, in the *Tractatus* "metaphysics dresses in the gown of methodology and takes refuge in the philosophical method Wittgenstein spells out" (Kuusela 2008, p. 65; cf. chapter 3).

Another group of resolute readers, however, denies any such commitment on Wittgenstein's part. Floyd proposes an interpretation from the point of view of which "the very idea of a canonical, *correct* concept-script . . . would be seen to be an idea Wittgenstein was trying to overcome in the *Tractatus*" (Floyd 2007, p. 195).

"As I see it Wittgenstein never insisted on, but instead resisted, the idea that thoughts must be imagined to be expressible, in principle, in a single universally applicable, logically fully perspicuous 'ideal' language" (Floyd 2007, pp. 199, 200). If so, then apparently Wittgenstein isn't to be read as committed to there being a general propositional form as a component part of the framework for logical analysis in a sense that makes this commitment ultimately a metaphysical one. Accordingly, resolute readers of the latter type must seek to explain the *Tractatus*'s failure in some other way, not in terms of Wittgenstein's unintended commitment to a theory of the nature of language. Read and Deans propose to call a reading that rejects the idea of a canonical notation "strong resolutism" (Read and Deans 2003, pp. 248, 249–250). I shall adopt this terminology, without, however, assuming further similarities in detail between, for example, Floyd's and Read and Dean's readings.[18]

Which type of a resolute reading should one endorse, if one were to adopt one? If clarification is *always* (in any form it might be practiced) a piecemeal activity, then strong resolutism seems more consistent. For it is unclear how offering piecemeal clarifications could ever commit Wittgenstein to such general views about language that Conant and Diamond attribute to him. This is a point where there appears to be a gap in their reading: Conant and Diamond attribute to Wittgenstein a general claim about the nature (logic) of language, but don't explain how clarification as he understands it could result in a commitment to such a claim. (Perhaps this shouldn't be characterized as merely a gap, but a tension between the way they describe the method employed in the *Tractatus* and its failure. I'll discuss this issue shortly in relation to Conant's writings.) Indeed, even though there seems to be very good evidence that the later Wittgenstein thought his early philosophy *was* committed to a tacit doctrine about language (see Conant and Diamond 2004, pp. 84, 96 n80; Kuusela 2008, chapter 3), this can't alone settle the matter. Such external evidence may indicate that the early Wittgenstein was committed to a doctrine about language. Nevertheless, an account *in terms of the text of the Tractatus is still required* to explain how exactly this commitment found its way into his philosophy. If it came in through a back door, where is that door? The lack of such an account is what I mean by the gap in Conant's and Diamond's interpretation.

Another way to explain the problem for the Conant–Diamond interpretation is by reference to Conant's account of the *Tractatus*'s method as elucidation-with-nonsense (as I proposed to call it above). For, given the way Conant characterizes the method employed by the *Tractatus*, it seems that he can't consistently ascribe to it a failure of the kind described in quotations from Conant and Diamond (2004). The problem is that the method of elucidation-with-nonsense, as described in "The Method of the *Tractatus*," seems to match Wittgenstein's aspiration to abandon philosophical theorizing so well as not to leave any room for a relapse to doctrines. That is, insofar as one takes Wittgenstein's purpose to be only to introduce a method of elucidation-with-nonsense through examples, i.e. one

understands him as engaged in an activity of clarifying why some philosophical thesis or another collapses into nonsense with the purpose of illustrating a method of clarification, there is no reason to ascribe to him any doctrinal commitments. To exemplify a method by showing how it works in particular cases is not yet to commit oneself to a doctrine about what philosophy must be or what language must be. For, a string of examples *need not* be understood as implying any doctrines about the necessary features of whatever is exemplified, even if philosophers traditionally tend to understand examples in this way: as illustrating an essence common to what the examples exemplify. Rather, one can only ascribe doctrinal commitments to Wittgenstein insofar as one interprets the role of his examples as being used for the purpose of setting up an allegedly universally applicable method of logical analysis that embodies a conception of *the* essence of propositions, i.e. a doctrine about the logic of language.

That is, if the *Tractatus* can be described as making a claim about what philosophy and its method *must* be, or what kind of form logical analysis *must always* take, then there are grounds for saying that it did fail to abandon philosophical doctrines. But to maintain that Wittgenstein makes such a claim is to see him as engaged in something more than mere elucidation-with-nonsense in Conant's sense. To see the *Tractatus* as (actually, unwittingly) committed to a doctrine about philosophical method is to see it as preaching a method, i.e. as engaged in a project of introducing an allegedly universally applicable method. This contrasts with an activity of merely practicing and exemplifying a method as an activity which can, in principle, be understood as leaving open the scope of the method's applicability. Hence, to ascribe to the *Tractatus* a failure in the form of a relapse to doctrines requires distinguishing between the method it practices and preaches, although preaching clearly can't be understood here as a matter of laying down the foundations for a method by putting forward an ineffable doctrine, as Hacker maintains (see end of Section II).

More specifically, my suggestion, as explained in the following section, is that we comprehend elucidation-with-nonsense (the method used *in* the *Tractatus*) as a method Wittgenstein employs to introduce a method of logical analysis that involves the use of a canonical concept-script and is intended to be universally applicable in the clarification of any logical unclarity. Here elucidation-with-nonsense emerges as an attempt to establish a philosophical method once and for all and in advance of the latter's employments in particular cases (see Section V). By explaining how Wittgenstein thinks such a method can be introduced without relying on any theoretical claims about language, and seemingly without any commitment to such claims, I hope to fill in the gap in Conant's and Diamond's account or to remove the tension. In this way I aim to open up a way for resolute readers to respond to the revised Hackerian challenge about the generality of logical insights in the *Tractatus*.[19]

IV. How to Respond to the Hackerian Challenge Without Assuming Ineffable Truths

How can one avoid ineffable truths while allowing for the possibility of giving expression to general logical insights, including the (ultimately problematic) insight about general form of propositions? Consider Floyd's suspicion about the possibility of such an account (Floyd 2007, p. 195):

> as Warren Goldfarb pointed out in 1995 (cf. his 1997), Diamond's initial Fregean picture of the *Tractatus* runs the risk of chickening out precisely in accounting for the notion of *analysis*. Logical distinctions would be ineffable yet in some way genuine if they could be shown in the workings of what could be conceived of as a correct or adequate concept-script.

This critical point directed at Diamond is helpful in trying to explain where I think a distinction needs to be drawn. Let us ask: is it correct to maintain, as the above criticism suggests and seems to require one to assume, that to take logical distinctions to be "in some way genuine" is to commit oneself to ineffable facts or truths, i.e. to chicken out? That is, does admitting the genuineness of logical distinctions necessarily mean falling back onto the view that there are ineffable truths or facts about logic? As the beginning of Section III illustrates, Hacker's interpretation takes the answer to these question to be affirmative, this constituting also the basis of his counter arguments against resolute readers.[20] More surprisingly, however, Floyd's and Goldfarb's feeling of the irresoluteness of Diamond's interpretation of the notion of logical analysis in Wittgenstein seems to reveal a similar traditionalist moment in their thinking about the *Tractatus* (see Goldfarb 1997, p. 72). For, insofar as the above criticism of Diamond rests on the mentioned traditionalist presupposition of the identification of genuine with the factual, then the traditional way of thinking has not entirely been left behind, and more work is required in order for us to arrive at a standpoint from which we can fully appreciate Wittgenstein's conception that in logic we are not dealing with truths or facts, ineffable or otherwise. We must be careful not to amalgamate genuineness and factuality: something being genuine (or real) is not always a matter of there being facts or truths about it, including ineffable truths. Rather, a logical distinction might be said to be genuine insofar as its recognition solves a philosophical or logical difficulty or difficulties, but one need not maintain that there are therefore some kinds of truths about it, or that we could speak of it as if about a fact or truth.

Wittgenstein appears to be wrestling with this difficulty in his notebook in the spring of 1915: "Is there a general propositional form? [New paragraph] Yes, if one understands thereby the sole 'logical constant'!" (Ms102, 85r / *Notebooks*, 45e). This quotation can apparently be interpreted in two ways: (1) as an example of the (early) early Wittgenstein's irresolutism or (2) as an expression of the kind of change in the mode of thinking that is required for liberating logic from the

shadow of factuality and truth. In the first sense his acknowledgment of the existence of the general propositional form would be an acknowledgment of a fact that is genuine or real though can't be stated. In the second sense his remarking that the general propositional form is a logical constant would outline a way of comprehending the notion of general propositional form that doesn't involve treating this form as a fact about propositions. I shall pursue the latter line of interpretation, trying to explain in this way how Wittgenstein seeks to redefine the status of logical clarifications as distinct from claims or assertions.

The gist of the interpretation is this. Rather than putting forward a theory or a doctrine about logic, or gesturing at ineffable truths, Wittgenstein's goal in the *Tractatus* is to introduce a particular logical notation, a concept-script—or at least an outline of (some central principles governing) such a notation. (The latter suffices for the purposes of my argument.) This notation, the principles of which the *Tractatus*'s purpose is to make understandable, is then the expression of the logical insights of the early Wittgenstein. This means that these logical insights don't find their expression in (paradoxically nonsensical) theoretical true/false assertions. Rather, they are embodied or built into the notation, whereby it is important that to be in possession of a notation—i.e. certain linguistic or logical tools—is not yet to make a statement (claim, assertion) about anything. For instance, by designing a notation of which it is characteristic that it treats propositions as (re)presentations of facts, i.e. introduces a variable or constant such as the *Tractatus*'s general propositional form, one is *not yet* making any kind of a claim about the nature of propositions. (I return to this issue in Section 5.) Wittgenstein comments on this conception of the expression of philosophical insights in the summer of 1929 (Ms105, 10, 12; continuation of Ms106 on even pages):[21]

> R[amsey] does not comprehend the value I place on a particular notation any more than the value I place on a particular word because he does not see that in it an entire way of looking at the object is expressed; the angle from which I now regard the thing. The notation is the last expression of a philosophical view.

Now, my purpose is not to try to base an interpretation of the *Tractatus* on a remark Wittgenstein makes on his philosophical practice some ten years after the completion of the book. Such support is inconclusive at best and methodologically questionable. Rather, the argument is that this conception of the expression of philosophical or logical insights or views seems able to solve the interpretational problems relating to the *Tractatus*, as described above. It allows one to maintain both that Wittgenstein tries to do something very different from putting forward a theory (theoretical assertions) and at the same time that the book gives expression to certain very general views about the logic of language. (Of course it is also interesting that the author of the *Tractatus* describes this view of the expression of philosophical insights as his own. Notably, there is no indication here that he had

just recently come by this view, and apparently he was still at this time committed to the idea that there is something like *the* correct concept-script (see discussion of the color-exclusion problem at the end of this section).) But in order to see how the above could offer a solution to the interpretational problem, we need to take a few steps back. I begin by relating my suggestion to what Conant, Diamond, Goldfarb, and others have written about related issues.

In explaining their interpretation, Conant and Diamond have made use of a similarity they perceive between Frege and Wittgenstein. Frege, they explain, uses nonsense, things that strictly speaking can't be said and are to be taken with a pinch of salt, for the purpose of the introduction of a logical notation or the principles governing it. As Conant puts it: "The aim of Fregean elucidation is to help us understand the principles of construction that underlie Frege's Begriffsschrift" (Conant 2002, p. 420; cf. Diamond 1991, p. 182). Diamond characterizes such introductory or explanatory remarks as transitional: "We are left after the transition with a logical notation that in a sense has to speak for itself. If we try afterwards to say why it is a good notation, we know that we shall find ourselves saying things which may help our listeners, but which we ourselves cannot regard as the expression of any true thought, speakable or unspeakable" (Diamond 1991, p. 183). Goldfarb sums up this conception, transposing it to the *Tractatus* as an explanation of the clarificatory role of nonsense (Goldfarb 1997, pp. 71, 72):

> An answer suggests itself along Fregean lines. For Frege . . . talk of categorical differences makes no sense; but the illusion of sense, or psychological images the words cause in us, are helpful in getting us to take up the proper language. The sentences are urging us to adopt the [B]egriffsschrift; once we do these remarks can be left behind. . . . So then, for Wittgenstein, we might say that his very detailed remarks serve as an urging to adopt his logical sign-system, a Wittgensteinian [B]egriffsschrift.

Nevertheless, Goldfarb concludes that he can't find a concept-script in the *Tractatus*. Even though we would now have a characterization of a strategy for the introduction of such a notation without making theoretical assertions, somewhat disappointingly Wittgenstein doesn't actually provide us with a concept-script. "Not only does [Wittgenstein] give us no [B]egriffsschrift, he gives us no instruction on how to look for one" (Goldfarb 1997, p. 72). Similarly also Ostrow: "But while it is unquestionable that the notion of canonical Begriffsschrift plays an important (if extremely unclear) role in the *Tractatus*, it is equally certain that Wittgenstein has not actually *provided* us with any such language" (Ostrow 2002, p. 9; the quotations from Floyd in the previous section express the same view). Interestingly, though, the view that Wittgenstein has not provided us with a notation is not universally shared. Russell, for example, appears to have no doubt in his Introduction to the *Tractatus* that it provides us with such a notation, calling it "Wittgenstein's theoretical logical language" (*Tractatus*, p. 16).[22] As for Conant

and Diamond, their position on this question is somewhat unclear (to me). I'm uncertain whether they would say that the *Tractatus* provides us with a concept-script or perhaps only with fragments of such a notation, or merely seeks to clarify the notion of such a script and its philosophical relevance.[23]

Goldfarb's and Ostrow's not being able to spot a concept-script in the *Tractatus*, however, might simply be a problem of their being unable to see what is too close and right in front of their eyes. Or that would be the case, if this suggestion is correct: what we should identify as Wittgenstein's concept-script (or the articulation of its central principles) is what his interpreters have been fond of calling his "picture theory of language", the idea of elementary propositions as pictures of facts that are concatenations of simple names, and complex propositions as the truth-functions of such propositions (see *Tractatus* 3.14, 3.21, 3.22, 4.0311, 5). Thus, the real significance of "the picture theory," according to the proposed interpretation, is that it constitutes a scheme for the logical analysis of propositions.[24] The idea of truth-functional analysis and the idea of analysis of propositions as pictures constitute, so to say, two levels or dimensions of analysis. Wittgenstein is offering, in this sense, a two-level scheme for the analysis of propositions. At the level of complex propositions a truth functional analysis is given which reveals the elementary propositions of which a complex proposition is composed. Such an analysis may then be complemented by an analysis at a sub-sentential level that brings to view the components of which elementary propositions are made up. (Wittgenstein's concept-script, therefore, can be used to clarify simultaneously both conceptual and propositional relations, just as Frege designed his concept-script to be able to do, in contrast to Boole's notation.) Thus, rather than putting forward a speculative theory of the nature of propositions, I suggest, Wittgenstein should be seen only as aiming or intending to outline a framework and a set of tools for logical analysis.[25]

As for the justification of the notation, the criterion of correctness of a concept-script is not, unlike one might perhaps be tempted to think rather naively, a matter of the notation corresponding to facts about language or the world, including ineffable facts shown by well-formed propositions.[26] The correctness of Wittgenstein's notation is not to be thought of in terms of the correctness of a doctrine in this sense. All such stories about correspondence are nonsense, and would involve a "from sideways on"[27] glimpse at the world or language. Rather, the correctness of the notation depends on its capability to dissolve logical and philosophical problems. Wittgenstein makes this point in the *Tractatus*: "we are in possession of the right logical conception, if only everything is all right in our symbolism" (*Tractatus* 4.1213). Accordingly, that "everything is all right in our symbolism," i.e. that the symbolism doesn't give rise to paradoxes and other difficulties, is the only logically legitimate ground for the reader's acceptance of Wittgenstein's concept-script.

In more concrete terms, a legitimate (partial) reason for accepting the notation as correct would be, for instance, the reader's recognition that by not treating the

negation-sign as a name (of a "logical object", a concept or a second-level function) the notation can dissolve certain problems with Frege's notation, or the reader's satisfaction that the *Tractatus*'s way to present logical inference in terms of truth-functional relations is sufficient to render such relations clear, *and so on*. Essentially, what is at stake is the reader's recognition of the dissolution of logical or philosophical problems on the basis of that very same non-theoretic linguistic capacity that allows her to recognize something as philosophically or logically problematic (e.g. paradoxical) in the first place. In this sense, Wittgenstein only needs to appeal, in introducing his concept-script, to what the reader already knows as a language user. This non-theoretical comprehension is the justificatory ground of Wittgenstein's notation.

If my suggestion is accepted, the issue of generality may be explained as follows. What it means for general logical insights, such as the insight that the negation-sign is not a name and that propositions are (re)presentations of states of affairs, to be embodied (to find their expression) in Wittgenstein's concept-script, is simply that this notation treats certain expressions as analyzable in certain (but not other) ways.[28] This is, briefly, a matter of there being certain rules of translation that govern the codification of expressions (signs with a use) into the concept-script, and that not just anything counts as such a translation. (Examples are the possible translations of the words "object" and "no" as they are typically used in English. There are certain limitations as to how these expressions can be rendered in Wittgenstein's concept-script. Neither can be translated as a name.)

Accordingly, simply by introducing its concept-script, the *Tractatus* is already clarifying the logic of language to its reader and imparting general insights into the logic of language. The imparting of such general insights then is, I suggest, the more specific purpose which Wittgenstein's transitional remarks (or his method of elucidation-with-nonsense) serve. They are not only meant to lead the reader to give up logical or philosophical theorising, whilst nothing 'positive' is offered in the place of such theories. Rather, the notation (or its outline) which Wittgenstein introduces is the expression of certain very general logical views—indeed, an expression that doesn't involve the confusion between internal and external properties that Wittgenstein says is characteristic of the philosophical tradition (see *Tractatus* 4.122 ff.).[29] With this explanation of the role of nonsense the gap in Conant and Diamond's interpretation seems closed (the tension dissolved), and an answer to the revised Hackerian challenge to resolute readers has been outlined.[30]

I conclude this section with a quick illustration of how the present interpretation can deflect Hacker's more specific criticisms of resolute readings, even though such criticisms might still be effective against strong resolutism—at least in some forms. (I'll come to the latter point shortly.) Hacker reminds us of the historical fact that Wittgenstein tried to correct the *Tractatus*'s views relating to the independence of elementary propositions upon his return to Cambridge in 1929 and in response to the so-called color-exclusion problem (Hacker 2000, pp. 377,

378; 2001, pp. 134, 135: the significance of the color-exclusion problem lies in it showing that the *Tractatus* doesn't get the inferential relations between propositions quite right, i.e. that elementary propositions can't be treated as independent of each other, unlike the truth-table mode of rewriting propositions assumes).[31] These attempts to correct the *Tractatus*'s views Hacker then presents as evidence for Wittgenstein not treating them as nonsense, and as supportive of the interpretation that he did put forward an ineffable doctrine. For why would Wittgenstein have tried to fix something that was meant to be mere nonsense from the start?

But in the light of the present interpretation it is easy to see that Hacker's argument isn't conclusive. Given the proposed reading, there is nothing surprising whatsoever in Wittgenstein having tried to correct his views about elementary propositions with respect to the color-exclusion problem. Only this is not to be seen as an attempt to correct a theory. It is an attempt to fix his notation. Why the color-exclusion problem is problematic for Wittgenstein is that it shows that not "everything is all right in our symbolism" but its design gives rise to logical difficulties. (Again nothing else but our normal linguistic capacities are relied on in our recognition of the problem.)

Nevertheless, Hacker's point seems to remain problematic for strong resolutists (or some of them, at least) who reject the idea that Wittgenstein wanted to put forward a canonical concept-script. For, if Wittgenstein wasn't putting forward a canonical notation, a matter of detail such as color-exclusion would apparently not constitute a significant problem for him. This is the case, for instance, if one understands the *Tractatus*'s concept-script merely as an object of comparison in the sense of the later Wittgenstein, as Read and Deans suggest (see Read and Deans in this volume). In the light of such an interpretation there would be no serious problem with the concept-script not capturing inferential relations in all detail, but the fact that the concept-script doesn't capture some such relations simply marks a point where the object of comparison loses its illuminating power. (That is, if the comparison is not meant to capture language exactly as it is and in every respect, then there is no problem with it not doing so.) Yet, as a matter of historical fact, Wittgenstein did treat the color-exclusion problem as a very serious one. The problem played a significant part in his coming to abandon his early views on logic, as related by Baker (see Baker 1988). Consequently, a difficulty remains for the strong resolutists to explain Wittgenstein's reaction to the problem, insofar as they wish their interpretation to be exegetically plausible.[32]

V. The Strictly-Correct-Method and the Method Employed in the *Tractatus*

At this point (I believe) I've almost reached my goal in this paper. I've explained how one can be resolute about the method employed in the *Tractatus* while simultaneously maintaining that Wittgenstein seeks to impart some very general views about the logic of language. In this final section I will connect the proposed

interpretation with the *Tractatus*'s notion of the strictly-correct-method and issues relating to the failure of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. Among other things, that back door through which metaphysics entered the *Tractatus* still needs to be explicitly marked. I start from what Wittgenstein calls "the only strictly correct method" and characterizes as follows (*Tractatus* 6.53):

> The correct method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then always when someone wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—but *this* would be the only strictly correct method.

The method described here is not the one employed in the *Tractatus*. The method used in the book involves speaking nonsense, as Wittgenstein explains in the next remark (*Tractatus* 6.54). In the light of this contrast, the interpretation I'm proposing can be explained as follows. The method adopted in the *Tractatus* involves the use of transitional nonsense as a means to introduce the strictly-correct-method. (Put in another way, the *Tractatus* employs the method of elucidation-with-nonsense to introduce the strictly-correct-method.) The strictly-correct-method, in turn, is the method of analysis in terms of Wittgenstein's concept-script, a key concern for Wittgenstein being the introduction of its principles. But what exactly does it mean to endorse the strictly-correct-method? This can be clarified by reference to Wittgenstein's apparent identification of what makes sense with the propositions of natural science in 6.53.

   As explained, it is characteristic of Wittgenstein's method of analysis that it treats linguistic expressions as ultimately analyzable into (re)presentation of states of affairs, or factual statements, identifying this class of statements with the propositions of the natural science (*Tractatus* 4.1, 4.11). Given this, it might then seem possible to characterize the class of sensible statements as identical with that of those of natural science. Importantly, however, such general pronouncements about what makes sense are merely, and at best, bits of transitional nonsense. (Such statements exemplify a not-strictly-correct method.) But the reason why such a characterization is nonsensical is not a consequence of a theoretical commitment on Wittgenstein's part, unlike the traditional reading suggest. Rather, the method he is introducing itself excludes such pronouncements, because analyses in terms of the concept-script, i.e. the translation of expressions into it, are always in principle a piecemeal affair. In order to know how statements (linguistic signs used in particular ways) are to be translated into the concept-script we need to pay attention to their use, not just to their surface-grammatical forms. Evidently, this should go also for the identification of a proposition as belonging to natural science. Thus, the remark about such propositions in 6.53 is empty; it doesn't identify *any*

proposition as sensible or nonsensical, even if we assume only the propositions of natural science will survive analysis. Now we are in a position to characterize the strictly-correct-method as follows.

Accepting Wittgenstein's concept-script as the correct tool of analysis (as a canonical notation) means at the same time accepting certain very general views about the essence and logic of language. (For example, that any sensible proposition can be revealed by analysis to be a (re)presentation of a state of affairs.) This is a "wholesale element" in what the *Tractatus* offers, pertaining to an idea about the form that logical analyses take. A methodological commitment of this kind, however, is, according to the present interpretation, the only thing one is expected to accept wholesale. That is, the only thing *not* decided piecemeal is that translatability into Wittgenstein's concept-script (or even more abstractly to some such canonical notation) should be the means of determining whether a statement makes sense. Whether one accepts this methodological idea, is a question about adopting or abandoning the *Tractatus*'s framework for analysis (or its conception of clarification as logical analysis in terms of some canonical notation).

My interpretation of the *Tractatus*'s failure connects it with the wholesale side of what it offers. (I take this suggestion to be in agreement with Conant and Diamond, despite the differences explained above.) Even though Wittgenstein wasn't supposed to be making a claim about language, but merely putting forward a notation, his commitment to a particular style of analysis, i.e. analysis in terms of a certain notation, does in effect commit him to a doctrine about language. For although one isn't committed to any doctrines about language by simply constructing a notation, to maintain that *all* logical unclarities can be settled through analysis in terms of a particular logical notation is to commit oneself to a thesis about language. This is then how a thesis about the essence of language sneaks into the *Tractatus*. The back door through which metaphysics enters Wittgenstein's early philosophy is his methodological commitment to analysis in terms of the concept-script introduced in the book (or some canonical notation). The back door is the assumption that there should be something like *the* correct method of philosophy, and the dogmatic imposition of a particular framework of analysis onto language as the one to be adopted.[33]

With regard to this, consider this comment on the *Tractatus* by Wittgenstein in 1931 (*Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, p. 184):

> In my book I still proceeded dogmatically. Such a procedure is legitimate only if it is a matter of capturing the features of the physiognomy, as it were, of what is only just discernible—and that is my excuse. I saw something from far away and in a very indefinite manner, and I wanted to elicit from it as much as possible. But a rehash of such theses is no longer justified. I once wrote, the only correct method of doing philosophy consists in not saying anything and leaving it to another person to make a claim. That is the method I now adhere to.

What he saw from far away and in a very indefinite manner was the logical distinction between making a statement and articulating a mode of presentation. Connected with this was an idea of the possibility of a novel kind of approach to philosophy that doesn't involve putting forward theses that treat logical necessity as if such necessities were facts about the objects of investigation. For, this is what the *Tractatus*'s framework for the analysis of language is: a mode of presenting language uses—indeed, a mode into which all sensible uses of language are assumed to be translatable. The indefiniteness of Wittgenstein's grasp of matters, on the other hand, consisted in that he didn't realize that to impose a mode of presentation onto the phenomena and to assume they all *must* fit it, comes to exactly the same as putting forward a philosophical thesis about the necessary characteristics of things. Thus, although he had grasped something very important that later on still informs his philosophical approach, in the end the *Tractatus* did relapse to theses. (For discussion, see Kuusela 2008.) Accordingly, to offer now (in 1931) some alternative notation or method as *the* updated canonical notation or method would be simply to rehash such a philosophical thesis.

But why does Wittgenstein say in 1931 that he now wishes to leave all claims to others and to stick to something he seems to connect with the *Tractatus*'s strictly-correct-method or at least the idea of not making any claims himself? If the strictly-correct-method introduced in the *Tractatus* is problematic in embodying a tacit thesis about language, how can Wittgenstein apparently endorse it at this later point? Or does he endorse it? Conant characterizes the not-strictly-correct-method as a "literary surrogate of the strictly correct method—one in which the text invites the reader alternately to adopt the roles played by each of the parties to the dialogue in the strictly correct method" (Conant 2002, p. 456, n131). Thus, rather than waiting for someone else to make a claim, Wittgenstein formulates his own claims "whose attractiveness we are asked both to feel and to round on" (Conant 2002, p. 456, n131). Although this might be correct, it isn't detailed enough to explain what Wittgenstein might think is wrong with making his own claims in the *Tractatus*. Indeed, as Conant characterizes this method, it is hard to see anything wrong with it (see Section III). Rather, the not-strictly-correct-method seems to emerge as an early employment of the method Wittgenstein characterizes later on (in 1947) by saying: "Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! Only don't fail to pay attention to your nonsense" (Ms134, 20 / *Culture and Value*, p. 64), a remark which Conant uses in his "The Method of the *Tractatus*" as a motto for a section on Frege's use of elucidatory nonsense (Conant 2002, p. 388). Let us look at this issue more closely.

I assume that some of the claims one might describe the *Tractatus* as making, and which the reader is invited to examine, concern the method of philosophy as logical analysis—even though the *Tractatus*'s claims might not be exhausted by such methodological statements.[34] Assuming this, the problem with the not-strictly-correct-method would then be, essentially, that it is an attempt to introduce a method before any particular problems that the method would be used to deal

with have *actually* been articulated or taken up for discussion. Rather, underlying the method is a conception of philosophical problems that is assumed to cover *all* philosophical problems there might be. (In accordance with this, the *Tractatus* offers only an extremely schematic characterization of philosophical problems as based on confusions relating to the modes of signification of our expressions in *Tractatus* 3.323–3.324; see Kuusela 2008, chapter 1.1 for discussion.) Thus, the problem with the not–strictly–correct–method, according to this suggestion, pertains to the wholesale aspect of the *Tractatus*. Part of Wittgenstein's thesis about the correct method of philosophy is a thesis about the nature of philosophical problems as confusions of a particular kind.

By contrast, to *not* make a claim is to wait until there is an actual philosophical claim made, an approach which allows one, in principle, to choose the appropriate method with such particular problems in view. The advantage is that this approach allows one to tailor methods to particular problems in a manner Wittgenstein later thinks necessary. "In philosophy it is not enough to learn in every case *what* is to be said about a subject, but also *how* one must speak about it. We are always having to begin by learning the method of tackling it" (*Remarks on Colour* §43). Now philosophy then is not characterized by anything like *the* correct method, but rather there are many methods of philosophy corresponding to differences between problems to be addressed (*Philosophical Investigations* §133). Accordingly, as Wittgenstein notes in 1932: "The task of philosophy (in my sense) is to point out *actual* mistakes" (Ms156a, 19v, 20r). If this is the thought (even if only in germ) that lies behind Wittgenstein's methodological statement from 1931 about waiting for the other to make a claim, then this statement expresses a principle Wittgenstein continued to adhere for the rest of his career. Accordingly, this interpretation allows us to say that although what Wittgenstein says in 1931 sounds like an avowal of adherence to the strictly-correct-method of the *Tractatus*, it isn't. Wittgenstein's methodological statement from 1931 takes us beyond what the early book proposed one should do.[35]

Consequently, it seems not correct to characterize the not-strictly-correct-method of the *Tractatus* by reference to the remark from 1947 that urges one not to be afraid to speak nonsense. The *Tractatus*'s not-strictly-correct-method could only be understood in the light of the 1947 remark insofar as its purpose would not be to introduce the (dogmatic) strictly-correct-method. But, I've argued, the purpose of Tractarian nonsense and Wittgenstein's not-strictly-correct-method is to introduce the strictly-correct-method. Thus, the not-strictly-correct-method is a method that involves a commitment to a doctrine of language and marks the early Wittgenstein's failure to abandon philosophical theses. To understand the (not-strictly-correct) method employed in the *Tractatus* in the light of the remark from 1947 is to read too much later Wittgenstein into the early work, and exegetically implausible and problematic.

VI. Concluding Remarks

From the point of view of considerations pertaining to the methodology of interpretation, it seems important to distinguish between two potentially conflicting motives or aspirations that an interpretation of the *Tractatus* may be informed by: (1) the aspiration to provide an exegetically faithful interpretation; (2) the aspiration to attribute to the *Tractatus* the philosophically most viable view. Apparently, given the principle of charity, any interpretation of a philosophical text should be informed by the latter aspiration. I've tried in this essay to give equal weight to the former aspiration which emerges as a constraint to the fulfilment of the latter one. Ultimately, this is why I reject the strong resolute reading,[36] even though it might be philosophically more viable than the mild resolute reading. For, while the strongly resolute Wittgenstein's method doesn't suffer from the same philosophical problems as that of the mildly resolute Wittgenstein (since the former doesn't involve a commitment to a canonical notation), the strong resolute reading seems to have difficulty in explaining Wittgenstein's later reactions to the *Tractatus*, and his later critique of the book. If so, it is exegetically problematic.

Regardless of whether these last considerations are correct, however, from the point of view of the methodology of interpretation, the important point is this. To the extent that it is true that the strong and mild resolute readings differ in their aspirations and motives (the former putting less emphasis on exegetical concerns—even though, of course, each scholar's contribution should be considered individually), then apparently disputes between the strong and mild resolutists should be seen in this light, i.e. as disputes where the concerns of the participants match only partially. Analogously, insofar as it is right to say that the philosophical viability of the *Tractatus* is not an important consideration for the traditional interpretation (to the extent that Hacker, for example, is not worried about attributing to Wittgenstein a straightforward inconsistency), then parallel considerations apply to disputes between the traditional and resolute readers. But the purpose of saying this is not to suggest that these debates are therefore either philosophically or exegetically uninteresting. Rather it is only that a clearer comprehension of what is at stake in the debates and what motivates particular interpretations might help to make the debates more calm, i.e. make them feel less like battles between warring parties. And this might be to the philosophical benefit of all.[37]

Notes

1 Another earlier remark seems to say much the same, though is perhaps different in tone: "To every truth that someone holds against me I must always say 'I have nothing against it! just analyse it thoroughly, then I must agree with you'" (Ms108, 136; comma added). References to Wittgenstein's manuscripts and typescripts are by the numbering system established by von Wright. See G.H. von Wright, *Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982. Whenever a remark occurs also in Wittgenstein's edited and translated works I provide a reference to them too. If no published translation exists, the translation is mine.

2 The traditional interpretation is also called the "ineffability" reading, owing to its assumption of a notion of ineffable philosophical truths. By way of contrast, resoluteness might be described as a commitment to remain resolute about the nonsensicality of nonsense and to reject the notion of ineffable truth. This is the minimal sense in which I understand resoluteness (in particular, when I use the term to characterize the interpretation proposed here).

3 Two principal forms of a metaphysical interpretation can be distinguished. A metaphysical interpretation in a narrower sense takes the essence of language to be determined by the essence of reality or the other way around. (So, there are two basic types of narrowly metaphysical interpretations: realistic and idealistic.) A metaphysical reading in a wider sense remains neutral with respect to the question whether reality determines the nature of language or language the nature of reality, i.e. whether any such relation of determination exists between reality and language. I shall use the term "metaphysical reading" in this wider sense. Why interpretations of this kind, besides the realist and idealist interpretations, are appropriately called "metaphysical" will become clearer later on.

4 See for example P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, hereafter "Hacker 1986," and "Was He Trying to Whistle It?," in A. Crary and R. Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*, London, Routledge, 2000, hereafter "Hacker 2000," reprinted with revisions in *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, hereafter "Hacker 2001." Other representatives of ineffability readings include G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, South Bend, Ind., St. Augustine's Press, 1971, hereafter Anscombe 1971; Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006; Norman Malcolm, *Nothing Is Hidden, Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, and P. Winch, ed., *A Religious Point of View*, London, Routledge, 1993; David Pears, *The False Prison*, vol. I, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987; and Bertrand Russell, Introduction to the *Tractatus*.

5 To spare the reader from having to look back and forth between dozens of notes, in the sections that follow I will place abbreviated source information of frequently cited papers in the text after an initial full citation of them in a note.

6 Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, hereafter "Diamond 1991," p. 181; Warren Goldfarb, "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*", *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 1997, vol. 22, hereafter "Goldfarb 1997," p. 64.

7 In my view, Goldfarb aptly captures the problem when he writes: "that incoherence lies very close to the surface; it is not a question of 'deep tensions' in the work. The *Tractatus*, understood irresolutely, wears its inconsistency on its sleeve; or better, it avoids outright inconsistency only by undercutting any genuine commitment to its basic doctrines" (1997, p. 64).

8 Later on Wittgenstein rejects the metaphor of climbing a ladder in philosophy (Ms109, 207, 208 / *Culture and Value*, p. 10). But he doesn't say the reason is (nor need it be taken to be) that the ladder entangles one in a paradox.

9 Besides Conant and Diamond who are the focus of my discussion in this essay, this reading is developed and supported by, for instance, Juliet Floyd, "The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism's in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in L.S. Rouner, ed., *Loneliness*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, "Number and Ascriptions of Number in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in J. Floyd, and S. Shieh, eds., *Future Pasts: The Analytic Tradition in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, hereafter "Floyd 2001," "Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible," in A. Crary, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life, Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2007, hereafter "Floyd 2007"; Warren Goldfarb (1997); Michael Kremer, "Contextualism and Holism in the Early Wittgenstein: From *ProtoTractatus* to *Tractatus*,"

Philosophical Topics, 1997, vol. 25:2, "The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense", *Noûs*, 2001, vol. 35:1; Denis McManus, *The Enchantment of Words: Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006; Matthew B. Ostrow, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: A Dialectical Interpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, hereafter "Ostrow 2002"; Rupert Read and Rob Deans, "'Nothing Is Shown': A 'Resolute' Reply to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe and Vilhauer," *Philosophical Investigations*, 2003, vol. 26:3, hereafter "Read and Deans 2003"; Thomas Ricketts, "Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," in H. Sluga and D. Stern, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, hereafter "Ricketts 1996"; Peter Winch, "Discussion of Malcolm's Essay," in P. Winch, ed., *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, London, Routledge, 1993.

10 James Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*," in E.H. Reck, ed., *From Frege to Wittgenstein, Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, hereafter, "Conant 2002," p. 421.

11 See also James Conant and Cora Diamond, "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan," in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss, eds., *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, London, Routledge, 2004, hereafter "Conant and Diamond 2004," pp. 64, 74.

12 Cora Diamond, "Saying and Showing: An Example from Anscombe," in B. Stocker, ed., *Post-Analytic Tractatus*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 165 and 166 respectively.

13 James Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder," *Yale Review*, 1991, vol. 79, hereafter "Conant 1991," p. 343.

14 Some of Hacker's critical points have already been implicitly answered in the description of the resolute reading above, for example the objection that a resolute reading must implicitly assume a general criterion of sense (Hacker 2000, pp. 361, 362; 2001, pp. 112, 113). It need not make this assumption, and could only do so on pain of inconsistency. (The same argument has been presented by others against Conant and Diamond and has been responded to by them in Conant and Diamond 2004.) Another objection to which I will not devote space here relates to Wittgenstein's statement in the *Tractatus*'s Preface that he takes thoughts expressed in it to be true. This as such can't be used in support of an ineffability view, unlike Hacker seems to think (Hacker 2000, p. 360; 2001, p. 109). The reason is that, if the truth we are talking about is not the truth of factual propositions, then the sense in which Wittgenstein might be talking about the truth of the thoughts expressed in the book remains unclear at this point, and any appeal to the notion of an ineffable truth as the basis of an argument begs relevant questions. I shall explain my interpretation of the notion to the correctness of logical clarifications in Section IV. Questions relating to evidence from Wittgenstein's later writings which form one aspect of Hacker's critique of resolute readings will be discussed later in Sections IV and V.

15 A way to formulate this worry would be to ask: if the *Tractatus* is merely nonsense how can one take it as having anything to do with logic and the philosophy of logic—any more than my shoes do? Although we know from the history of the composition of the book that Wittgenstein saw himself as dealing with problems in logic, this is not good enough to establish any philosophically significant connection between his book and the discipline of logic. If the book is mere nonsense, an account of the employment of nonsense in the book is required that connects his nonsensical sentences with issues in logic. Here Hacker's own explanation that apparently one can mean something by nonsense will clearly not do. To say "apparently" (cf. 1986, p. 26 quoted above) at this point is merely to wave hands in the air.

16 Goldfarb takes up this issue as a difficulty for resolute readers in his discussion of Diamond's *Realistic Spirit* (Goldfarb 1997, p. 72). For discussions of aspects of the *Tractatus*'s logical views from a resolute perspective, see Burt Dreben and Juliet Floyd, "Tautology: How Not to Use a Word," *Synthese*, 1991, vol. 81; Cora Diamond, "Truth

before Tarski: After Sluga, after Ricketts, after Geach, after Goldfarb, Hylton, Floyd, Van Heijenoort," in E.H. Reck, ed., *From Frege to Wittgenstein, Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, and "What Can You Do with the General Propositional Form" in José Zalabardo, ed., *Reading Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Oxford University Press (forthcoming); Michael Kremer, "Mathematics and Meaning in the *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Investigations*, 2002, vol. 25:3; Ricketts 1996. Although Marie McGinn doesn't call her interpretation a "resolute reading," but rather wishes to contrast it with that of Conant and Diamond, she offers a book-length non-ineffabilist discussion of the *Tractatus*'s views on logic. See Marie McGinn, *Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Logic and Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006. See also my review of her book in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, http://ndpr.nd.edu/.

17 The metaphysical commitment Diamond ascribes to Wittgenstein is a commitment in the wider sense of metaphysical distinguished in note 3. The commitment is appropriately characterized as metaphysical because requirements of the kind Diamond talks about involve the making of a claim about how things must be, as if (exceptionless logical) necessity was a feature of reality or the object of investigation (in this case language). For the notion of metaphysics and Wittgenstein's early and later attempts to break away from metaphysics, see Oskari Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2008, hereafter "Kuusela 2008," chapter 3.

18 Read and Deans contrast strong resolutism with weak resolutism. For more than one reason, I think a more appropriate contrast would be mild resolutism. I adopt this convention.

19 What will in the light of this interpretation still remain a characteristically piecemeal activity, as I will explain in Section V, is the analysis in terms of the concept-script. Clarifications by means of codification or translation of expressions into such a notation are inescapably piecemeal.

20 Hacker goes as far as to present it as evidence for Wittgenstein's commitment to ineffable truths that according to him something ineffable is expressed in a certain poem by Uhland (Hacker 2000, pp. 372, 373; 2001, pp. 128, 129). Not to pause to ask whether Wittgenstein might *not* have taken poems to be in the business of expressing truths strikes me as overly enthusiastic about the notion of an ineffable truth or Wittgenstein's commitment to it.

21 I'm grateful to Alois Pichler for the dating of this remark.

22 There are well-known problems with Russell's interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein doesn't think ordinary language is logically defective and doesn't seek to improve on it in the way Russell himself does and Russell assumes in the introduction. Rather, Wittgenstein's "theoretical logical language" is meant only to promote logical clarity (see *Tractatus* 3.325, 5.4633, 5.5563). But this means that Russell's mistake is a mistake about Wittgenstein's aims in constructing a logical notation. It doesn't follow that Russell is wrong about Wittgenstein being engaged in a broadly Leibnizian-Fregean-Russellian project of constructing such a notation.

23 A criterion of completeness for a concept-script (in contrast to something being only a fragment of such a script) would be this. A complete notation would be applicable to *any* task of logical analysis we might need to employ it in. It could be used to clarify any logical confusion we might come across. Thus, that something can't be given a satisfactory analysis in terms of a particular concept-script indicates that the script is either incomplete (doesn't cover certain kinds of uses of language) or misconstructed (doesn't render the modes of signification of some expressions right). (This kind of abstract notion of completeness Wittgenstein comes to reject later. See Kuusela 2008, pp. 67–69, 80–84.)

24 In accordance with this interpretational idea, I understand the class of statements used for the purpose of the introduction of Wittgenstein's notation very broadly. Spelled out

more fully, my suggestion about the role of the *Tractatus*'s nonsensical statements is that we should read what appear to be dogmatic statements constituting an ontology and a theory of language, as explaining or defining the principles of the notation. Thus, for instance, the beginning of the book is to be read as saying something like, "Seen from the point of view of the notation to be introduced, the world consists of facts not things." Why Wittgenstein doesn't actually express himself this way is explainable by reference to his ascribing to his notation a canonical status. For if he is correct and his concept-script correctly captures the logic of though and language, then there is no other point of view for anyone to adopt. Consequently, to talk about a point of view is redundant. Leaving aside certain complications, one might say that Wittgenstein is introducing logical or syntactical principles by talking in the material mode in Carnap's sense. See Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967. See Oskari Kuusela, "Carnap and the *Tratatus'* Philosophy of Logic" (forthcoming).

25 In addition, for example, the following are characteristics of Wittgenstein's concept-script. The word "object" ("thing" etc.) is expressed in it by a variable (*Tractatus* 4.1272). It doesn't treat the true and the false as objects or the negation sign as a name (*Tractatus* 4.431). The sign of identity is not a part of it (*Tractatus* 5.533, 5.534).

26 As regards the notion of showing, the concept-script is meant to reflect what propositions show in its design. It is constructed in such a way that it displays clearly the logical roles of expressions. But from this point of view, to comprehend what propositions show is not to be in possession of any kind of a truth. By adopting a certain notation that displays the logical roles of expressions in particular ways one is not yet making a true statement about anything or entertaining an ineffable truth.

27 For this expression, which originates with John McDowell, see Diamond 1991, p. 185.

28 Diamond discusses the *Tractatus*'s notion of general propositional form, in a forthcoming book chapter (which I received after the completion of this essay), depicting it as follows: "The g-variable is meant to play a role in the activity of philosophical clarification, in that it presents what is common to a use of signs, a common form that we are then able to recognize in our senseful speaking" (Diamond, forthcoming, section 7). This description of variables as a means of expressing generality captures a part of how I'd like to explain the expression of general logical insights in the *Tractatus*. While the introduction of variables constitutes one vehicle of the expression of general insights about logic, similarly also other notational devices may embody such insights, as exemplified by Wittgenstein's treatment of logical connectives.

29 For a discussion of the distinction between internal and external properties, see my "The Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy," in Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

30 An affinity between the present and traditional interpretations (by contrast to strong resolutism) is that according to both there is such a thing as *the* correct logical point of view for the early Wittgenstein. However, I reject the idea that Wittgenstein seeks to explain this point of view in terms of a (nonsensical) theory.

31 See Ms108, 31; Ms112, 126 vff.; Ts209, 34, and for discussion Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein, Frege, and the Vienna Circle*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, hereafter "Baker 1988."

32 Floyd seeks to avoid the problem that pertains to Read and Dean's interpretation through her attribution of the goal of the completeness of the rigorization of logic to Wittgenstein (private correspondence with Floyd; see Floyd 2007, pp. 206 ff., esp. pp. 210–211). Crucial for the success of Floyd's strategy is the interpretation of the notion of completeness in the *Tractatus*, which she proposes to understand in Hilbertian or Gödelian terms. This is crucial because, if, by contrast, one comprehends the completeness of a logical notation in terms of its ability to successfully clarify any logical unclarity we might come across—i.e. in clarificatory rather than mathematical terms,

so to speak—as I would do (see note 23 above), then a complete logical notation is essentially what Floyd calls a "canonical notation" (see quotations from Floyd in Section III). The reason why I propose to understand the notion of completeness in the latter terms is that this is how Wittgenstein himself speaks of (what he calls) the ideal of completeness in his later remarks that are plausibly interpreted as criticisms of the *Tractatus*'s conception of logical analysis. (See Ts220 §114 / *Zettel* §440, Ms142 §132 and Ms115, 50–52; for discussion of Wittgenstein's critique of his early notion of completeness, see Kuusela 2008, pp. 67–69.) No detailed discussion of this issue can be undertaken here.

33 Ultimately, this is problematic in the sense that it leads to problems with particular analyses in terms of Wittgenstein's concept-script, insofar as such analyses promote a false uniformity of our descriptions of language use. That is, although it might be possible to make significant amounts of language fit the kind of model for propositions and language use that the *Tractatus* puts forward, in effect this seems to lead to our overlooking logical distinctions and differences, consequently giving rise to philosophical difficulties. This can be characterized as a deeper sense in which the *Tractatus* fails as an attempt to spell out a correct method of clarification.

34 Recall my broad construal of the class such claims explained in note 24.

35 In one of his essays Conant says, with reference to *Tractatus* 6.53, that the *Tractatus* "condemns 'the strictly correct method'" on the grounds that this method would not be satisfying to the other (Conant 1991, p. 362). I do not regard this as a serious obstacle to the interpretation which I am suggesting according to which a key aspiration of the book is to introduce the strictly-correct-method. To look at the issue more closely, according to Wittgenstein, someone might not find the correct method satisfactory because "he would not have the feeling that we are teaching him philosophy" (*Tractatus* 6.53). But just as well as a condemnation of the correct method, this statement might be read as stating the extent to which, Wittgenstein thinks, the other (still) has to change in order to arrive at a correct philosophical point of view. Hence, the statement might be regarded as part of Wittgenstein's project of helping the other to reach clarity: it notes a difficulty that he expects people to feel with the strictly-correct-method of philosophy he seeks to introduce. Or it gives a measure of the distance between traditional philosophy and his approach, providing a criterion for what counts as having gone through the process of transforming one's outlook to correspond to that of the *Tractatus*.

36 I'm grateful to Simon Summers for discussions on the *Tractatus* that have helped me to see this.

37 I'm most grateful to John Collins, Tamara Dobler, Juliet Floyd, Peter Hacker, Marie McGinn, and Simon Summers for their comments on the essay, but am alone responsible for any remaining mistakes or misrepresentations of others' positions.

7

THE POSSIBILITY OF A RESOLUTELY RESOLUTE READING OF THE *TRACTATUS*

Rupert Read and Rob Deans

Introduction

Oskari Kuusela has done a great service in his paper in this book. For he has tried (and with we believe some success) to do what too few try to do: to read the warring parties in relation to the *Tractatus* with genuine charity. To figure out what they might have to offer, and how one of them might *lead* in some respects to another. This offers some real hope, in turn, of leading a way beyond "the *Tractatus* Wars."

Our ambition in the present paper, however, is rather different. It is to characterize, in the wake of some criticisms that have been made of anything like our version of the enterprise, how a "strong" or "severe" or "Jacobin" or "purely therapeutic"[1] resolute reading of the *Tractatus* may be possible. We wish to do this, precisely because of our concern, *directly symmetrical* with Kuusela's, to read the *Tractatus* with genuine charity. We believe that this has been done to date much too little, even by our fellow would-be resolute readers.

The perfect foil for this enterprise of ours therefore is Kuusela's deeply thoughtful and sympathetic piece. For we wish to rebut his charge that, for all its philosophical attractions, "strong resolutism" cannot in the end be accepted *as a reading*[2] of the *Tractatus*.

The *Begriffsschrift-begriff*

At the heart of Kuusela's "dialectical synthesis" of the interpretations of the *Tractatus* that he considers is this:

> Rather than putting forward a theory or a doctrine about logic, or gesturing at ineffable truths, Wittgenstein's goal in the *Tractatus* is to introduce a

particular logical notation, a concept–script—or at least an outline (some central principles governing) such a notation. . . . This notation, the principles of which the *Tractatus*'s purpose is to make understandable, is then the expression of the logical insights of the early Wittgenstein. This means that these logical insights don't find their expression in (paradoxically nonsensical) theoretical true/false assertions. Rather, they are embodied or built into the notation.[3]

By our lights, this remains (as do similar moments in some "mild" would-be resolute readers) likely to constitute in at least one key respect irresolute taking of the *Tractatus*. There is to begin with a risk every time that Kuusela uses, as he often does, terms such as "logical insights," "views," etc., with regard to the *Tractatus*. The risk is quite simply of "chickening out"—of backsliding into ineffabilism.[4]

More crucially and specifically, we are suspicious of the "embodiedness" idea, which again is likely to lead into tacitly picturing unsayable propositions or assertions as standing or hiding within the structures of the *Begriffsschrift*. As Kuusela himself allows: "[B]y designing a notation of which it is characteristic that it treats propositions as (re)presentations of facts . . . one is *not yet* making any kind of a claim about the nature of propositions" (p. 134; italics in the original) But then where is the embodiedness?

In the end, it all depends, we shall suggest, on how one takes the status of the *Begriffsschrift*. But: let us try to find the symbol in the sign. That is, let us consider what Kuusela might mean (might want to mean and succeed in meaning) by embodiment here, if he does not mean that Wittgenstein was trying to whistle it.

- One model might be something like this: "His love for her was manifest in what he did for her." (Or more generally, "Our practice expresses the concept ——.") This may be helpful. Love is nothing, we would concur, without such "embodiment." But nevertheless, there seems a disanalogy. For love can still be expressed, and felt. But it doesn't mean anything, to express the "logical insights" "embodied" in the *Begriffsschrift*.
- Inspired by Wittgenstein's brilliant later thinking about two meanings of "expression," we might look instead to a model like this: "Musical expression is not something that can be given or expressed independently of the very music in question." Does this help us understand what it might be for the *Begriffsschrift* as Kuusela would have it to embody logical insights? This is a more promising candidate (and we might helpfully compare here 4.011 and 4.014 f.); but the difficulty it leaves is that it would seem odd to talk of "musical insights" or any such as being "embodied" in the musical *expression* of a musical piece in this sense. Once again, then, this raises the underlying worry about what Kuusela is saying: how can he hope to talk about "logical insights" having enough pre-existence that they can then be "embodied," without his being irresolute?

- How about this, then, as another different model that might seem more hopeful: "Our hopes are embodied in him." Where he might be, for example, Napoleon Bonaparte, or Nelson Mandela, or whoever. This seems clearly to fail, *for our hopes can clearly be independently expressed*. Unless one moves to the kind of mysticism expressed by Bonaparte himself, when he famously remarked "I *am* the Revolution." Then the hopes might be able to be identified literally with him. (Similar maneuvers are possible with Jesus Christ, etc.) But it seems unlikely that this can be what Kuusela wants. For again pretty clearly this seems a form of ineffabilism. (God is a mystery.)

We are pessimistic, then, that Kuusela can successfully unpack the terms that he uses in the crucial quotation from him, above. We provisionally conclude that his remarks are nonsense, "embodying" a covert irresolution.

Kuusela proceeds immediately (p. 134) to cite the following remark of Wittgenstein's from 1929, in support of his would-be interpretation: "R[amsey] does not comprehend the value I place on a particular notation any more than the value I place on a particular word because he does not see that in it an entire way of looking at the object is expressed; the angle from which I now regard the thing. The notation is the last expression of a philosophical view."

But this somewhat equivocal passage certainly need not pose difficulties for our proposed reading of the *Tractatus*, according to which that work does not insist upon a canonical notation, not even in outline—*unless* one reads terms such as "view" here in a way in which we think it would be most unwise to read them (e.g. reading "view" as something more or less true or false, would-be fact-like). If, rather, one reads "view" here literally as "*way* of looking" (manner of looking), then this passage is harmless for us. Philosophers too often mean or read "view" as a synonym for "position" or "statement of belief" or "theory." We suggest that one reads it in this passage rather as it (we think) sounds here, as meaning *way of looking*. Thus: a notation can give us a way of looking. A way of looking at, for instance, a form of words that we want to use. An "angle" from which to look thereat. Kuusela proceeds to claim (p. 134) that his interpretation "allows one to maintain both that Wittgenstein tries to do something very different from putting forward a theory and at the same time that the book gives expression to certain very general views about the logic of language." *If* "view" here is taken to mean roughly "position" or "belief," then we categorically dispute this. Perhaps Kuusela does not want it to be taken thus. But then once more we are unsure what there is left for him to mean by this, unless he is to mean by it something like what *we* mean by "view," namely *way* of looking or seeing, not *position*, no matter of what kind.

Here is our way of seeing things (for which, we hope, further support emerges in the remainder of the present paper): one ought to think of the role of a/the *Begriffsschrift* in the *Tractatus* as roughly what Wittgenstein later calls "*an object of comparison*" (cf. *Philosophical Investigations* §§130–132). It is to be *placed beside* forms

of words that one has used or wants to use or has just heard others using. It may then shed light. Help one to see things aright. By similarity *and* by difference. One can look at a/the concept-script, and go back and forth between it and the form of words that is worrying one, and the concept-script's degree of "fit" with those words may tell one something helpful.[5]

So; for us, the *Begriffsschrift-begriff* is indeed *present* in the *Tractatus*. But it does *not* have the "canonical" status assigned to it by Kuusela. Rather, it is a therapeutic device. It offers a powerful option for *how* to do the job intimated in the closing sections of the book: attaining clarity for oneself (and, most often most helpfully, via another) about what one oneself wants to mean and can succeed in meaning by words.

The concept-script-concept could not possibly play the canonical role attributed to it by Kuusela and others. For where does its authority derive from? It cannot derive from the "argument" of the *Tractatus*, which is no argument at all and *proves* nothing. It can derive only from being actually accepted. That is, from being seen to be of use, when set beside our actual or would-be use of words and reflected upon. (That is, roughly: from being an object of comparison.)

It is true that a certain canonical status can of course be given to a concept-script by human practice. It's obviously the practice not the script considered in some narrow formalist sense that matters. And language-users or logicians can choose to regard some way of putting things as normal or even as compulsory.

But: the *justification* of the concept-script is the disappearance of logical/philosophical problems, e.g. contradictions. Their dissolution is something recognized on the basis of our linguistic capacity, which is pre-theoretical. At times, Kuusela seems to accept exactly this; but then we think that he must backtrack on what he also wishes to do: to ascribe a pivotal and determinative—canonical—position to the concept-script-concept in the *Tractatus*'s schema. To see it as "embodying" "logical insights." As somehow "expressing" them in a different way from how logicians have traditionally expressed them (in statements). He must accept rather that its role *is* in effect the role of what Wittgenstein later comes to call "objects of comparison." (*We* might, then, say this: the only "logical" insight that is "embodied" in any *Begriffsschrift* is whatever fruits it bears, its actual usefulness.)

For us, the possibility of a "strong" resolute reading is the possibility of being able to say that Wittgenstein's writing is through and through transitional (transitional back to the ordinary). It cannot stand and *dictate*[6] anything—including a concept-script—and *nor* can any concept-script that it eventuates in. *Our ordinary language* has to speak for itself. Language must look after itself; propositions must look after themselves.

Overcoming the Frame–Body Dualism

OK; but do we really want to say that the *frame* of the *Tractatus* too is through and through transitional? Doesn't the frame, at least, stand? Conant has argued that philosophy consists *essentially* of elucidations, but not *entirely* of elucidations. Mustn't we allow that the frame is more ordinary, and not elucidatory?

Consider, by way of response, this that we want to say:

> Wittgenstein remarks in the *Tractatus* that philosophy consists essentially of elucidations. Ergo, whatever is not an elucidation is inessential to a philosophical work. The frame is essential to the philosophical work done by the *Tractatus*. Ergo, the frame must consist of elucidations. . . .

Now, one might respond that this argument of ours is not sound, because the frame is not absolutely essential to the philosophical work done by the *Tractatus*. One could read the "body" of the text, and by a brilliant feat of imagination manage to figure out for oneself how to work it through, in a broadly "Kierkegaardian" fashion, etc. But, even if this is true (and it seems slightly far-fetched—even Kierkegaard had to write '*The point of view for my work as an author*', after all), it depends upon a strict separation of frame and body. Which is *just* what one finds slipping through one's fingers, unavailable, as one actually works on the *Tractatus*. That is the story of the last twenty years of Diamond's and Conant's work—the gradual "expansion" of the frame, the crucial allowance that what the frame *is* depends upon one's level of "dialectical" progress through the text (compare the latter parts of n.102 of Conant's piece in *TNW*; this is for us a relatively "strong" moment in Conant). The bloating of the frame is a sign of a degenerating research programme . . . unless one takes the radical way out of this recession, the way that we would intimate: and allows that, in principle, it can all be frame—or none of it be frame (it doesn't much matter which way one puts this). And then, whether something is being temporarily, transitionally held onto as frame (or not) depends upon one's progress through the text, depends *through and through* upon what moment in the dialectic one is at, at any given moment, depends upon what one is doing with the "prop" in question at the time.

Inasmuch as one can "never say for sure" that what one is handling is now and forever frame, then one has to admit the essential moral of the argument laid out above. The 'frame' too is open to being treated as elucidatory, and cannot be closed off definitively from being so treated. *This is enough to make a severist reading of the Tractatus (both) possible and (moreover) attractive*.

Let us reframe what we just said condensedly, for it is important: The separation of "frame" and "body" is just what one finds slipping through one's fingers as one continues to "work through" the *Tractatus*. The question must arise, and the text itself invites it, whether these remarks (those most often called "framing" remarks) are not themselves expressions of a desire to want to say something metaphysical,

something that will stand firm, but that actually stands in need of being overcome through elucidation. In *our* view, to hold (as "*mild*" resolute readers typically do) onto a strict separation of "frame" and "body" stymies the liberating potential of the dialectic at work within the *Tractatus*. That work, under such a strict methodological (metaphysical?!) maneuver, is prematurely halted. There is more that the *Tractatus* can elucidate if the reader has the will to continue to work with the text. We hold open the possibility that the *Tractatus* might be read as consisting *entirely* of elucidations, a possibility that Wittgenstein's words in fact hold open too.

Overcoming the Ladder

Given the above section, what then does the "strong" programme of resolutism make of the ladder?

This: it's a very strange sort of ladder that one is being invited to climb when what would count as a rung is systematically elusive and when its very existence turns out *to depend upon the person climbing it* and even then involves "rungs" that cannot be seen until actually climbed, and that shape-shift thereafter. And if the goal of climbing the ladder is to have overcome *all* philosophical propositions and attained *complete* clarity in our thinking—how would we ever know we had done that, or even what it means?[7]

Is Wittgenstein really holding this out as a genuine possibility, as something to be attained as opposed to something ultimately to be overcome? Does truly to throw away the ladder not also require that one overcomes the idea of the ladder, too—and the idea of reaching a place by means of it? . . . Is the problem just that we are trying to take the metaphor too literally or are pushing it beyond its application? Or perhaps is the very notion being questioned (implicitly, by Wittgenstein) that the logical structure of the propositions of our language and the inferential relations that exist between them can always be fully analyzed simply by using a notational device (a "concept-script"), such that we attain complete clarity as to their use and meaning?[8] Isn't Wittgenstein drawing our attention to the seductive allure of logical analysis and to its limitations? Our severe mono reading wants to explore just this and we think it is entirely warranted by the very dialectic that Wittgenstein evidently intends the reader to employ in reading the text.[9]

Climbing the ladder is then (a concept) itself in need of overcoming if one thinks that there is some linear and progressive dissolving of philosophical problems such that one eventually potentially attains a state of complete clarity. We submit that the suggestion that the reader can ascend the ladder to the point of finally dissolving all philosophical problems and attaining complete clarity in their thinking is a tempting picture and one to which we can become captive and which the *Tractatus* is an attempt to *free* us from. Wittgenstein's ladder then is a queer sort of ladder indeed. If it exists anywhere it is in a non-Euclidean (or, if you prefer,

Escherian) space, for it probably never ends—and if ascending it could ever be said to get its climbers anywhere it would only be to return them to where they had "begun," and for them then in a certain sense to know the place (the only place that could really have interested them anyway) for the first time. . . . However, if it has done its elucidatory work it "returns" them/one there with the realization that one is prone to confusion and needs to continually subject one's thoughts and words to scrutiny. This ultimately entails once more that no part of the *Tractatus* can be ring-fenced—one might see in some of its propositions a "frame" giving instructions as to how to read the "body" of the text, but as one climbs the ladder one eventually (if one keeps climbing) even calls this or them into question—*all* of its propositions are potentially to be overcome. Our severe mono-Wittgensteinianism reading of the *Tractatus* wants to take this possibility seriously—as a *possibility*, at least.

Overcoming the "Correct Method of Philosophy"

Kuusela writes (p. 140): "The back door through which metaphysics enters Wittgenstein's early philosophy is his methodological commitment to analysis in terms of the concept-script introduced in the book (or some canonical notation). The back door is the assumption that there should be something like the correct method of philosophy, and the dogmatic imposition of a particular framework of analysis onto language as the one to be adopted." Kuusela is very close to the mark here. It is true that it is in the general area of Wittgenstein's methodological commitments that he runs into problems in the *Tractatus*, as we enlarge upon below. But in terms of the specifics of this claim of Kuusela's: it should already be reasonably clear from what we wrote near the start of this paper how we would respond to this. For, if a concept-script is (roughly) an "object of comparison," then Wittgenstein can potentially quite escape this charge.

But now consider this quotation that Kuusela uses in support of his remarks here, from Wittgenstein in 1931, and that he (Kuusela) thinks poses a problem for a resolute reader who wishes to resist his interpretation:

> In my book I still proceeded dogmatically. Such a procedure is legitimate only if it is a matter of capturing the features of the physiognomy, as it were, of what is only just discernible—and that is my excuse. I saw something from far away and in a very indefinite manner, and I wanted to elicit from it as much as possible. But a rehash of such theses is no longer justified. I once wrote, the only correct method consists in not saying anything and leaving it to another person to make a claim. That is the method I now adhere to.

This is one of those moments in middle Wittgenstein where the right thing to say, we believe, is: here, *Wittgenstein himself is being insufficiently charitable toward his earlier self*.[10] (Hardly surprising, for a man always and notoriously fanatically hard on

himself.) For the method of the *Tractatus* involves self-conscious nonsense (*as does Wittgenstein's later method*—some of his *middle* period by contrast involves explorations which don't always amount to real progress, and which involve in some respects a *backsliding* from this method of Wittgenstein's two masterpieces: see below for development of this point). It is highly misleading to imply otherwise, as Wittgenstein himself does here.

Of course, talk of self-conscious nonsense will be helpful to a resolute reader only if one can convince one's interlocutor that nonsense really is nonsense. Irresolute readers tend tacitly or explicitly to rely on the presumption that nonsense is something(s). The resolute or New Wittgensteinian approach is to suggest that using nonsense *as a term of philosophical criticism* commits one to regarding nonsense as a "place-holder," i.e. as (a) nothing that masquerades as (a) something. "Nonsense" as a term of *criticism* does *not* commit one to thinking that nonsense has an essence, a positive existence: on the contrary.

But this means we need to move beyond thinking of nonsense as one kind of thing, as Diamond taught us to think. (One of the earliest resolute slogans was, "There's only one kind of nonsense.") Rather, we ought perhaps to think it is no kind of thing at all.

After all, the saying, that, logically, there is only one kind of nonsense, has to be recognized as *itself* a transitional, nonsensical remark. For it is of course directly analogous to the wonderful remark of Wittgenstein's (6.375) that "There is only logical necessity," the remark that Diamond uses as a *paradigm* of transitional nonsense, in her epochal (her canonical) "Throwing away the ladder."[11]

This is a prototypical illustration of what "strong" resolutism amounts to. *Allowing the natural continuation of the therapeutic method of the Tractatus, applied to any dogmas that appear to emerge from resolute attempts to orient readers toward the Tractatus—and to any metaphysical dogmas that appear to lurk hidden in the Tractatus's own commitments.*

Just how normative then is the "correct method in philosophy" of *Tractatus* 6.53? How universally applicable is it to dissolving "the problems of philosophy"? It does seem to dogmatically assert[12] that all philosophical problems can be straightforwardly dealt with by its application—by demonstrating to a speaker who wanted to say something metaphysical that there is equivocation and indeterminacy in their particular would-be use of signs as symbols. If this is just accepted without question then it might seem a short step to concluding that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein *is* after all making proposals for a concept script[13] that will enable the "correct method in philosophy" to be implemented and in making those proposals has made unwitting commitments of a theoretical nature as to what propositions *must* be and how a logical investigation *must* proceed and what its results *must* determine.[14]

We accept of course that at points in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is engaging with the logical systems of Frege and Russell and is doing so to highlight errors and inadequacies in their systems. But: is Wittgenstein as he does so a "normal" or a "revolutionary" scientist (to use Kuhn's terms)? Our view is: that he is categorically

a revolutionary figure, here. He is initiating a different game. We don't find a *full* sense of this, in Kuusela's piece.

Now, to be fair to Kuusela, it is quite true that the move away from the idea of logic as expressible in true statements is itself a revolutionary development in logic. For, once it is accomplished, there are no longer, e.g., proofs for logical systems. (If Wittgenstein's position was accepted by contemporary logicians a big part of logic would just disappear into thin air or be seen as "castles of air" (cf. *Philosophical Investigations* §118).) But: this alone would leave intact the idea that logic has results, that logic is stable, that what would previously have been called true logical statements are to be "expressed" *in another way* (i.e. in the concept–script, etc.). This is what Kuusela's Wittgenstein is committed to, in the degree and nature of his commitment to what we have called the *Begriffsschrift-begriff*; and from where we stand it seems to involve a covert ineffabilism.

In Wittgenstein's proto-concept script what could possibly constitute or "express" a "logical insight" that would amount to anything of the sort that crypto-ineffabilists want? For it's only in its actual application to a string of words or word-like signs that puzzle us that such a script begins to get any traction, but such traction is always parasitic upon parsing of sentences the meaning of which we are *already* agreed upon. As we have already made clear then, the "rules" that govern the concept–script's application *presuppose that we already understand the language*. In that crucial sense it shows us nothing we do not already know. And in so far as it "shows" "logical form", what sort of insight is that?—an empty husk waiting to be filled by application, a vacant place-holder that can say nothing, and "embodies" nothing about which anything can be said, no thing.

We believe that Wittgenstein is well aware of the metaphysical and theoretical requirements that underwrite some kind of Frege/Russell conception of logical analysis[15] and that the *Tractatus* is specifically designed such that we might over-come fully our attraction and attachment to such ways of thinking. He does this in a number of ways by showing that there is no universally applicable framework that ranges over all that we would call language and that within the "paradigm case" of the bi-polar fact-stating proposition not only is the determinate set of categorical distinctions introduced by Frege and Russell misleading, but any set of determinate categorical distinctions may be misleading, including his own.

The categorical distinctions introduced by Wittgenstein are not therefore to be considered as the formal terms of an ideal logical language or script, for no general and universally applicable framework is given in which such distinctions find a fixed use. The reader of the *Tractatus* has therefore to be aware of the potential for the use of what have been taken as determinate categorical distinctions to shift according to context[16] and of how this undermines the widespread belief that the piecemeal logical investigations that Wittgenstein is undertaking in the *Tractatus* are to be construed as forming part of a wider project of analyzing something that could usefully be called *the* logic of our language.[17]

It is our contention that Wittgenstein intends the reader of the *Tractatus* to come to realize that all of what we in our ordinary lives accept without difficulty as thinking cannot be fully *captured* nor be fully expressed by anything that we are likely to be content to call a logical calculus operating to precise rules, whether it be the logical systems of Frege or Russell, or even the notational devices that Wittgenstein himself introduces in the *Tractatus*.[18] What is more, he intends the reader of the *Tractatus* to come to realize that even with regard to the "paradigm case" of the bi-polar fact-stating proposition sense may well be indeterminate.[19] In neither case does Wittgenstein consider this to be a deficiency of our natural language about which we need worry.[20]

Wherefore then the "correct method in philosophy" in 6.53? *Does* it too need to be overcome? Potentially, yes—if one is inclined to think that (Wittgenstein thinks that) there actually is an ideal notational device that could fully capture and represent all the possibilities of linguistic expression and that only thinking which can be so captured and represented constitutes thought. Or if one thinks that a notational device could be used to characterize all philosophical confusions and is *the* normative means of dissolving them.[21] Perhaps if we were not creatures who were so deeply susceptible to delusion, then the correct method of philosophy for us would be simply what Wittgenstein describes in *Tractatus* 6.53. However, creatures who were not so susceptible would be very very different from us and would probably not have anything much like our language.[22] The utility of a notational device is in being able to help elucidate particular philosophical confusions; it is not necessarily the means to elucidate all philosophical confusions. *The* correct method spoken of in 6.53 is itself the manifestation of a philosophical impulse that needs to be overcome.[23]

Of course, nonsense can be determined by showing that as yet no determinate meaning has been given to all the signs in a proposition, but this is a very general way (and not the only way) of characterizing how nonsense arises.[24] The idea that a definition of nonsense can be given as 6.53 might suggest (not what it means—for it means nothing at all—but how it must arise) is again another manifestation of a philosophical impulse that needs to be overcome, as it implies that there are hidden necessities and possibilities that determine the limits of the application of signs. And in overcoming this temptation we come to realize that the determination of sense and nonsense is not in any way to be regarded as a philosophical problem requiring a technical solution, but is, in the main, determined quite adequately using our ordinary non-philosophical ways of speaking.

And isn't this implicitly suggested by Wittgenstein in 6.54 when he invites us to see the nonsensicality of the *Tractatus* not just in terms of the propositions that are used to elucidate particular philosophical problems, but also in terms of the nonsensicality of the very project undertaken in the *Tractatus* (of carrying out a logical investigation into the propositions of our language and the inferential relations between them), with its insistence as to what propositions *must* be in order to make such a logical investigation possible, its insistence as to how such a logical

investigation *must* proceed and its insistence that the results of such a logical investigation *must* provide a complete analysis of the logical structure of our language such that sense is *fully* determinate. . . . All this, we submit, is among (not, as Conant would have it, Wittgenstein's unwitting resource, but rather) Wittgenstein's topic and *target*, once the dialectic of the *Tractatus* becomes far enough advanced.

Wittgenstein's Unwitting Commitments in the *Tractatus*

What then on this severe mono-Wittgensteinian reading could possibly be wrong with the *Tractatus*? Have we left any room for Wittgenstein's subsequent criticism of this work? How are we to explain his evident later dissatisfaction with it (on those occasions when he was not himself uncharitably misinterpreting it)?

Our approach is to look for unwitting commitments that still enable the text to achieve its immediate purpose, but commitments that Wittgenstein later realized did not give him the focus and/or the multiplicity that he subsequently saw was necessary to achieve his therapeutic objectives.

In other words, it is not that the *Tractatus* fails to hit its intended target—it does and continues to do so. Because one finds what target it is aiming at by endless open-ended work within and from it. The *Tractatus* as a therapeutic work is a work that works with you to determine the target (within your own temptations etc.) that you are aiming at.

There is, as Kuusela says, for resolute readers such as ourselves and Floyd, no neat *set* of pre-existing stable philosophical problems. All such problems are piecemeal. As Kuusela writes, directly after considering briefly our approach, the effort to develop a "strong" or "severe" resolute reading (p. 131):

> Which type of a resolute reading should one endorse, if one were to adopt one? If clarification is *always* . . . a piecemeal activity, then strong resolutism seems more consistent. For it is unclear how offering piecemeal clarifications could ever commit Wittgenstein to such general views about language that Conant and Diamond attribute to him.

Naturally, we think this quite right. We are delighted that Kuusela recognizes here the risk of irresolution in mild mono-Wittgensteinianism. And for us, besides indexing the superb "strong" work on the *Tractatus* etc. of Juliet Floyd, it brings to mind nothing less than the rendition of Wittgenstein's *later* method that the later Gordon Baker, Kuusela's great teacher, fomented. We like this. As this:

> [I]f the *Tractatus* can be described as making a claim about what philosophy and its method *must* be, or what kind of form logical analysis *must* always take, then there are grounds for saying that it did fail to abandon philosophical doctrines.

For our line of thinking, "following" if you like Baker,[25] is precisely that the *Tractatus* does not undertake such absolutist commitments, about what philosophy and its method *must* be. As we shall explain shortly: while we do believe (as Kuusela does) that it is in the arena of philosophical method that there is a lacuna in the *Tractatus*, that lacuna is not to our minds of the form of a dogmatic (and thus covertly metaphysical) commitment to how method *must* be. (It is rather in the form simply of too narrow a vision and practice of method. That is very close to what Kuusela is saying, but still subtly different.) Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* explored some possibilities. That is all.

The problem with the *Tractatus* then, we might say, is fundamentally one of *expression*,[26] for it embodies a kind of commitment to *a particular way(s)* of doing philosophy. And here we are again not that far from Kuusela. This commitment, a commitment *methodological* in character, affected how philosophy conceived of as an elucidatory activity should be practiced. It is this (over–)idealization that lies at the heart of Wittgenstein's later dissatisfaction with the *Tractatus* as he came to realize that this approach did not give him the focus or the multiplicity he wanted—what the *Tractatus* was trying and mostly failed to achieve and what the *Philosophical Investigations* later did achieve: perspicuity as to the nature and use of particular sentences and of the functioning of many particular aspects of language.

Despite its innovative criticism of all metaphysics—of idealism as well as realism—and despite its concern to fundamentally question the nature of philosophical logic and to demonstrate the limitations of logical analysis, the *Tractatus* too readily falls prey to the methodological assumption that the sentences of our language and the confusions that our ways of speaking can generate are made perspicuous by a logical investigation into the proposition and the inferential relations that exist between them—the "paradigm case" being the bi–polar fact-stating proposition. (Yet even so, this is an entirely deflationary quest as the investigation undertaken by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* reveals that philosophical logic is not a maximal general science of the laws of truth with universal applicability and also that no complete analysis can be given of even the "paradigm case" of the bi–polar fact-stating proposition.) Moreover, whilst the logical investigation that Wittgenstein undertook in the *Tractatus* did recognize the importance of context of use in establishing the meaning of a proposition and therefore the need for careful sign–symbol correlation to ensure that there was no equivocation and indeterminacy in the use of the signs that made up a given proposition, the abstraction involved largely precluded the examination of how the particular contexts of use of our spoken sentences can mislead us and also how different kinds of language-use can also mislead us. (One can say that this is a matter of being held captive by a picture. But there is a grave danger of being "Whiggish," of being retrospectively unfair to what the *Tractatus* is committed to (assuming that its author is/was necessarily committed to a covert dogmatic metaphysical assumption about method), in asserting what Kuusela, following it seems moments in the middle and later Wittgenstein, asserts.)

Moreover: none of this is to say that the author of the *Tractatus* was *unaware* of these wider considerations, for he *does* consider the peculiarities raised by other forms of proposition and language use in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein not only introduces the general "classification" of propositions (uses) into sensical, senseless, and nonsensical, but also discusses for instance how different kinds of propositional "nets" can be used to describe the world scientifically, and the problematic nature of mathematical, aesthetical, and ethical propositions (or "propositions"). What Wittgenstein did not yet fully appreciate was the importance of paying *detailed particular attention* to these differences and more besides, to investigating how particular kinds of proposition and their particular contexts of use *in everyday life* contribute to their meaning and their philosophical treatment. By overly concentrating on the "paradigm case" of the bi-polar fact-stating proposition—even with a deflationary intent—Wittgenstein's treatment of other types of proposition is insufficiently developed.[27]

One can therefore see in Wittgenstein's post-*Tractatus* writings an increasing recognition that his initial treatment of the "paradigm case" of the bi-polar fact-stating proposition cannot express adequately the complexities of actual sentence-use and language-use and one can therefore also understand his continuing struggle with "the proposition" as he attempts to meet these difficulties. However, there is also a broadening and changing conception of just what language is and a corresponding and growing realization as to the unsuitability in certain respects and contexts of the method employed by the *Tractatus*.

Does this Tractarian idealization betray a metaphysical commitment? Does it have theoretical underpinnings? *No*, not in the sense that underlying it is a commitment to either realist or idealist metaphysics or indeed to *any* theoretical commitment as to "how language and thought *must* stand in relation to the world." Nor is there any metaphysical or theoretical commitment concerning logical analysis itself, in the sense of it being driven by any insistence or requirement as to what it *must* be, how it *must* proceed and what it *must* achieve. It is precisely such commitments that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* thoroughgoingly wants to expose as confused and to wean his reader from.

Whilst the *Tractatus* may not have achieved all that Wittgenstein hoped for, that does not mean that it has lost any ability it had to help one dissolve philosophical problems. Those who are at times (and this means all of us; or at least, for certain, all reading these words at this moment) puzzled by our apparent ability to think intelligibly and to use language meaningfully about the world, who want to understand just how it is that our thoughts and our words are able to represent (or misrepresent) the world in the way(s) that they do, who believe that there is a philosophical discovery waiting to be made and a philosophical explanation needing to be given, would still do well to engage with its text. However, the *Tractatus* does tend to ask too much of the reader by requiring that they work on their own self-reflexively with the text, leaving them to do too much by themselves. The way in which it expresses itself and the way in which it seeks to

elucidate philosophical problems are furthermore too prone to misunderstanding; and so as therapy it is often not very effective.

Some of Wittgenstein's methodological commitments and absences are then the key problem with the *Tractatus*. We do *not* agree with Conant and Kuusela that these are tantamount to tacit metaphysical commitments in the text that cause problems. All such seeming-commitments can be eliminated by this self-retooling machine (the *Tractatus*) working in tandem with a reflective reader. But there *are* methodological absences that later get filled in, and there are methodological commitments that prove to be insufficiently helpful. This is what leads later Wittgenstein sometimes to call his earlier self "dogmatic": but we believe that that term is quite often uncharitable. We see it as springing from an over-harsh self-criticism and from a backsliding away from taking sufficiently seriously the *Tractatus*'s willingness and indeed requirement for one to keep doing the work that needs doing in order to attain clarity, keep true to its vision of philosophy as an *activity*, keep from resting content with any reified conception of its subject-matter (and of itself). In short: later Wittgenstein did not keep in view enough what was already in play in early Wittgenstein under the umbrella of "throwing away the ladder" or "*das Überwinden*".

Let us explain, and summarize then what we actually *do* take to be the unwitting —strictly methodological and stylistic (not metaphysical) etc.—commitments of the *Tractatus*.[28]

Let us do so, by means first of indexing Conant's characterization of the burden on the mono-Wittgensteinian *vis-à-vis* needing to account for the point that ("Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism," in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life*, p. 41, bold added):

> critics of the resolute reading hold that a mere framing of the basic initial question [Does the bare existence of putative 'evidence' drawn from the later work suffice to show that the resolute approach to reading the *Tractatus* must be misguided?] (supplemented, of course, with textual exhibits that indicate that later Wittgenstein was concerned to criticize *something* in the *Tractatus*), in effect, clinches the debate. **This line of criticism can only have the sort of immediate bearing on the dispute that these critics imagine it does if resolute readers are obliged to hold, not only that the author of the early work aimed to prosecute a program of philosophical clarification that rested on no substantive philosophical doctrines, but also that he succeeded in that aim**.

But the latter claim surely *can't* be right, if the question against (some, at least) severe mono-Wittgensteinians is not to be *begged*. For, one *of course* has to admit that, *in an unprejudiced sense of the word "something*," Wittgenstein was concerned to criticize *something* in the *Tractatus*. But *Conant moves straight on to the substantive assumption that that "something" must be a "substantive philosophical doctrine" of some*

kind. But there are various other candidates for that "something." Here are some of those candidates (they overlap):

- That Later Wittgenstein was concerned to criticize *appearances* of doctrines raised by the *Tractatus* (i.e. things that look as if they are doctrines, even when they aren't necessarily, or aren't necessarily in the *Tractatus*, or aren't necessarily held onto in the (i.e. by the end of the) *Tractatus*), appearances which could too easily tempt or confuse.
- That Later Wittgenstein was concerned to criticize the (narrow) width of view in the *Tractatus* (i.e. not necessarily that the *Tractatus* was covertly committed to substantive doctrines, but that it simply left some question(s) inappropriately open, through saying virtually nothing about large swathes of (life and) language—this accounts for at least part of the issue raised for the *Tractatus* by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* §23, we would suggest).
- That Later Wittgenstein rejected the *style* of the *Tractatus* (this is of course a truism, in a way; but it seems to us that it actually goes quite a long way to accounting for those (*relatively*) rare) Later Wittgenstein remarks which are clearly and unprejudicially identifiable as straight criticisms of Early Wittgenstein), as itself often unhelpful or insufficiently therapeutic.
- That Later Wittgenstein rejected some aspects of the *method(s)* of Early Wittgenstein, as outlined above.
- That Later believed that the therapy practiced by Early was almost wholly *ineffective*, just pragmatically unsuccessful in being "understood" or picked up by people, and so was concerned to vary his approach systematically.

Various of Wittgenstein's famous Later remarks, such as the one that each remark in the *Tractatus* should really have been the title of a chapter, can we think be made sense of fairly easily along the lines we have just "sketched." Conant's text leaves no *room* for these possibilities at all. It is imperative—it is only fair—to avoid begging the question against "severists" such as ourselves in this way. We think that Wittgenstein's intention, for instance, to publish the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* together is thrown into a fairly clear light by the points we have just sketched—one cannot *assume* otherwise.

On top of these, there is also the more speculative but we think quite interesting argument gestured at earlier, that Read has previously made in print at a little greater length,[29] to the effect that some of Later's criticisms of the *Tractatus* are *off-target*: that Later sometimes read Early uncharitably, through his excessive hardness on himself, also through wishing to have something new and "uninfluenced" to "say"; that Later occasionally used Early as a "stalking horse" for stalking common and deep philosophical illusions that actually Early need not have been regarded as committed to; and so forth. . . . In short, one needs, crucially, to avoid repeating the mistake that Wittgenstein himself tends fairly consistently (almost throughout

his career) to make as an interpreter of his own work: uncharitable reading.[30] That is part of our purpose, in endeavoring to offer the outlines of what one might call a resolutely resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, a reading that stays true to 4.112, "Philosophy is not a theory but an activity" and to 4.0031, "All philosophy is 'Critique of language'."

Furthermore, there are other aspects of Wittgenstein's later practice which have different targets again—e.g. the criticisms made in *Philosophical Investigations* §§90–91 f. are we believe *not* directed at the *Tractatus* at *all*, but rather at the "backsliding" that Wittgenstein underwent in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as he sought for a sound way of putting his developing ideas. (Compare also the later Baker, who (we think rightly) thought that many of Later's apparent criticisms of Early are actually criticisms of various kind of "stock" or student-like figures, of more or less inchoate temptations that many of us including Wittgenstein (i.e. including Later Wittgenstein himself, quite contemporarily, at times) were exposed to or inclined toward.)

This is of course only a sketch. But it is a sketch that we believe can in future be filled in through a more in-depth project of reading Wittgenstein. Filling it in would amount to showing *what* Wittgenstein's dubious unwitting commitments were in the *Tractatus*, *how* they were not metaphysical, and *how* the residue of Wittgenstein's apparent later criticisms can be neutralized, such that we need not, as Kuusela does, say that Wittgenstein's seeming later criticisms of the *Tractatus* are a fatal blow to "strong" resolutism as a reading.

Severe Mono-Wittgensteinianism

The great advantage of severe mono-Wittgensteinianism—one might even rename it, now, as *austere* mono-Wittgensteinianism—as a reading is that it does not put any limit on the liberating potential of the dialectical process that the reader begins when engaging the text. It does not limit the philosophical problems that it treats, as if it were possible to have an overview of the text that is divorced from one's own involvement with it. The overcoming goes on and on; there's nowhere stable to stand and utter theses, no words that settle things.

For as a reading it proceeds (we proceed) on the basis that is not possible to know when the dialectic at work in the *Tractatus* is finally exhausted, such that therefore it remains (we remain) open to the possibility that the *Tractatus* can continue to reveal that and how the reader remains in the grip of confusions generated by other philosophical problems. (Philosophical progress is the movement *away* from illusions and delusions that continually settle in upon one, not a movement toward Truth. In this sense, it is quasi-evolutionary, and somewhat similar to Thomas Kuhn's picture of the development or progress of scientific knowledge.) Thus severe mono-Wittgensteinianism contends that it is never possible for readers to know or even rationally to believe that they have been completely cured (for all time) from the confusions that philosophical problems generate. The *Tractatus* just achieves what

it achieves according to the reader's willingness (and need) to keep on working with it. What then matters is what the reader does with the text (or what the text does to and with the reader). Consequently, it remains very possible to continue to use the *Tractatus* for therapeutic purposes. As and when it is appropriate to the philosophical problem at hand one can simply engage with its text *without apology or qualification.* (This is why in our recent philosophical work we sometimes use and interleave quotes or moments from early and later Wittgenstein interchangeably, without special pleading.) Severe mono-Wittgensteinianism does not therefore see the liberating potential of the *Tractatus* as in any way being limited by metaphysical or theoretical commitments, covert or otherwise, but only by its mode of expression: its style, its method, and its breadth of view.

According to Conant, severe mono-Wittgensteinianism overly minimizes the fundamental discontinuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy.[31] But there is a *fundamental* discontinuity only if one accepts the metaphysical and theoretical nature of the candidates he or others (such as Kuusela) put forward for consideration as unwitting commitments.[32] On our reading, as indicated above, the *Tractatus* is designed and meant to overcome even these. It is possible to reject the candidates that Conant and Kuusela put forward and, without seeking to minimize the discontinuity (or better, the progress) in Wittgenstein's philosophy, maintain that he had other unwitting commitments that were the source of his later criticism of himself. We too think that the "zealots"—if there really is such a category of resolute reader (a reader who thinks that there is nothing wrong with the *Tractatus*)—are quite wrong.

What is of more interest to us, once more, is how severe mono-Wittgensteinianism, in comparison and contrast to its mild cousin, enables you to move more easily from the mere exegesis of texts to the actual philosophical work of applying Wittgenstein to oneself and one's (the) world.[33] In our view severe mono-Wittgensteinianism returns one to the world, as Wittgenstein intended, and liberates one to use whatever may be useful in his corpus to deal with the philosophical problems that one might be confronting. *Resolute* "resolutism" is what philosophy *needs*.

Conclusion

We are in many respects close to Kuusela. Some may even find the difference between Kuusela's diagnosis (which is closely identified with Wittgenstein's own later diagnosis, of a hidden dogmatic-metaphysical commitment to the concept-script method) and our diagnosis (of an unduly narrow but purely methodological commitment that doesn't tie the author of the *Tractatus* down definitively) to be a distinction without a difference.

But there is still a difference. In his Conclusion, Kuusela writes the following (p. 143):

From the point of view of considerations pertaining to the methodology of interpretation, it seems important to distinguish between two potentially conflicting motivational bases or aspirations that an interpretation of the *Tractatus* may be informed by: (1) the aspiration to provide an exegetically faithful interpretation; (2) the aspiration to attribute to the *Tractatus* the philosophically most viable view. Apparently, given the principle of charity, any interpretation of a philosophical text should be informed by the latter aspiration. I've tried in this essay to give equal weight to the former aspiration which emerges as a constraint to the fulfillment of the latter one. Ultimately, this is why I reject the strong resolute reading, even though it might be philosophically more viable than the mild resolute reading. For, while the strongly resolute Wittgenstein's method doesn't suffer from the same problems as that of the mildly resolute Wittgenstein (since the former doesn't involve a commitment to a canonical notation), the strong resolute reading seems to have difficulty in explaining Wittgenstein's later reactions to the *Tractatus*, and his later critique of the book.

We hope to have done enough in the short space of this paper to have somewhat undermined this worry, and so to have outlined why we believe our reading potentially capable of both (1) and (2). We have thereby, we hope, securely and ongoingly established at least the possibility of a resolutely resolute reading.

But: if our reading turns out to be wrong—if it is too charitable, as Kuusela suspects, and as he has powerfully argued in his paper in this book and in his brilliant book—then in the end this is not that important. For what is more important is: to be on the path to doing philosophy aright. And that path is what "severism"—the resolute (as opposed to irresolute) application of "the resolute reading"—does for us. (2) trumps (1).[34] In the end, whether or *not* this was Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*—whether or not *he* was a resolute resolutist—it is where philosophy needs to go.[35] And that is where we want to be.[36]

Notes

1 See pp. 61–62 of Kuusela's *The Struggle Against Dogmatism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2008, for explication.

2 Although to avoid confusion we should make clear at the outset that, for "strong" readers (and, we would hope, for all resolute readers), there is and can be *no such thing as* a settled reading of the *Tractatus*, as there *is* (at least potentially) of many philosophical works. The *Tractatus* endlessly shape-shifts, flickers—that is its *point*. It is a therapeutic device, and could not possibly succeed if it issued in anything stable, and in particular in any set of propositions, no matter of what kind. Even something like 4.0312, which might seem something stable that the *Tractatus* wants to hold onto, is for us a ladder-statement. When it threatens to become a new orthodoxy, or a fulcrum or Archimedean point, we see the *Tractatus* as *working again* to "destabilize" it or "disembody" it. To resist its *reification* . . .

3 P. 16. Any talk of a "*fragment*" of the concept-script as being developed in the *Tractatus* risks of course being prejudicial, and in the end no less problematic than talk of a

canonical concept-script: because the term "fragment" apparently implies that it is or ought to be part of a greater whole.

4   There might seem an obvious counter-example to our point here in the *Tractatus*: 4.122 f., wherein it is said that we *can* talk in a certain sense about formal properties. Is this not a way of preserving a sense for talk of "logical insights," "views," etc. that Wittgenstein himself urges upon us? We believe not, for reasons that are made manifest in Denis McManus's brilliant detailed resolute treatment of these passages, in his *The Enchantment of Words*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006. See also Read's Review thereof in *Philosophy*, 2007, vol. 82, pp. 657–661.

5   Someone might retort to us: "But this was not the purpose that Wittgenstein envisaged for the concept-script!" We reply: You are begging the question. What you really mean is: This is not the purpose that *you* envisaged for the/a concept-script. And likewise not the purpose that Frege envisaged for it. And here one is put in mind of a lovely remark in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, a remark we believe Wittgenstein would already have been "up for," at the time of the *Tractatus* (p. 378; VII:16): "'But didn't the contradiction make Frege's logic useless for giving a foundation to arithmetic?' Yes, it did. But then, who said that it had to be useful for *this* purpose?" (italics added). For discussion, see Read's "Logicism and Anti-Logicism Are Equally Bankrupt and Unnecessary", in Rudolf Haller and Klaus Puhl, eds., *Wittgenstein and the future of philosophy*, *Proceedings of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society*, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 380–388.

   It will be countered against us now that by this point we are reading too much later Wittgenstein back into the *Tractatus*. And that we will face an impassable obstacle to making our interpretation plausible: for we will have somehow to neutralize the many remarks where later Wittgenstein criticizes early Wittgenstein for dogmatism, the remarks so impressively marshalled by Kuusela in his *The Struggle Against Dogmatism*. We address this objection in the section "Wittgenstein's Unwitting Commitments in the *Tractatus*," below.

6   For there's no dictating in logic. The introduction of the concept-script is already an act of clarification. Here, we share some important common ground with Kuusela— see p. 61 of *The Struggle Against Dogmatism*.

7   For explication, see Read's "The Real Philosophical Discovery," *Philosophical Investigations*, 1995, vol. 18:4, pp. 362–370.

8   Again, this has a direct bearing on the (problematic) commitments that we *would* want to attribute to Wittgenstein when writing the *Tractatus*: see below.

9   Cf. M.B. Ostrow, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: A Dialectical Interpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002. Ostrow's approach and reading is we believe fairly closely allied to ours; his is a genuinely dialectical *interpretation*, as opposed to merely a dialectical approach to the extant interpretations (as in Kuusela).

10 Does this commit us to saying to saying that Wittgenstein is *always* later uncharitable to the *Tractatus*, because he says the same thing in many different ways and many times? No; as we explain below, we think that Wittgenstein later rightly identified a number of crucial limitations to and unhelpful aspects of the *Tractatus*, even when one reads the *Tractatus* as charitably as one possibly can and allows it to continue to work on itself and upon its reader as much as possible. But as we shortly explain, we think that Wittgenstein was *often* later uncharitable in his diagnosis of the *Tractatus*'s failures. In this respect, we are in alliance with Erik Stenius (and, though to a more limited degree, with Anthony Kenny).

11 Most of Conant's alleged unwitting metaphysical commitments of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (see p. 85 of "Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism," in Alice Crary (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2007) are like this. Are we really expected to believe that Wittgenstein was unsubtle enough to believe, simply (unwittingly) to believe and not to overcome this

belief anywhere in or through the *Tractatus*, things such as "There is a general form of proposition and *all* propositions have this form," "A logically perspicuous notation is *the* essential tool of philosophical clarification," etc. Just *look* at these propositions. One good look at most of the items in this "Actual List" (of unwitting metaphysical commitments) that Conant proposes would I think be enough for the author of the *Tractatus* to spot the resemblance with 6.375, or to see (more generally) that any such commitment would be self-defeating or in need of overcoming. (And: contrast to the items on this list the nuanced presentation for example of 6.1232.)

12 Again, we would suggest that this apparent dogmatism should set alarm bells ringing – that there may be a metaphysical or theoretical underpinning to what is being said that is in need of being overcome, especially as the very method used in the *Tractatus* to make such an assertion ignores the "correct method." Given the creative complexity of the *Tractatus* it is difficult to accept that Wittgenstein just did not notice this apparent contradiction.

13 Cf. Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism* and of course his "The Dialectic of Interpretations" in this book. On our reading, this does not necessarily follow, because it is entirely possible to envisage proceeding *à la* 6.53 *without* any such *Begriffsschrift*. But we shall not pursue this point here.

14 Now, it might seem that Wittgenstein can only claim with any semblance of justification in the Preface that he's solved philosophical problems in their essentials if he has a universally applicable method, i.e. one that applies to any philosophical problem whatsoever. But everything depends here on one's reading of the Preface *in the light of the rest of the book*. We would therefore once more suggest a different reading. We would suggest if one is to take seriously that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is engaging in a form of elucidatory philosophy, then eventually one must question the apparent dogmatism of these remarks in the Preface. That is, we would suggest that this apparent dogmatism should set alarm bells ringing—that the reader should keep open the possibility that these thoughts might not turn out to be so unassailable and definitive after all. *This* ladder too may need to be overcome . . .

15 This is in effect the basis of the unwitting commitments that Conant ("Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism," pp85–86) attributes to Wittgenstein.

16 As much is admitted by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* 4.123 where he talks about the shifting use of the word "object," "property," and "relation." See McManus's sparkling analysis of this in *The Enchantment of Words*.

17 Cf. Floyd's powerful argument, in her "Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible," in A. Crary, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honour of Cora Diamond* , Cambridge, Mass.,: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 177–234.

18 However, in objecting to a particular conception of the correctness of philosophic logic, Wittgenstein is not of course entirely rejecting a utility of logical analysis in particular cases.

19 Thus not all of language is expressible as thought within a logical framework using categorical distinctions and not all thought that can be expressed within a logical framework is fully analyzable.

20 And, of course, this is directly contrary to what is "stated" in the *Tractatus*, but then it is the very nature of the *Tractatus* to call into question the certainties and necessities that it so boldly pronounces.

21 Cf. Floyd, "Wittgenstein and the Inexpressible." We continue (we hope) to be profoundly influenced by the ways in which Floyd continues to open up the text of the *Tractatus*, especially perhaps her insight that there can be "thinking without thoughts" that does not end up falling into a form of ineffabilism. Our debt to Floyd is and always has been therefore too deep to allow of referencing individual moments in her text as an adequate expression thereof. (This is *not* to try to say that she and we agree on everything; we don't. And we have our own way of expressing things, which coincides with hers only sometimes.)

22 See Read and Jon Cook, "Wittgenstein and Literary Language," in Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2010.

23 The primary means for elucidating philosophical problems remains our natural language and in this sense *it too* can be thought of, in a certain sense, as an object of comparison. By which we mean: we might say that, on our reading of early Wittgenstein, our natural language is itself already a concept-script. (*This idea* can in a certain sense be compared with—set alongside—particular forms of words.)

24 To think otherwise is to have a technical conception of what nonsense is and how it arises.

25 Though Baker himself unfortunately never came to have anything like this view of the *Tractatus*, and considered the "New" reading of it—as opposed to the later Wittgenstein—something of a waste of time. We regard this as unfortunate principally because, like all resolute readers, we think that one will struggle to understand what was greatest and new in later Wittgenstein, what therapeutic philosophy is all about, if one doesn't understand how far Wittgenstein had already got in the *Tractatus*.

26 Cf. his remark, "My difficulty is only an—enormous—difficulty of expression." From the *Notebooks 1914–16*; March 18, 1915.

27 Just how the *Tractatus* tries to make these different kinds of propositions perspicuous is both overambitious and ineffective as more subtle methods of investigation are necessary that recognize the full extent of the linguistic diversity of these propositions. What Wittgenstein sought to do as a logical investigation in the end must become a grammatical investigation using particular cases in order to achieve his therapeutic aim. In short: a richer diet is needed, and a slower digestion. But: all that development can be seen as nothing more (nor less) than an unfolding and detailed respecification of the task begun in the *Tractatus* by means of the differentiation of a bunch of systemically different cases. (We think that insufficient attention for instance has been paid to the "net" concept near the end of the *Tractatus*, which can be read as anticipating Popper and Kuhn.)

28 Borrowing loosely from John Rawls, one might say that to do justice to the *Tractatus* is to try out seriously the slogan: The *Tractatus* as having commitments—Methodological, not Metaphysical.

29 See especially the last footnote of Read's paper, "Is Forgiveness Possible? The Cases of Thoreau and Rushdie (on)(Writing) the Unforgivable," *Reason Papers*, Fall 1996, vol. 21, pp. 15–35; see also Read's "Book Review: D. Stern's *Wittgenstein: Mind and Language*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1997, vol. 35:1, p. 151.

30 What if one of the first people to be inclined at times and in some respects to read the *Tractatus* standardly, as opposed to resolutely, were . . . Wittgenstein himself? Middle (and perhaps also later) Wittgenstein errs, in never speaking of "the ladder," of *das Überwinden*, etc. One cannot *trust* middle and later Wittgenstein on early Wittgenstein. Where later Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* I.§§89–116 is criticizing the *Tractatus* (and most of the time, we believe that his target of criticism is rather middle Wittgenstein, or certain self-consciously questionable ways of taking early Wittgenstein, or a stock figure, or simply himself and inclinations he still has), he typically fails to take charitably into account the full resources that the *Tractatus* has at its disposal.

31 Conant, "Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism."

32 To be fair to Kuusela: he probably wouldn't speak of *discontinuity* here. For if one (i.e. Wittgenstein) tries to achieve something and in the process (at least at first) fails then that doesn't mean that the attempts to achieve that thing are discontinuous. A goal unites them. *Our* inclination, extrapolating from Kremer, is to see the closest thing to a break or discontinuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy as being between the *Proto-Tractatus* and the *Tractatus*.

33 Cf. e.g. R. Read, *Applying Wittgenstein*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007. We severists, we relatively *austere* mono-Wittgensteinians, find mild-

mono-Wittgenstein's early work philosophically too disappointing, unworthy of this great philosophical mind. See e.g. note 7 above.

34 And this of course is the most effective way, ultimately, beyond the "*Tractatus* Wars". To acknowledge that in the end it matters very little what one wise or clever man wrote or thought. What matters is what one takes to be philosophically right, and how one goes on.

35 If it wasn't what he said and meant (as we believe it was), then it is what he *ought* to have said. If it wasn't his point of view as and for his work as the implied author of the *Tractatus*, then it is at least ours now.

36 Many thanks to all those who have helped us get this far—you know who you are. And especially to Oskari Kuusela, for deeply helpful comments and generous discussion on a previous draft of this paper.

8

SYNTHESIZING WITHOUT CONCEPTS

Peter Sullivan

This paper continues a discussion that Adrian Moore and I have had[1] about the place of idealism in Wittgenstein's philosophy. While there are several unresolved issues in that discussion I want here to pursue only one; and, to minimize the risk of repetition, I will shift the primary focus of discussion from Wittgenstein's earlier to his later thought. I will, though, have to say something first to identify the point I have in mind from the earlier discussion, and second to indicate how the later issue corresponds to it. I'm afraid that will make for a longer than normal introduction.

I. General Background

The possibility of disagreement exists, according to Wittgenstein, only against a background of agreement, and that is certainly the case here. Moore and I share a view of Wittgenstein's work as belonging to the Kantian, transcendental tradition; we are in agreement that the central requirement for a proper understanding of his thought is to make plain how it relates to the core ideas of that tradition, and in particular to transcendental idealism. But on just that issue we have disagreed. Suppressing niceties, and settling for what Adrian himself has called a "cartoon sketch," Moore has held that in his early work Wittgenstein embraces transcendental idealism, while his later thought offers us ways of resisting it; whereas I have held exactly the reverse.

The easiest diagnosis of that would be to suppose that we understand the issue differently, but I don't think that's so. In both his early and his later work Wittgenstein is concerned with understanding the limits of thought. By the notion of a *limit* here is meant something set by, so essentially equivalent to, the essential nature or form of what it limits. It is the notion used when one says that a space

is limited by its geometry (to take Wittgenstein's favourite analogy from the *Tractatus*). This notion of a limit is not a contrastive one. There is nothing thought-like excluded by the limits of thought for lacking thought's essential nature, just as there are no points excluded from space for being contra–geometrical. But thinking in general is contrastive: in general, that is, thinking something to be the case is thinking it to be the case rather than not. That is the broadest reason, if only the initial reason, why thought about limits is apt to portray them instead as *limitations*, boundaries that separate what has a certain nature from what does not. Moore and I are agreed that the crucial step in embracing or resisting idealism consists in succumbing to or resisting the construal of limits as limitations. This step is not enough on its own. Descartes construed the limits both of thought and of possibility as limitations, and he was no idealist. But having accepted that construal he did have to offer some account of how the limitations came to be what they are, and in particular of how the limits of thought and of possibility should so happily coincide. Kant mocked the explanation Descartes offered.[2] And in this Wittgenstein was always with Kant: *if* there had to be any account of such things, then an idealist account was the only contender he could take seriously.

This is all common ground between Moore and me. And we further agree that Wittgenstein aimed, in both his early and his later work, at exposing the emptiness, or sheer senselessness, of any account one might be tempted to offer of these matters, hence the confusion there must have been in getting into the position of needing one. Our difference begins over whether the construal of limits as limitations only ever plays this negative role in Wittgenstein's thought, or whether, at some other level, he embraces it, as contributing positively to whatever understanding working through his propositions is intended to induce.

II. The "Inner" Limit in the *Tractatus*

In a forthcoming paper[3] Moore focuses this difference on what I tend to picture as the "inner" limit of language, the limit one runs up against in trying to articulate what some thought or statement amounts to. This is the limit of which Wittgenstein said, in *Culture and Value*, that it "is shown by its being impossible to describe the fact which corresponds to . . . a sentence, without simply repeating the sentence"; and he went on to remark about it, "This has to do with the Kantian solution to the problem of philosophy."[4] That is a typically unhelpful remark. Moore and I agree that it has *somehow* to do with that; it might have helped resolve the issue between us if Wittgenstein had said *how*.

In Wittgenstein's early work this limit is reached in elementary propositions that present objects in immediate combination. In articulating what it is for things to be as such a proposition represents them as being, one can do no better, or no other, than to repeat it. But surely we want more than that. Our aim is to articulate our understanding of what it is for things to be as we represent them as being, and this includes our understanding that it is for *these* things to be that way. In merely

repeating the proposition we of course exploit that understanding, but we do nothing to articulate it. To achieve that we should have to say, not just *how* these objects are, but *what* they are. And this we cannot do.

> Objects I can only name . . . I can only speak *of* them. I cannot *express* them.[5]

Now Moore is certainly right to hold, in his remarks on this passage, that Wittgenstein deliberately conjures up here the sense of a real and intelligible aspiration that is necessarily frustrated. (Wittgenstein's prose is so expressive that one would have to be deaf not to recognize this.) That Moore is also right in his suggestion that Wittgenstein has "something Kantian" in mind in doing this is proved by the uncharacteristic intrusion of Kantian terminology when the same limit is revisited later in the book: "Empirical reality is limited by the totality of objects."[6] But I think he underestimates (he does not in fact mention) the role that Wittgenstein's doctrine of analysis is intended to have in dissolving this sense. This doctrine says to the aspiration alluded to, "Go ahead. Put into words whatever it is you think you want to articulate. There is no restriction here, no limitation, only the analytic triviality that, in whatever you say in doing that, you will speak of some things not thereby articulated. And those are objects."

On Moore's account the sense of a limitation here reflects our understanding of ourselves as finite, discursive thinkers, who must come to terms with reality by conceptualizing it, but cannot in that way fully possess it. This understanding *survives through* the realization that the aspiration to which it gives rise is confused, so that the expression of *that* recognition, in the statement that reality consists only in what we can thus possess—or more familiarly, that the world is the totality of facts, not of things—itself has to be heard as imposing a limitation. The effect of the doctrine of analysis, though, is to recast objects, from the presumed role of things we have to make sense of, to become elements in the sense we make. (The simplicity of objects, or the unanalyzability of names, then no longer signals some kind of surd restriction to conceptual thought, but instead is a mark of its transparency.)

But I do not expect those few remarks to persuade. At points like this that my difference with Moore has tended to become horribly intractable. And it's for that reason that I want to focus instead on the corresponding issue in Wittgenstein's later work, where, I think, our disagreement is much more straightforward.

III. The "Inner" Limit in the *Investigations*

We run up against the same inner limit of language in Wittgenstein's later work with the question, "How am I able to follow a rule?"[7] The issue is the same, since to offer a "justification for my following the rule as I do"[8] is to represent what I do as being what the rule requires. Wittgenstein has in mind particularly an articulation of my action as implementing some algorithm or procedure for

applying the rule. Justifications of that kind are often available. But, as he says, they soon run out.[9] When they run out the best I can offer is simply to repeat, in description of my action, the description the rule itself offers of what it requires: you asked me to bring a *red* flower, and the flower I have brought is *red*.

At any rate, that is what we might expect Wittgenstein to say, if the limit now reached is the limit mentioned in *Culture and Value*, and if it is genuinely a limit rather than a limitation. But it is not what he says. Instead we find,

> How do I know that this colour is red?—It would be an answer to say: "I have learnt English,"[10]

or worse,

> Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do."[11]

Of course, neither of these responses is a justification. Instead, they are allusions to all that could be found in the place where further justification might be sought. But if what we have reached is properly a limit, there is simply no such place, and only confusion can come from alluding to what is found there.

A "cartoon sketch" of my view of Wittgenstein's later work is that this confusion is exactly what we find. Even to colour the sketch crudely I need to go back to the way the contrast of limits and limitations was introduced. I said, for instance, that there is nothing *thought-like* excluded by the limits of thought, or that there are no contra–geometrical *points*. The idea is not that limits exclude nothing at all, but that they exclude nothing of an appropriate kind, nothing that *would* qualify for inclusion if only it satisfied the condition the limit specifies. Here, too, if what we have met is a limit it excludes nothing of an appropriate kind, nothing that could further articulate or illuminate the rationality of my following the rule as I do. That is not to say that there are not lots of other true, and perhaps even interesting, things to say about how I am able to do that, for instance, about how I am such as to be able to learn English, or even how there could come to be any such thing as English for me to learn. Mention of shared reactions and whirls of organism and so on might be relevant in those connections. Excluding these things doesn't turn the limit we are concerned with into a limitation unless they are taken to be of an appropriate kind, unless reflection on them is held to illuminate the rationality of my following the rule as I do. But that, I think, is how Wittgenstein, at least some of the time, does take them. His attempt to dismantle Platonism is altogether ineffective unless they can be taken that way. And the consequent construal of this limit as a limitation must be intended to contribute positively to the understanding his discussion induces, if freedom from the alleged "mythology" of Platonism is to be a component of it.

So, part of this sketch—the insistence on treating this "inner" limit *as* a limit— is simply a translation, into the terms of Moore's and my discussion, of a familiar

anti-reductionist response to the rule-following problematic. Some advocates of that response, notably McDowell, have endeavored to make it compatible with allowing to "sub-bedrock" considerations—such as the consideration that, had certain very general facts of nature been different, concepts other than those we employ might have been intelligible to us—enough force to dislodge Platonism. The rest of the sketch claims that these two cannot be made compatible without treating what one recognizes to be a limit simultaneously as a limitation, i.e. without idealism.[12]

IV. A Problem about "Intransitive Understanding"

That sketch is clearly *too* sketchy to entitle me to ignore all of the various ways in which philosophers have developed the Wittgensteinian idea that recognition of this "inner" limit of language somehow imperils the possibility of objective judgement. But it does set a problem for me in disentangling what I can accept in work pursuing that idea from what I must reject as symptomatic of the mis-construal of this limit as a limitation. This problem arises most sharply with what I think is the richest work to grapple with this idea, and to illuminate the connections between Wittgenstein and Kant that it suggests: David Bell's discussion in his essay, "The Art of Judgement."[13] In the remainder of the paper I want to make a start on that problem. What makes this a suitable occasion is that, in another recent paper,[14] Moore has expressed agreement with the spirit of Bell's essay, and suggested how its core ideas can be seen as consonant with some of his own. So, although this is a really a problem for me, I can hope to turn it into a question for him. The form of the question will be this: whether what I can accept from Bell's essay, and make out to be consistent with regarding this limit only ever as a limit, can begin to do duty to the extent of his agreement with Bell; or whether, on the other hand, doing duty to that must involve construing this limit as a limitation. (In the latter event I should then like to ask how the agreed position, with all the connections between Kant and Wittgenstein it sustains, can avoid attributing Kant's idealism to Wittgenstein—for I'm sure that that is how Bell himself sees things.)

Bell aims in this essay[15] to elucidate "the subjective, non–conceptual, sponta-neous sense that experience must make to anyone capable of objective thought."[16] He is concerned, first, to shed light on what this sense is, or on what it is for experience to make this kind of sense to its subject. Following Kant, he counts it an aesthetic response to experience. And, to display what this response involves, he appeals to the process of coming to make sense of an initially recalcitrant painting, a process in which one can discern, as if in slow motion, its salient components:

> At the most general level it has to do, for example, with the relation of parts to whole, and involves the feeling that the whole has an integrity, a *point*,

in other words that its elements and limits are not arbitrary but comprise a mutually and internally self-determining unity.[17]

Bell takes from Wittgenstein a notion of "intransitive understanding" to emphasize that, while what I see now makes sense to me, there is no question of specifying, of putting into words in a sentence, the sense it makes. Moore, for his part, terms this aesthetic response the Feeling of Unity; and he too holds that it is a species of understanding, hence a species of knowledge, that cannot be put into words.[18]

Bell's second concern is to explain the role of this kind of understanding or sense-making. It allows us, he says, to chart a middle path between "the pessimism of the belief that all human thought is ultimately ungrounded and arbitrary, and the incoherence of the belief that it can be given a final justification in terms of . . . objective rules for the application of which we would require further rules, and so on."[19] Bell, that is, takes Wittgenstein's (and Kant's) exposure of the latter incoherence to show that "when I follow a rule, . . . ultimately I do so blindly"; but he insists that this need not imply that I follow the rule "mindlessly, or merely mechanically."[20] Basic rule-following is "blind" in that it can be given no further grounding within the categories of objectivity and rationality. But it is saved from arbitrariness by a grounding of another kind. Objective thought is, and must be, "grounded in a spontaneous, blind, subjective awareness of intrinsic but inarticulable meaning."[21] Moore, too, holds that the inexpressible knowledge we have in exercises of the Feeling of Unity has a unique, grounding role[22] as a "precondition of making rule-governed judgements."[23]

Now the difficulty these thoughts of Bell's pose for me is that of having a solution without a problem. For,

(1) so long as we hold to the understanding of the "inner" limit of language as a limit, and do not misconstrue it as pointing to a place for further justification where no justification is to be found, then it is just plain wrong to hold that basic rule-following is blind. (I will argue this in the next section, in connection with a paper of Crispin Wright's.)

This commits me to hold that

(2) the "pessimistic" threat, that thought might be exposed as at bottom "mindless or mechanical", is just an illusion created by that misconstrual. (In Section VI I will briefly indicate aspects of Bell's discussion I take to confirm this diagnosis.)

Yet,

(3) the intransitive understanding Bell characterizes is certainly a real phenomenon.

And I think it would be very hard, reading Bell's essay, to doubt that

(4) this kind of understanding has *some* role to play in explaining how thought can engage so smoothly, unhaltingly, with what we see. (In Sections VII–VIII I will try to indicate how this role can be acknowledged without endorsing Bell's conception of the problem to which, in his work, it offers the solution.)

V. Basic Rule-Following Is Not Blind

Blindness is a deficit. If someone is"steering blind" they are steering without information they ought to have. This is not a description that applies to someone who knows their way well enough not to need a map. Anyone trying to make good the idea that basic rule-following is blind rule-following thus runs the risk of presenting it as something that properly speaking ought to be done by reference to a map, though in fact there is no map to be had. This section sets some markers by illustrating how, in "Rule-Following Without Reasons,"[24] Crispin Wright succumbs to this risk. These markers will be helpful in the next, when we revert to Bell.

Early in this paper Wright makes the sound point that "the idea of an essential inner process—a cognitive routine—common to all cases of rule-following is mythical."[25] Wittgenstein made this point in the Blue Book with the example of the instruction, "Fetch me a red flower from the meadow."[26] His immediate target there was the notion that, to obey that order, one had first to summon up in one's imagination a colour sample by reference to which one would select a flower of the right colour. That notion falls apart when we consider the instruction, "Imagine a red patch." This example makes plain that the role the imagined intermediary was supposed to fill is one that in general nothing need fill (and that in the specific case nothing could fill). The effect of the example is thus to do away with, to expose as a confusion, the notion that there is any such theoretical place as the one that the imagined sample was supposed to occupy. So it would clearly not be right to represent Wittgenstein as showing here that there need be nothing in that place—as if the notion of there being such a place is all right, it's just that there is in fact nothing there.

But that is what Wright does: "To express the matter dangerously, we need have nothing 'in mind' when we follow rules."[27] This is not just a dangerous way of putting the point, but a perverse one. By enclosing the phrase in scare-quotes Wright signals that "in mind" is to mean: "in the place the imagined sample was supposed to be." But his formulation surrenders the phrase to that misconception, and so makes it unavailable to express the common-sense truth that to obey the order (intelligently, intentionally, not as a mere automaton) I must have in mind (i.e. I must know) the colour of the flower I am to bring. Wandering into the meadow with nothing in mind—not knowing what kind of flower one is to bring, or why—would indeed amount to applying the rule blindly. But to portray

ordinary, intelligent compliance with an instruction in the light of a comparison with such abstracted or automatistic behavior would obviously be a disastrous mis-representation of what Wittgenstein's example was intended to show; and so we need to ask what, in spite of the danger he recognized, could attract Wright to it.

Wright's forthright conclusion in this paper is that "in the basic case we do not really *follow*—are not really guided by—anything."[28] Basic rule-following is rule-following "without reason." We count it rational in that it "involves intentionality, and a willingness to accept correction"; but it does not involve "responsiveness to the requirements of the rule . . .which can feature in thought and rationally inform one's response."[29] In that precise sense it is "blind."[30]

Wright reaches this conclusion by considering how rule-following in the basic case must contrast with what he terms "the *modus ponens* model"[31] of a non-basic case:

> RULE: if neither king nor rook has been moved . . . etc., one may castle.
> PREMISE: neither king nor rook has been moved . . . etc.
> VERDICT: one may castle.

In this consideration he is especially concerned with features of this model that have to do with the "extricability" of its several components.

In the first place, PREMISE is extricable from RULE, in that someone could understand PREMISE and judge it to be true who had no inkling of RULE, or of the concept of castling that it governs. For that reason instruction in the model could serve as a means of explicitly introducing someone to this concept.

For the same reason, the model neatly parcels out what is required of someone to apply the rule correctly: he must grasp what, in general, RULE requires; and he must appreciate the specific circumstances that warrant a particular application of it, encoded in PREMISE. Someone could, then, be wrong about either of these without this impugning his grip on the other. This constitutes a rather different sense, to be explained by independence of commitment or knowledge, rather than of understanding, in which RULE and PREMISE are extricable from each other.

This in turn implies that VERDICT is, in that commitment or knowledge sense, extricable from both of them. For each of those components it holds that someone might be right about that component yet fail to reach a correct VERDICT because of ignorance or mistake about the other. I think it is the independence of VERDICT and RULE that matters most to Wright. It is what allows us to regard RULE as formulating knowledge by which one is guided in applying the concept of castling, and which particular VERDICTS must respect.

If we turn now to consider a case of basic rule-following it is obvious that many of these features will lapse.

> RULE: if x is red, "red" is correctly predicable of x.
> PREMISE: a is red.
> VERDICT: "red" is correctly predicable of a.

But the core of Wright's argument is that these features *cannot* lapse if there is to be any such thing as the requirements of a rule by which applications of it are guided. There can be, as he puts it, no "pure rule-following", no "rule-following where a correct grasp of the rule itself guarantees correct performance."[32] So the parceling out so neatly effected in the non-basic case by the *modus ponens* model must be a feature of *all* rule-following, including basic cases. If there is to be any such thing as what a rule requires, this must be something grasp of which makes, in conjunction with whatever fills the role of PREMISE, its *distinguishable* contribution to correct performance. In the basic case, though, we cannot make the needed distinctions. PREMISE and RULE can no longer be extricated from each other. And, since PREMISE and VERDICT are now effectively identical,[33] the same holds of the relation of RULE and VERDICT. Grasp of the rule, we are invited to conclude, dissolves into the verdicts we imagined it to inform.

At any rate, that is what I take to be Wright's central argument. And, assuming that I have identified it correctly, I think it is clear where it goes wrong. In the shift to the basic case some of the features of the *modus ponens* model of non-basic cases must indeed lapse, but only *some*. The extricability relations that must lapse are (for the most part) those that were explained in terms of independent *understanding*: PREMISE can no longer be understood, let alone judged to be true, independently of RULE. But those that were explained in terms of independent commitment or knowledge remain. Specifically, one's knowledge of the RULE governing "red" is not impugned if, through ignorance or mistake regarding the input PREMISE to an application of that rule, one fails to reach a correct VERDICT. Or, to put the same point less fancily, people who know what redness is sometimes wrongly call things red because they misperceive them. That is the *only* kind of extricability that the denial of "pure" rule-following entails.

Wright's argument would have us hold that, in basic rule-following, the *modus ponens* model *must* lapse—for lack of rationally extricable premises—but also that it *cannot* lapse—since pure rule-following is impossible. It takes the pressure of a felt paradox to soften anyone for the conclusion that, in calling something red when one sees it to be red, one is acting blindly, or without reason. The less exciting truth is that some features of the model lapse, while others do not.

VI. Bell's Paradox

Wright's argument is not Bell's. Bell's essay is enormously ambitious, but, with the problems of expounding two *Critiques* already in hand, he reasonably enough takes pretty much for granted the Wittgensteinian considerations leading to the conclusion that "in the last analysis our discursive mental acts are performed blindly."[34] But Bell, too, presents the problem to which his notion of intransitive understanding offers a solution as a paradox, one to which we are immediately driven in halting a regress of rules. And this gives a needlessly paradoxical air to the solution itself. Somehow it is to explain how my basic judgements can be

"characterized by a *rule-governed spontaneity*, that is, in Kant's terms, by a 'conformity to law without a law.'"[35] That sounds, Bell concedes, "like an oxymoron."[36] And I think it is one. This brief section aims to remove some of the sense of paradox from the problem; the next will attempt the same for the solution.

Bell records the incoherence of a regress of rules, each one serving for the application of the last, in what he terms the Principle of Spontaneity. This principle requires that

> The relation in which we stand to what we think or mean must be immediate and direct. If we are to avoid the incoherence of a regressive infinity of acts of judgement, . . . then at some point we must judge immediately, spontaneously—and this means without having already judged, identified, understood, or grasped a thought on the basis of a prior such act.[37]

This is entirely right. But we cannot hold onto this thought at the same time as holding that an act "is 'blind' [if] it remains necessarily inaccessible to *prior* rational and objective justification."[38] Together these two thoughts imply that immediate or basic judgements are "blind" judgements, and so not judgements at all—not acts in which we are rationally answerable to the requirements of the concepts we deploy. The two together imply, in other words, that there can be no such thing as a basic rational action; whereas the Principle of Spontaneity on its own entails that there must be.

This contradiction sets the central problem for Bell's essay. In one formulation of it he asks, "When I apply a rule I may do so blindly—but that does not imply that I do so mindlessly. But, then, what role are we to ascribe to mind at precisely this point?"[39]

The question has no answer unless we settle and stick to a single understanding of what precisely "this point" is. Are we asking after the mind's role *in* basic rule-following, when, as the Principle of Spontaneity requires, it applies concepts in unmediated recognition of their appropriateness? Or are we asking instead about some prior operation by means of which the mind accomplishes basic judgements, some operation that the second of the above thoughts insists has to be present if basic judgement is not to be exposed as a kind of mindless sounding-off? To put this reaction impressionistically (hence not in any way that amounts to reasoned criticism), I hear Bell's question as asking: "What is the mind *doing* when it applies a basic rule? It is not following some instructions as to how to apply it. But it must reach the application *somehow*." But really accepting the Principle of Spontaneity means accepting that there is simply no room for an issue of *how* a basic rule is applied.

Bell's paradox stands out still more clearly in a second formulation of his central problem. "How can I perform an act that is quite undetermined by the rules in question, but that somehow manages to conform to them?"[40] The simple answer is that I cannot: there is no such act.

People sometimes speak of an action or its product as "merely conforming" to a rule, when, quite accidentally or coincidentally, it satisfies a description of what the rule requires (a slug-trail shaped like "68 + 57 = 125" is a typical example). That notion of "mere conformity" plainly has no relevance to Bell's problem (if it did, there would not be a problem: there is, for instance, no mystery about how a slug-trail could take that shape). But once that notion of "mere conformity" is put aside, there cannot be the distance between being "determined by" a rule and "conforming to" it that Bell's question supposes. No action is *ever* determined by a rule except in the sense that the action is correct if it conforms to the rule.

In non-basic cases an action conforming to a rule may be the causal upshot of putting into effect some procedure for following the rule; it may, for instance, be the result of a process of inference in line with Wright's *modus ponens* model. This introduces a very different, causal sense in which a rule-governed action might be said to be "determined," and this sense surely informs Bell's question: it is because no procedure for following the rule is put into effect that he speaks of basic judgements as "quite undetermined". But that sense is simply inapplicable in a case of basic rule-governed judgement, and is anyway generally misleading: using the same word for these different kinds of "determining" makes it too easy to forget that what does the determining, and likewise what is determined, is quite different in the two cases.

Wittgenstein suggested that his interlocutor's remark, "All the steps are already taken," serves to give symbolic or metaphorical expression to the difference between being causally determined and being logically determined.[41] If that suggestion is right, then the interlocutor's only mistake is not to have spelled out this difference more prosaically. Despite superficial grammar, "determining causally" and "determining logically" are not two ways of doing a single thing. What can determine logically (the rule) determines nothing causally: it is not an agent. What can determine causally (e.g. biology, or exposure to training) determines nothing logically. Conversely, what can be determined causally (e.g. the response I will in fact give, or how someone will carry on following exposure to certain examples or a given regime of training) is determined logically by nothing at all. And what can be determined logically (e.g. that continuing the series, . . . 1002, is correct) is the wrong kind of thing to have a cause. However it may be with Wittgenstein himself,[42] much of the familiar rule-following problematic comes from making the difference between these two much too slight. Only in that way could commentators press, as if it were urgent or vexing, the question of what could determine, with a stronger-than-causal necessity, how someone will in fact continue a series; and only in that way could they present it as a discovery of Wittgenstein's that there is no good answer to this evidently misbegotten question.

VII. Intransitive Understanding

Bell does not speak, as my title does, of "synthesizing without concepts." The phrase he takes from Kant and aims to explain is rather "schematizing without a concept." To do this is

> to discover in the diversity of sensory experience a felt unity, coherence, order, which is non-cognitive and non-conceptual, but which is a necessary condition of the possibility of all rule-governed thought and judgement.[43]

I settled for the clumsier, non-Kantian phrase to make still more glaring the scope there is here for running into contradiction with the commitment that "*all* combination is . . . an act of the understanding."[44]

That is hardly a prospect of which Bell is unaware. Schematism is in the business of harmonizing opposites,[45] so it will not be surprising if paradox surrounds its description:

> if, as I've suggested, schemata are to explain how it is possible to act spontaneously, blindly, and yet in conformity with the rules of rationality and objectivity, schemata will inevitably inhabit a non-man's land between subjectivity and objectivity, between sensibility and understanding, between determinacy and indeterminacy, between passivity and activity, and so on.[46]

But I think we can see here two distinguishable reasons for Bell's tolerance of apparent paradox in his description of the kind of intransitive understanding that is to yield this explanation. The first, with which I completely sympathize, is Bell's concern to think himself thoroughly into the shape and motivations of Kant's thought, to the extent that he can present the often-documented contradictions and equivocations of the schematism doctrine as "themselves indicative of Kant's target."[47] The second, where I am sceptical, is a matter of homeopathy. Bell's own sense that a real paradox threatens the rationality of basic rule-following makes him ready to accept a corresponding paradox in what averts that threat. The last section explained why I do not share that sense of paradox; in this section I aim to remove the correspondingly paradoxical aspects of Bell's solution.

Bell is emphatic that the felt unity or significance that grounds conceptual judgement "cannot be the product of conceptual determination or conformity to rules"; stopping the regress requires at this point "a new model."[48] But when a model is needed to fill a threatening gap, and when this gap is conceived as one left by a regress that has been brought to a stop rather than satisfyingly resolved, it is surely very likely that what we are offered will be modelled in part on a further step in the regress.

> Schematism . . . is precisely this process of introducing into [or discovering in] the diversity of experience a unity that is not conceptually determined, but that makes possible the *subsequent* application of concepts to it.[49]

That this unity is "not conceptually determined"—that it "owes nothing to concepts . . . or rules"[50]—is what makes this a new model, capable of stopping the regress. But with those words omitted from its description, it appears that this process achieves something very like what the understanding, the faculty of rules, achieves. That is, it seems that schematism is designed to achieve, at a level below the last step in a regress of rules, just what a further step in that regress would have achieved. This appearance is an aspect of Bell's solution that comes from his conception of the problem, and as such it is an aspect I want to do without.

A way of doing this is suggested by a comparison Bell makes[51] between the aesthetic judgements that provide his principal model for pre-conceptual unity and the "judgements of perception" Kant speaks of in the *Prolegomena*. Pursuing resemblances of that kind might lead us to consider also the merely "*subjective* unity," or a "relation of representations [having] only subjective validity", mentioned in §§18–19 of the B Deduction; and then on again to the description of apprehension in the Analogies as "only *a placing together* of the manifold of empirical intuition."[52] A familiar exegetical difficulty presented by each of these cases is that Kant seems to be trading in a kind of combination prior to, and exploited by, the combination through concepts effected by the understanding—he speaks as if there were something akin to what is represented in an exploded diagram, some process like offering up the parts to one another before the bolts go in—when it seems plain that no such notion can play a positive role in his account. Now in at least some of these cases the difficulty is avoided by taking Kant to be speaking counterfactually: what he is describing is not a step on the way to categorial unity, but all there could be in its absence.[53] Bell's account of his solution creates the same kind of unease. So it is worth trying whether the same kind of approach to intransitive understanding will remove it: instead of asking how the sense of felt unity is forged, we should consider how things would be without it.

Bell's central contention is that, if what I experience did not make to me the kind of sense he is concerned to characterize, I could not apply concepts to it. But then how *would* things be? In the analogy of the recalcitrant painting he speaks of things presenting themselves to me as "problematic," or "perplexing."[54] Later he says that I could not "feel at home"[55] in what I experience. Quoting Wittgenstein, he explains that to feel at home in this way is to have no need to interpret, and that what this amounts to can best be grasped through the contrasting scenario where, lacking this accommodation, the possibility of different interpretations is always an issue for me: "I see the thought symbol 'from outside', [and] . . . become conscious that it *could* be interpreted thus or thus."[56] If things generally were "opaque" to me in that way, then, Bell explains, the attempt to bring any particular

concept to bear on them "*would* always require . . . some prior judgement as to its appropriateness, relevance, or warrantability."[57]

From this it emerges that the counterfactual approach offers much more than a structural analogy. For what we find described here in Bell's and Wittgenstein's words is clearly recognizable as the etiolated (Humean) experience that Kant speaks of in that mode as "only a play of representations", containing no ground of objective determination, and therefore nothing "to distinguish one appearance from another."[58] In the same explicitly counterfactual mode we can indeed conceive of a notion of what is really given in experience such that:

- A different momentary experience might present to its subject exactly what my momentary experience presents to me.
- That different momentary experience would fail to make sense to its subject as mine does to me.
- If the concepts that I apply to what I experience were applied by the subject of that different experience, that application would be arbitrary and ungrounded: to subsume that experience under those concepts would be to make connections and projections that nothing in the experience prefigures or warrants or grounds, and so connections and projections that would be no better, no more appropriate to the experience itself, than any of many alternatives.
- *Any* concept would thus stand to that experience as an interpretation, and so would "hang in the air", as interpretations do.

Now, if that is what it would be for experience *not* to make sense to its subject, can we recover a characterization of intransitive understanding simply by reversing these marks? I believe we can:

- My own experience is harmoniously and aptly described by the concepts I bring to bear.
- The connections those concepts forge are not arbitrary impositions. These connections are pre-figured in the experience itself, which is shaped and informed by them.[59]
- The application of these concepts is better termed an expression than an interpretation of my experience.
- Indeed *nothing* stands merely as an interpretation to my experience, because what I experience *needs* no interpretation. At home in the world, I can simply say what I see.

VIII. A Question to Moore

What this approach recovers is certainly nothing like all that Bell intended. Most obviously, what I have just described is not some species of awareness that underlies

and grounds the possibility of conceptual judgement. It *is* the possibility of conceptual judgement.[60] The unity we feel, on this approach, is not a *precondition* of combination through concepts. It *is* that. Adopting the counterfactual mode, this approach paints no positive picture of machinations below the limit of conceptual justification, of how things are arranged there so as to provide otherwise ungrounded judgement with some kind of foothold.

In some respects it would be possible for me to approach Bell's view more closely than I have. For instance, he several times speaks of an "awareness . . . of . . . inarticulable meaning."[61] If the awareness in question is rightly termed "*intransitive* understanding," then this cannot be awareness of a species of meaning. If it were, we should have to deal with the object of a kind of understanding that has no object, or with the sense that things make when there is no such thing as the sense that they make—and that is revelling in paradox rather than tolerating it. Even so, there would not be the same objection to speaking instead about the meaningfulness of experience. This would be a matter of its lending itself to articulate description. It would be inarticulable simply in that no articulation could begin to exhaust it. And then "awareness of intrinsic meaningfulness" could aptly characterize the smoothness and immediacy—the unhaltingness, the lack of arbitrariness, there being no need for hesitant and questionable interpretation to reach across some cognitive divide—with which we are able to articulate aspects of what experience presents us with. But even if this comes somewhat closer to what Bell intends, I am certain it does not exhaust it. (For one thing, it does not sustain the suggestive parallels Bell draws, following Wittgenstein, with the understanding of music.[62])

What I think is much less clear is whether the approach I have recommended can accommodate as much of Bell's view as Moore would himself want to agree with. A characteristic example of the grounding inexpressible knowledge that, on Moore's account, I have "through exercise of the Feeling of Unity" is "my knowledge of what green things have in common; or . . . my knowledge of what it is for something to be green."[63] As above, this is, on the face of it, not a precondition or ground of my ability to make judgements about greenness. It just *is* that ability.

Moore expresses the hope that, despite some of his differences with the "letter" of Bell's essay, a real convergence can be recognized in the spirit of their views. On many issues concerning the interpretation of the third *Critique* not touched on here, I am sure that this is right. But on those issues I have touched on, it seems to me that to converge fully with Bell would be to converge on the idealist position that he rightly takes to be shared between Kant and Wittgenstein. As to whether Moore intends that I am, as I said, much less sure. Perhaps Moore can put me right.[64]

Notes

1 Beginning in our Aristotelian Society symposium, "Ineffability and Nonsense." See Adrian Moore, "Ineffability and Nonsense," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2003, SV 77, pp. 169–193; and Peter Sullivan, "Ineffability and Nonsense," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2003, SV 77, pp. 195–223.

2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1933, B167.

3 "Was the Author of the *Tractatus* a Transcendental Idealist?," forthcoming in P. Sullivan and M. Potter, eds., *The Tractatus and Its History*.

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Oxford. Blackwell, 1980, p. 10.

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London, Routledge, 1922, 3.221.

6 Ibid., 5.5561.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1953, §217.

8 Ibid., §217.

9 Ibid., §211.

10 Ibid., §381.

11 Ibid., §217.

12 Does this mean accepting "rails to infinity," and all the associated "mythology" of Platonism? No. It means questioning the association. There *are* rails to infinity, if that claim is construed, as it naturally can be, as a general reminder of such truths as that any two numbers have a unique sum. But other, related imagery surrounding these truths *can* generate a very different position, reasonably called "hyper-Platonism":

> when [the mathematician] sees a peak he believes that it is there simply because he sees it. If he wishes someone else to see it, he *points to it*, either directly or through the chain of summits which led him to recognize it himself. When his pupil also sees it, the research, the argument, the *proof* is finished. The analogy is a rough one, but I am sure that it is not altogether misleading. If we were to push it to its extreme we should be led to a rather paradoxical conclusion; that there is, strictly, no such thing as mathematical proof; that we can, in the last analysis, do nothing but *point*; that proofs are what Littlewood and I call *gas*, rhetorical flourishes designed to affect psychology, pictures on the board in the lecture, devices to stimulate the imagination of the pupils.
> (G.H. Hardy, "Mathematical Proof," *Mind*, 1929, vol. 38, pp. 1–25; for Wittgenstein's reactions to this article see Mathieu Marion, *Wittgenstein, Finitism, and the Foundations of Mathematics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 158n).

According to the view presented in the first part of this quotation the only role of proof is to bring someone who cannot do so without it to see the truth of what is proved. The end of proof is not that something be proved: it is an end that could be achieved, and, if only the learner were not short sighted, would be better achieved, without proof. This is hyper-Platonism, and there are good reasons for rejecting it. Hardy—who is, of course, nobody's fool—identifies the most important of these reasons in the second part of the quotation, hyper-Platonism's paradoxical consequence that the only method mathematics has is mere *gas*, something with no more than a flimsily contingent connection with mathematical knowledge. That amounts, as Hardy says, to there being no such thing as mathematical proof; and that leaves it entirely mysterious how, or whether, any mathematician can ever come to know anything.

Wittgenstein was fond—much too fond—of setting up Hardyesque imagery as his target. Many, many passages from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* indicate that he supposed himself to be simultaneously targeting the Platonism of Frege. He aims to cast doubt on the idea that, in inferring one proposition from another, we are tracing an objective relation of consequence that independently holds between these

propositions; and he suggests that this is fundamentally the same idea as that, in developing the series +2, we are, if we do it right, tracing steps that the rule itself determines to be the correct ones. My starting point is that neither of these ideas is remotely open to suspicion, and that they have no real connection with the fragments of hyper-Platonistic imagery that so often cling to them in Wittgenstein's discussions. The effect of these adornments is that Wittgenstein's discussion targets an amalgam of two positions that are more nearly contradictory than mutually entailing. This makes the discussion less effective than it might have been against one of them (hyper-Platonism), and wholly ineffective against the other (the sober Platonism of Frege).

13 David Bell, "The Art of Judgement." *Mind*, 1987, vol. 96, pp. 221–244.
14 Adrian Moore, "Is the Feeling of Unity that Kant Identifies in His Third *Critique* a Type of Inexpressible Knowledge?," *Philosophy*, 2007, vol. 82, pp. 475–485.
15 Bell's main exegetical concern is with Kant's third *Critique*, but I have to abstract completely from that: I have neither the space nor the expertise to do otherwise.
16 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 234.
17 Ibid., p. 237.
18 Moore, "The Feeling of Unity," pp. 477 and 483.
19 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 241.
20 Ibid., p. 241.
21 Ibid., p. 241.
22 Moore, "The Feeling of Unity," p. 485.
23 Ibid., p. 477.
24 Crispin Wright, "Rule-Following without Reasons: Wittgenstein's Quietism and the Constitutive Question." *Ratio*, 2007, vol. 20, pp. 481–502.
25 Ibid., p. 486.
26 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1958, p. 3.
27 Wright, "Rule-Following without Reasons," p. 486.
28 Ibid., p. 497.
29 Ibid., p. 498.
30 Ibid., p. 496.
31 Ibid., p. 491.
32 Ibid., p. 492.
33 To identify PREMISE and VERDICT—"*a* is red" and "'red' is correctly predicable of *a*"—is to hold that the quotation marks make no real difference. If one did take them to make an important difference, then the *modus ponens* model would apply to the "red" case exactly as it applies to the castling case. Someone—a monolingual German, for instance—*could* understand PREMISE and judge it to be true without any inkling of RULE; and that person *could* be introduced to the practice of applying "red" through instruction in this model. Wright, in effect, agrees with this, when he says (at p. 495) that a "stubborn" application of the *modus ponens* model enforces an "Augustinian picture" of language: "Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child . . . already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak" (*PI* §32). I have no disagreement at all with this important part of his discussion. But I will—because it anticipates conclusions reached in Section VIII—enter one reservation about the use to which Wright later puts its conclusion. The question at that point is what, in a basic case, knowledge of the rule governing an expression amounts to—or how we should, and should not, understand such claims as that so-and-so knows the rule(s) for the use of "red". In such a case, Wright contends, "we should not think of knowledge of the requirements of the rule as a state which *rationally underlies* and enables competence"; instead, "The knowledge *is* the competence. Or so I take Wittgenstein to be saying" (p. 498). Now, the final claim here is surely right, and, since the previous claim follows from it, that too must be right. But it mistakes the issue. The issue was whether, even in a basic case, one's

understanding of an expression, or knowledge of the rule governing it, rationally underlies, not one's "competence" with the expression, but one's actual applications of it (the "VERDICTS" one issues). If "the knowledge is the competence," then this knowledge rationally underlies one's particular judgements about (e.g.) redness. We can, and should, accept with equanimity that nothing in turn underlies it.

34 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 227.
35 Ibid., p. 227.
36 Ibid., p. 227.
37 Ibid., p. 226.
38 Ibid., pp. 226–227, emphasis added.
39 Ibid., p. 227.
40 Ibid., p. 227.
41 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§219–220.
42 Well, how is it, in fact, with Wittgenstein himself? It would of course be absurd to suggest that Wittgenstein is generally insensitive to the contrast between causal and logical connections, or to deny that unpicking causal from logical threads in the relation between understanding and performance is a central aim of his discussion of rule-following in the *Investigations*. (Specially relevant here is §183's warning against supposing there to be some *totality* of conditions that would guarantee correct performance, since that supposition would inevitably fuse logical and causal factors.) But when those undeniable facts are acknowledged, we still need to ask how the threads got to be tangled up in the first place; and, in considering this question, we should bear in mind that *one* way of making the difference between causal and logical connections "too slight" is to represent the task of untangling them as more delicate than in fact it is. Does it, for instance, help us to become clear about the impression that "The steps are *really* already taken . . . as if they were in some *unique* way predetermined, anticipated—as only the act of meaning can anticipate reality" (§188), that Wittgenstein allows "the steps" to remain ambiguous between those I *shall* take and those I *should*, or that the notion that meaning anticipates reality is left to sink and drown in the muddle that "an act of meaning" might do so? The following section (*PI* §189), in which Wittgenstein considers the different things that might be meant by saying "The steps are determined by the formula . . .," reveals more clearly the sources of such damaging non-interference. Here Wittgenstein first offers a causal reading, on which the statement might claim that, for certain people (in contrast to others), "the order 'add 3' completely determines every step" they will take. (It is wildly implausible that the statement would *ever* be used to claim quite that. What of distractions, blackouts, sudden illness, death? But let that pass.) Clearly contrasted with that causal understanding is a second, logico-mathematical usage, which distinguishes formulae (e.g. $y = x^2$) which do "determine a number y for a given value of x" from others (e.g. $y^2 = x$) which do not. But conspicuously absent from the section is another logico-mathematical sense, which applies to both sides of this second contrast: that the equation $y^2 = x$ has, for a given value of x, two roots, and what those roots are is as much determined, and determined in the same way, as is the unique root of $y = x^2$. Wittgenstein's suspicion of this general, unreduced notion of logical determination is responsible for its omission; and its omission opens the way to the confusions we are concerned with, since only the first, causal understanding has the breadth of application of required of anything one might be tempted to substitute for it.

43 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 239.
44 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B130, emphasis added.
45 Ibid., A138/B177.
46 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 229.
47 Ibid., p. 229.
48 Ibid., p. 238.

49 Ibid., p. 229, emphasis added. Bell speaks of discovering, rather than introducing, unity in the previous sentence. I'm sure he's right that the difference between these two is not the important issue; for a similar view see Moore, *Points of View*, p. 185, on "imposing" and "finding."

50 Ibid., p. 239.

51 Ibid., p. 235n.

52 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B219, emphasis added.

53 An especially clear example of this is the paragraph at A194-195/B239-2.

54 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," p. 237.

55 Ibid., p. 239.

56 Ibid., p. 242, quoting Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967, §§234-235.

57 Ibid., p. 239.

58 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A194/B239.

59 On this, and indeed on everything said in this section, see Peter Strawson, "Imagination and Perception," reprinted in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, London, Methuen, 1974, pp. 45–65.

60 It is, I said, the *possibility* of conceptual judgement, and that possibility is not *a* judgement.

61 Bell, "The Art of Judgement," pp. 241, 243, 245.

62 Ibid., pp. 242–243.

63 Moore, "The Feeling of Unity," p. 484.

64 This paper was first written for a meeting in 2007 of Mark Sacks's AHRC-funded project on Transcendental Philosophy and Naturalism. Thanks are due to those who raised critical points at that meeting; to Adrian Moore for taking the trouble to respond to it; but above all to Mark Sacks, for providing a context for this work and a model—inadequately followed, of course—for how to go about it.

9

A RESPONSE TO SULLIVAN

A.W. Moore

Sullivan's paper is characteristically rich and thought-provoking, and I cannot hope to do justice to it in these comments. But there is, as Sullivan says, a comparatively straightforward disagreement between us about where the later Wittgenstein stands in relation to transcendental idealism, and I hope at least to cast some light on why I still see this matter differently from how Sullivan sees it.

Prima facie Sullivan and I are diametrically opposed in our views of where the "two" Wittgensteins stand in relation to transcendental idealism. In the cartoon sketch that Sullivan gives, I see the early Wittgenstein as embracing transcendental idealism and the later Wittgenstein as enabling us to resist it, whereas for Sullivan it is the other way round. It looks as though we could not be further apart. But, of course, it is not as simple as that. For one thing, the cartoon sketch is, precisely, a cartoon sketch; and when it comes to providing a somewhat more realistic portrait, with all the obvious caveats about what it even is to attribute any kind of position to Wittgenstein on the strength of either of his two principal texts, then Sullivan and I look far closer to each other than the cartoon sketch suggests. Indeed there have been times in the past when the focus of our disagreement, at least as far as the early Wittgenstein is concerned, has been at the meta-level: on the question whether there is any ground-level disagreement at all. (And I am pleased to add parenthetically that, with respect to that meta-level disagreement, I now think that Sullivan was right and I was wrong—Sullivan having always maintained, correctly as I now see it, that we do disagree.[1]) But also, more importantly, as Sullivan emphasizes in his essay, we are very close even in according transcendental idealism such significance in the exegesis of Wittgenstein. Each of us, if pressed on the question of what the relation is between the Wittgenstein who is ultimately hostile to transcendental idealism and transcendental idealism itself, would concede that, while Wittgenstein would, at that stage in his thinking, repudiate

transcendental idealism as nonsense, it is a kind of nonsense whose attractions his own work engenders, and *to* whose attractions he himself, at more than one level, is susceptible. This is a point of contact, I think, that makes the differences between Sullivan and me minimal compared with the differences between both of us and commentators who deny that there are any interesting questions about the relation between Wittgenstein and transcendental idealism. Still, the fact remains that Sullivan sees transcendental idealism in the later work where I do not, and I want to say a little about why I do not.

First, a couple of preliminaries. I need to say something about David Bell's remarkable contribution to this debate. I have already conceded that I cannot hope to do justice to Sullivan's essay in these comments; and I am afraid that his excellent discussion of Bell is one part of his essay about which I am going to say virtually nothing. But I do need to say *something*, partly because Sullivan finishes his essay by expressly putting a question to me about Bell, and I owe him an answer; but also because my answer is in any case importantly relevant to what I shall go on to say. Sullivan's question is about a suggestion I have made, namely that there is a deep affinity between some of Bell's ideas and some ideas of my own.[2] In particular, Sullivan wants to know whether I intend this suggestion to extend to the issues on which he (Sullivan) focuses in his own discussion of Bell. Concerning what I have called 'the Feeling of Unity,' do I take such unity to be, in Sullivan's terms, a *pre-condition* of combination through concepts, or do I take it to be the combination itself? It looks as though this is an awkward question for me. This is because it looks as though the former alternative is what is required for me to stay in line with Bell, while the latter alternative is what is required for me to keep transcendental idealism at bay—in the way in which I think it *should* be kept at bay and, significantly in the current context, in the way in which I take the later Wittgenstein to keep it at bay.

My answer is the latter. That is, I take the unity in question itself to be combination through concepts. And I am consequently less confident than I was that there is the convergence in Bell's ideas and mine which I earlier suggested there was. I now think that I may have got Bell importantly wrong. If so, then not for the first time—and I am sure not for the last time either—so far from my putting Sullivan right (see p. 184),[3] I have reason to thank him for putting me right.

Now to the second preliminary. This is a much less weighty matter which I raise almost in a spirit of frivolity, but I raise it because here too there is something that connects with what I shall go on to say. Early in his essay Sullivan quotes that familiar section from *Philosophical Investigations*—§381[4]—where Wittgenstein raises the question, "How do I know that this colour is red?" and replies, "It would be an answer to say that I have learnt English." Sullivan quotes this passage disapprovingly. Wittgenstein's reply misfires, he suggests; for it alludes, in the face of a request for a justification, "to all that could be found in the place where further justification might be sought" (p. 173). Yet later, when discussing a case of basic rule-following, in which the rule is:

RULE: If *x* is red, "red" is correctly predicable of *x*,

and the premise is:

PREMISE: *a* is red,

Sullivan says that PREMISE cannot be understood, let alone judged to be true (and therefore, we may conclude, let alone known to be true), independently of RULE. What does this amount to? It seems to amount to the claim that there can be no judging (or knowing) that something is red without knowing that the English word "red" is predicable of such things—a clear echo of what Wittgenstein says at §381. So has Sullivan committed the very gaffe that he claims to find in Wittgenstein?

No. I am teasing. Sullivan makes clear in a footnote[5] that the quotation marks in RULE are not important. RULE is not meant to express a contingency about the English language, and cannot be assimilated to Wittgenstein's own explicit reference to English (or rather, of course, in the original, to German—though, incidentally, the fact that a good translation of the original *should* involve a reference to English, rather than to German, is not without significance, as we shall see). But this reminds us that there is no simple rule linking the use of quotation marks to the use of some linguistic item to draw attention to that very linguistic item. Just as it is possible to put quotation marks round an occurrence of the word "red," and still intend to be drawing attention to redness rather than to the word itself, so too it is possible to use the word "red" without quotation marks and intend to be drawing attention to the word rather than to redness. And that, surely, is Wittgenstein's point, or at least part of his point.

To explain. The question "How do I know that this colour is red?" strikes no obvious chords when taken out of context. We can of course imagine its being asked in contexts where it would be a perfectly reasonable, unmysterious thing to ask. But we can also imagine its being asked in contexts, in particular philosophical contexts, where it would continue to strike no obvious chords. Now: it would be *an* answer to say, "I have learnt English." In other words: *one* way of taking the question would be as equivalent to "How do I know that this colour is *called* 'red'?" Quite likely this would not be what was intended, especially if the context really were a philosophical one. But then replying in that way would just be an invitation to say more about what *was* intended. It is a familiar rhetorical device, and I dare say it is one that you have used yourself.

We are reminded of something that is in any case obvious, namely that whether an answer to a question is a sensible answer depends on what exactly is being asked. Obvious or not, this provides a good cue for me at last to explore my principal disagreement with Sullivan.

Let me first say something about how Sullivan sees transcendental idealism as arising in the later work. Think once again about rule-following. Sometimes,

when I am following a rule, I can justify what I do by articulating the rule. In such a case somebody else may seek further such justification—for instance, because the justification that I have proffered shows me to be following some subsidiary rule which is itself relatively complex and whose application to this case is unclear or unstraightforward. Eventually, however, their repeated requests for further such justification must issue in a blank. "Then," Wittgenstein's suggestion seems to be, "I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do'" (§217). And we can see why this gives Sullivan pause. There seemed to be a chain of justifications, each of which issued in a request for a further justification of the same kind, until eventually no further justification of that kind was available and the question, "What justifies you in doing *that*?" was met instead with this appeal to "what I do." The questions hitherto had been of a piece and the answers had been of a piece. They had been questions and answers about reasons, and, to that extent, about limits. But when an answer of that kind was no longer available there seemed, instead, to be an appeal to some brute contingency admitting of alternatives. That is to say, there seemed to be an appeal to a *limitation*. But what was needed, surely, to show that justification of the relevant kind had given out, was not this violent shift of direction but something more or less Platonic, something still expressing limits rather than limitations, but in such a way as to deflect the question.—"What justifies you in doing that?" "Oh, well, that's just what the rule requires."

Wittgenstein does seem to be guilty of some fundamental error, then. He does seem to suggest that we need a shift of direction here; that we need to appeal to limitations rather than to limits; that we need, in yet another metaphor, to dig beneath bedrock and say, as Sullivan nicely puts it, what *would* occupy the place of a further justification if only there *were* such a place. And, in suggesting these things, Wittgenstein does seem to cast the limits in question, which depend on the *limitations* in question, as themselves limitations. In sum, he seems to embrace transcendental idealism.

Here is another way of approaching the same matter. Wittgenstein asks at the beginning of §217, "How am I able to obey a rule?" and immediately registers that this question can be taken in two ways, as a question about causes and as a question about justifications. He further intimates that he is concerned with the question as taken in the second way. But the appeal to "what I do" seems to be more relevant to the question as taken in the first way, which is why its almost immediate appearance suggests the very shift of direction of which Sullivan complains. Crudely speaking, it is as if Wittgenstein fails to keep causes and justifications separate.

But can this be? Wittgenstein is surely the last person to be guilty of any such conflation. Again and again he adverts to this distinction in its various different guises and to its importance (§§189 and 460 are both worth consulting in this connection). And indeed one of the views that he is especially keen to undermine—not Platonism, with which, on many construals, he arguably has no quarrel, but rather what Sullivan helpfully calls "hyper-Platonism"—is a view that rests on this

very conflation. What is misguided in hyper-Platonism is not, say, the idea that there are rails to infinity, which, as Sullivan reminds us, can be understood in an entirely innocuous way, but rather how that idea is construed, so that, for instance, these rails constrain us *in the same way as* physical rails. *That* is a confusion of justifications with causes.

But I see no such confusion in Wittgenstein. Nor do I see any casting of limits as limitations. We earlier considered a chain of questions that can arise when I am following a rule: "What justifies you in doing that?"; "What justifies you in doing *that*?"; and so forth. And it looked as though Wittgenstein's appeal to "what I do" was introduced in response to the last question in this chain, when no further justification of the relevant kind was available—as a way of deflecting the question, if not of answering it. But it also looked as though his appeal to "what I do" was meant to be logically of a piece with an answer, providing at least a "quasi-justification" of the relevant kind; indicating what the justification *would* be if only there *were* such a thing. At any rate, I think this is how Sullivan sees things. But it is not how I see them. That seems to me to be a misreading of Wittgenstein.

How, then, do I read him? I think that Wittgenstein's concern is with what it *takes* to follow a rule; with what the logical conditions of rule-following are. The kind of question to which "This is simply what I do" is pertinent is not "What justifies you in doing that?" but "What is *involved* in your doing that?" or "*How do you know* what to do?" or "How are you *able* to obey a rule?" (see §§211 and 217). At a high enough level of complexity I can answer such questions by citing my justifications. But this is not because I am being asked what justifies me in doing what I do. It is because my having those justifications *is*, at that level, how I know what to do; *is* how I am able to obey the rule. (This is a "grammatical" point, not an empirical point.) Eventually, however, my reasons give out, and then I am inclined to say, harmlessly enough in this context, "This is simply what I do."

Admittedly, the metaphor of blindness, which Wittgenstein also invokes here, is not entirely happy. For indeed I might equally have been inclined to say, once I had reached bedrock, "I can now just *see* what to do." Sullivan is absolutely right to draw attention to the limitations (not the limits!) of this metaphor. Nevertheless, I take it that part of the force of the metaphor is to emphasize that, at this basic level, I do not need to exercise any choice; I do not need to reflect on alternatives; I do not need to reckon with any justification.[6] Following a rule is, as Wittgenstein observes, analogous to obeying an order (§206). And sometimes my obeying an order is blind in the sense that I do what I am told just because I am told to do it. But in another sense, of course, I can see perfectly well what I am doing. So too with basic rule-following. Sullivan is quite right to dismiss as perverse the suggestion that I need have nothing in mind when I am following a rule. But Wittgenstein himself makes a very similar point in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.[7] He there invokes a different metaphor, the metaphor of a mechanism (a metaphor which Bell, interestingly, rejects: see the passage cited by Sullivan on p. 175). Wittgenstein says, "One follows the rule *mechanically* . . . 'Mechanical'—

that means: without thinking. But *entirely* without thinking? Without *reflecting*" (Pt VII, §60, his emphasis).

But surely transcendental idealism still beckons here? Surely limits are being made to depend on limitations?

Not at all. Wittgenstein's question is a Kantian question, in as much as it is a question about how something is possible. But it is also a constitutive question. That I do what I do, and that other people do the same, is a pre-condition for there being this or that practice among us, and hence for our having this or that rule. It is not a sub-bedrock quasi-justification for anything we do. It is part of the framework that makes justification for various things we do so much as possible. It is not limits that are being made to rest on limitations, then. It is our *grasp* of limits. In particular, it is *which* limits we grasp. If we had been different in various specifiable ways, we would have had different rules. But that is not to say, what would indeed be absurd to say, that the rules we actually have would themselves have been different. The limits are still limits. Wittgenstein's question is a Kantian question; but his answer is not a Kantian answer.

Notes

1   See my "Was the Author of the *Tractatus* a Transcendental Idealist?," in Michael Potter and Peter M. Sullivan, eds., *The Tractatus and Its History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
2   See my "Is the Feeling of Unity that Kant Identifies in His Third *Critique* a Type of Inexpressible Knowledge?," *Philosophy*, 2007, vol. 82.
3   All unaccompanied page references are to Sullivan's essay in this volume.
4   All unaccompanied section references are to Part I of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, revised edn, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974.
5   See note 33 of his essay above (p. 186).
6   This is a welcome opportunity for me to correct a contrary impression that I give about this metaphor in "Is the Feeling of Unity that Kant Identifies in His Third *Critique* a Type of Inexpressible Knowledge?," pp. 476–477. There I characterize the point of the metaphor as follows: "there is, grounding the exercise of concepts involved in making rule-governed objective judgements, something that does not involve the exercise of concepts at all." But, for reasons that Sullivan makes clear, this is already to flirt with the idea that there is a kind of transcendental idealism in what Wittgenstein is saying.
7   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. G.H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G.E.M. Anscombe and trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, revised edn, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1978.

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