

WAS HE TRYING TO WHISTLE IT?

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1. *'A baffling doctrine, bafflingly presented'*

That there are things that cannot be put into words, but which *make themselves manifest* (TLP 6.522) is a leitmotif running through the whole of the *Tractatus*. It is heralded in the preface, in which the author summarizes the whole sense of the book in the sentence 'What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence', and it is repeated by the famous concluding remark 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'. Wittgenstein's claim is, or at least seems to be, that *by the very nature of language*, or indeed of any system of representation whatsoever, there are things which cannot be stated or described, things of which one cannot speak, but which are in some sense *shown* by language. The numerous truths that seemingly cannot be stated, but which are nevertheless apparently asserted in the course of the *Tractatus*, can be sorted into the following groups:

i. *The harmony between thought, language and reality.* There is (or seems to be) a harmony (or as Wittgenstein later put it, with deliberate Leibnizean allusion, a 'pre-established harmony' (BT 189)) between representation and what is represented. This harmony does not consist in the agreement of a true proposition with reality, since there are also false propositions. Rather it consists in the agreement of form between any proposition whatever and the reality it depicts either truly or falsely. This shared form, however, cannot itself be depicted. A picture can depict any reality whose form it has, but it cannot depict its pictorial form — it displays it (TLP 2.171). Propositions *show* the logical form of reality (TLP 4.12 - 4.121).

ii. *Semantics:* One cannot say what the meaning of a symbol is. It is impossible to *assert* the identity of meaning of two expressions (TLP 6.2322). One cannot say what the sense of a proposition is; rather, a proposition *shows* its sense. A proposition *shows* how things stand if it is true, and it *says* that they do so stand (TLP 4.022).

iii. *Logical relations between propositions:* One cannot say that one proposition follows from another, or that one proposition contradicts another. But that the propositions ' $p \text{ e } q$ ', ' p ' and ' q ', combined with one another in the form ' $(p \text{ e } q).(p):e:(q)$ ', yield a tautology shows that ' q ' follows from ' p ' and ' $p \text{ e } q$ ' (TLP 6.1201). A tautology shows the internal relations between its constituent propositions.

iv. *Internal properties and relations of things and situations:* Internal properties and relations of a thing are properties and relations which are such that it is unthinkable that the thing should not possess them (TLP 4.123). But it is impossible to say that a thing possesses an internal property or stands in an internal relation to some other thing, for example, that light blue is lighter than dark blue. Rather, internal properties and relations make themselves manifest in the propositions that represent the relevant states of affairs and are concerned with the relevant objects (TLP 4.122). Similarly, one cannot say that a proposition is a tautology, since that is an internal property of the proposition. But every tautology itself shows that it is a tautology (TLP 6.127).

v. *Categorial features of things and type classifications:* One cannot say that a thing belongs to a given category, e.g. that red is a colour or that a is an object (TLP 4.122 - 4.125). For the ontological category of a thing is given by its logical form, which consists in its combinatorial possibilities with other objects. But the logical form of an object cannot be named, since it is not itself an object — it is rather the common features of a whole class of objects, in particular the combinatorial possibilities in reality of the objects of the common category. And that is represented in a perspicuous notation by a variable. Apparent categorial or formal

concepts, such as space, time, colour, or fact, object, relation, number, or proposition, name, function, are in effect variable names, not real names. They cannot occur in a fully analysed, well-formed proposition with a sense.

vi. *The limits of thought*: One cannot circumscribe what can be thought in language by saying what cannot be thought, for in order to say it one would have to be able to think what is not thinkable (Preface). Nor can one justify excluding a certain form of words as nonsensical by reference to reality (as Russell had tried to do in his theory of types).

vii. *The limits of reality and the logical structure of the world*: Empirical reality is limited by the totality of objects, and that limit makes itself manifest in the totality of elementary propositions (TLP 5.5561). The limits of the world are also the limits of logic, i.e. the limits of all possible worlds are the limits of logical possibility. So we cannot say in logic that the world contains such and such possibilities but not such and such other possibilities. For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities (TLP 5.61). But a logical impossibility is not a possibility that is impossible. Nevertheless, that the propositions of logic are tautologies shows the formal — logical — properties of language and the world (TLP 6.12).

viii. *Metaphysical principles of natural science*: The fundamental principles of natural science, such as the laws of causality, of least action, of continuity, etc. are not descriptions of nature, but forms of description. The so called law of causality amounts to no more than that there are laws of nature. But it cannot be said that there are laws of nature — it makes itself manifest (TLP 6.36). It is shown by the possibility of giving a complete description of the world by means of laws of the causal form.

ix. *Metaphysics of experience*: What the solipsist means is quite correct, only it cannot be said, but makes itself manifest in the limits of my language being the limits of my world (TLP 5.62). That there is no soul, no Cartesian soul-substance ‘as it is conceived in the superficial psychology of the present day’, cannot be said, but it is shown by the logical form of propositions such as ‘A believes that *p*’ (TLP 5.542 - 5.5421).

x. *Ethics, aesthetics and religion*: It is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher. Ethics is transcendental. Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same (TLP 6.42 - 6.421). It is impossible to speak about the will in so far as it is the subject of ethical attributes (TLP 6.423).

The doctrine of what cannot be said but only shown is, as David Pears has observed, a baffling doctrine bafflingly presented.¹ Bafflement is further increased when the author of the *Tractatus*, in the penultimate remark of the book, draws the inevitable corollary of his arguments:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.
(TLP 6.54)

So the propositions of the *Tractatus* are themselves nonsense. They fail to comply with the rules of logical grammar — logical syntax (TLP 3.325). For they either employ formal concept-words as proper concept-words, and nonsensical pseudo-propositions are the result (TLP 4.1272) or they ascribe internal properties and relations to something, which cannot be

¹ D.Pears, *The False Prison: a Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, vol. I (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987), p.143.

done by a well-formed proposition with a sense. For a proposition with a sense must restrict reality to, and allow reality, two alternatives: yes or no — it must be bipolar (TLP 4.023). But any attempted ascription of an internal property would *not* allow reality two alternatives, since it is inconceivable that something might lack its internal properties.

It is not surprising that the early, well-informed readers of the *Tractatus* greeted this conclusion with incredulity. In his introduction to the *Tractatus*, Russell wrote, ‘after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through the hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit.’ (Introduction, p. xxi) He clearly felt that it was incredible that so many profound insights into the nature of logic should be intelligibly stated and yet be held to be nonsensical. Wittgenstein’s restriction on what can be said, he confessed, ‘leaves me with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort’. Neurath famously remarked of the closing sentence: ‘one should indeed be silent, but not *about* anything’.ⁱⁱ If, as Wittgenstein wrote in the preface, what lies on the other side of the limit of language is simply nonsense, then metaphysics is simply nonsense and there is nothing to be silent about. Ramsey remonstrated that if the chief proposition of philosophy is that philosophy is nonsense, then ‘we must take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense.’ⁱⁱⁱ Elsewhere he observed that ‘But what we can’t say, we can’t say, and we can’t whistle it either’.^{iv} Indeed, it is not as if one can even think what one cannot say — for as the young Wittgenstein himself (wrongly) insisted, ‘thinking is a kind of language’ and a thought ‘just is a kind of proposition’ (NB 82). So can one whistle what one cannot think, i.e. can one apprehend truths which one cannot even think?

The predicament is serious. It is not merely that Wittgenstein’s explanation of what apprehension of the ineffable consists in itself perforce invokes the use of formal concepts. Nor is it merely that Wittgenstein deliberately saws off the branch upon which he is sitting, since if the account of the conditions of representation given in the book is correct, then the sentences of the book are mere pseudo-propositions. But rather, if that is so, then the account of the conditions of representation is itself nonsense. And that seems a *reductio ad absurdum* of the very argument that led to the claim that the sentences of the book are one and all pseudo-propositions.

2. A post-modernist defence

One may well share Russell’s qualms. Surely, one is inclined to think, there is much that can be learnt from the book. Even if there is, as the later Wittgenstein laboured to show, much that is wrong with it, there is also much that it has taught us. Few, today, would defend the claim that the logical connectives are names of logical entities (unary and binary functions), or that sentences are names of truth-values or of complexes. Few would claim, as Frege and Russell did, that logical propositions are (what we would call) generalisations of tautologies, or

ⁱⁱ O. Neurath, ‘Sociology and Physicalism’, *Erkenntnis*, 2 (1931-2), pp.393-431, repr. in translation in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J.Ayer (Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1959), p.284.

ⁱⁱⁱ F.P. Ramsey, ‘Philosophy’, in *The Foundations of Mathematics*, ed. R.B. Braithwaite (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, London, 1931), p.263.

^{iv} Ramsey, ‘General Propositions and Causality’, in R.B. Braithwaite ed. *F.P. Ramsey: The Foundations of Mathematics* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1931), p.238. (The joke alludes to Wittgenstein’s famous expertise at whistling.) I am indebted to Professor D.H. Mellor for locating the quotation for me.

that they are descriptions of relations between abstract entities (Frege) or of the most general facts in the universe (Russell). And there can be no doubt that Wittgenstein's explanation of the tautologousness of the propositions of logic has had a profound effect upon the general understanding of logic.

One response to Wittgenstein's paradoxical conclusion is to try to erect a line of defence which will salvage the insights of the book from self-destructive condemnation. Max Black, author of the only detailed commentary on the *Tractatus*, tried to do just that.^v He conceded that if communication is equated exclusively with 'saying', then the *Tractatus* communicates nothing. But, since the book itself insists that there is much that can be shown but cannot be said, should we not insist that it shows a great deal, and that what it thus shows can be salvaged? Wittgenstein's propositions about the essences of things consist, Black suggested, in a priori statements belonging to logical syntax. These are formal statements which show things that can be shown, and they are no worse than logical propositions, which do not transgress the rules of logical syntax. But this is mistaken. The propositions of logic are senseless, not nonsense. Wittgenstein's own propositions, which Black called 'formal statements', are, by the lights of the *Tractatus*, nonsensical pseudo-propositions. They show nothing at all. The propositions that *are* held to show the ineffable truths which the *Tractatus* seems to be trying to say are not the pseudo-propositions of the book but well-formed propositions (including the senseless propositions of logic).

Black's suggestion is in effect that Wittgenstein was, as Ramsey had suggested, trying to whistle what he held one could not say. In recent years a quite different defence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has gained popularity, particularly in the United States. On this view, Wittgenstein was *not* trying to whistle it. (Neurath was right to claim that there is nothing to be silent about, and only wrong in imputing to Wittgenstein the contrary view.) It has been propounded by Cora Diamond, further elaborated by James Conant, Juliet Floyd, Warren Goldfarb, and Thomas Ricketts. On their side, enthusiastically urging them on, stands the puckish figure of Burton Dreben, a benevolent and humorous *Geist der stets verneint*. It has won warm approval from Peter Winch.^{vi} According to them, the *Tractatus* does not self-

^v M. Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1964), pp.378ff.

^{vi} Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', repr. in *The Realistic Spirit* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 'Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus', *Wiener Reihe: Themen der Philosophie*, Band V, eds. R. Heinrich and H. Vetter (R. Oldenbourg Verlag, Vienna, 1991) and 'Wittgenstein', in *Companion to Metaphysics*, eds. J. Kim and E. Sosa (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995); James Conant, 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say', in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, eds. R. Fleming and M. Payne (Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Pa., 1989), and 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense' in *Pursuits of Reason*, eds. T. Cohen, P. Guyer, and H. Putnam (Texas Tech University Press, Luboc, Texas, 1993); Warren Goldfarb, 'Metaphysics and Nonsense: on Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*', *Journal of Philosophical Research* XXII (1997) 57-73; Juliet Floyd, 'The Uncaptive Eye: Solipsism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in Leroy S. Rouner ed. *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, vol. 19: Loneliness*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp.79 - 108; Thomas Ricketts, 'Pictures, logic and the limits of sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in H. Sluga and D.G. Stern eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996); P. Winch, 'Persuasion', in P.A. French, T.E. Uehling, and H.K. Wettstein eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XVII: The Wittgenstein Legacy* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1992), p. 124f.

consciously try, by deliberately flouting the rules of logical syntax, to state deep, ineffable truths, which actually cannot be said but are shown by well-formed sentences of a language. Rather, it engages our temptations to utter nonsense, in particular philosophical nonsense of the kind exhibited in the *Tractatus*, and it demonstrates that such putatively philosophical sentences are indeed plain nonsense, different from mere gibberish only in as much as we are under the *illusion* that such sentences, though nonsensical, are deep nonsense — trying to say what can only be shown. There are significant differences between some of these interpreters. In the compass of a single article, it is impossible to deal in detail with those differences. Hence I shall focus primarily on Diamond’s account, mentioning others only *en passant*, and attempt to isolate the various theses they agree upon, all of which seem to me to be mistaken.

Diamond’s interpretation depends upon giving maximal weight to the preface and the penultimate remark. This she refers to as ‘the frame’ of the book, which instructs us how to read it. In the preface, Wittgenstein identified the aim of his book as being to set a limit to the expression of thoughts. This, he declared, can be done only by setting the limit in language, ‘and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense [*wird einfach Unsinn sein*]’.^{vii} The penultimate remark declares that ‘anyone who understands me eventually recognizes [my propositions] as nonsensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)’ The question Diamond poses is: how seriously we are meant to take the latter remark? In particular, does it apply to the leitmotif of the book. After we have thrown away the ladder, she queries, ‘Are we going to keep the idea that there is something or other in reality that we gesture at, however badly, when we speak of “the logical form of reality”, so that *it, what* we were gesturing at, is there but cannot be expressed in words?’^{viii} This would, she responds, be ‘chickening out’^{ix}, i.e. pretending to throw away the ladder while standing as firmly as possible on it. But to throw away the ladder is, among other things,

to throw away in the end the attempt to take seriously the language of “features of reality”. To read Wittgenstein himself as not chickening out is to say that it is not, not really, his view that there are features of reality that cannot be put into words but show themselves. What is his view is that that way of talking may be useful or even for a time essential, but it is in the end to be let go of and honestly be taken to be real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to

^{vii} ‘*wird einfach Unsinn sein*’, contrary to Diamond’s original suggestion in her ‘Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’ p.70, does not mean ‘is plain nonsense’ but ‘is simply nonsense’.

^{viii} C. Diamond, ‘Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*’, p.181.

^{ix} The term is, as Goldfarb points out (op. cit., p. 64), picturesque but highly tendentious. He prefers to distinguish ‘resolute’ interpretations of the *Tractatus*, which resolutely apply the penultimate remark to the text, from ‘irresolute’ ones which claim that its application is qualified by the distinction between showing and saying. According to him, the *Tractatus*, understood irresolutely ‘avoids outright inconsistency only by undercutting any genuine commitment to its basic doctrines’ (ibid.). This is mistaken. 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. That the book is inconsistent, that its position cannot be upheld, is undeniable — as its author later realized. It is, as he remarked, like a clock that does not work (see below, p. ?).

an ineffable truth.^x

Diamond contrasts two ways of taking the idea that there are, according to the *Tractatus*, no philosophical doctrines. One is to take the book as containing numerous doctrines which *stricto sensu* cannot be put into words — so that they do not, by the lights of the *Tractatus* count as doctrines. On that view (shared by Russell, Ramsey, Neurath, and later also by Anscombe, Geach and myself^{xi}), one is left holding on to some ineffable truths about reality after one has thrown away the ladder. The other is to hold that the notion of ineffable truths about reality is ‘to be used only with the awareness that it itself belongs with what has to be thrown away’. The latter, she claims, is the correct way to interpret the book.

Diamond extracts from these considerations three salient theses. First, all the propositions of the book are nonsense, except for the frame. Second, they are plain nonsense, no different from ‘A is a frabble’, with one proviso. Some of them are ‘transitional ways of talking’ in a ‘dialectic’ that culminates in their whole-hearted rejection. They are the (nonsensical) rungs of the ladder up which we must climb before we reject them *in toto*. Hence, thirdly, the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown but not said is itself part of the nonsense that is to be discarded. These three theses are common ground to most of the proponents of this interpretation of the *Tractatus*.^{xii} What is the argument for it?

Diamond’s argument involves three steps:

(a) If we take a metaphysical sentence such as ‘A is an object’, then, Diamond contends, in so far as we take ourselves to understand it, we take its truth and falsehood *both* to be graspable.

Even in thinking of it as true in all possible worlds, in thinking of it as something whose truth underlies ordinary being so and not being so, we think of it as itself *the case*; our thought contrasts it with as it were a different set of necessities. Our ordinary possibilities have the character of possibility, given that these underlying necessities are as they are, not some other way. ... possibility and necessity [are being viewed] as fixed some particular way rather than some other; they are still conceived *in a space*. What is possible in the contingent world, what is thinkable, what is sayable, is so because of the way ontological categories are fixed.^{xiii}

Wittgenstein’s aim is to show that this philosophical perspective is but an illusion.

(b) It is an illusion that there is any such thing ‘as violating the principles of logical syntax by using a term in what, given its syntax, goes against what can be said with it’.^{xiv} It is

^x Diamond, *ibid.*

^{xi} See G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (Hutchinson University Library, London, 1959), pp.161-73; P.T. Geach, ‘Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein’ in *Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G.H. von Wright*, ed. J. Hintikka, *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28 (Amsterdam, North Holland, 1976), pp.54-70; and P.M.S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972), pp.17-32, which Diamond criticizes.

^{xii} Professor Dreben would not agree with all these theses, or with Diamond’s way of putting matters. I am grateful to him for pointing this out to me in conversation. Professor Floyd, unlike Conant and Diamond, considers the preface too to be ‘ironic’ (*ibid.*, p. 87).

^{xiii} Diamond, *ibid.*, pp.195f.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, p.195.

because of this illusion that one may think that we violate the rules of logical syntax when we form such expressions as ‘A is an object’ and conceive of them as trying to state necessary features of reality that properly speaking show themselves in language. But the notion here of there being something one cannot do dissolves into incoherence if pressed slightly.^{xv}

(c) In fact, she argues, Wittgenstein’s claim is not that the sentence ‘A is an object’ is a special kind of nonsense, a kind of nonsense that transgresses the bounds of sense in the attempt to say something that cannot be said. *Pace* Ramsey, Wittgenstein was not committed to the existence of two kinds of nonsense, (i) important nonsense that tries to say what can only be shown, and (ii) plain nonsense.^{xvi} What Wittgenstein says is that *any* possible sentence is, as far as its construction goes, legitimately put together, and if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to one of its constituents (TLP 5.4733). The reason why ‘Socrates is identical’ is nonsense is that we have given no meaning to ‘identical’ as an adjective. ‘A is an object’ is nonsensical in exactly the same way. We have given no meaning to ‘object’ as a predicate noun, but only as a variable. But, unlike ‘Socrates is identical’, we are misled by the former kind of sentence, and think of ourselves as meaning something by it that lies beyond what Wittgenstein allows to be sayable. When he insists that we cannot say ‘There are objects’, he does not mean ‘There are, all right, only *that there are* has to be expressed in another way’.^{xvii} Rather, he simply means that this sentence is plain nonsense, not essentially different from ‘There are frabbles’. There is nothing to be shown that cannot be said. Indeed, she argues (correctly) that

It is an immediate consequence of this account of philosophy that the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself are nonsensical, since they treat formal properties and relations as non-formal properties and relations. In their use in the sentences of the *Tractatus*, the words ‘world’, ‘fact’, ‘number’, ‘object’, ‘proposition’ (and so on) have been given no meaning.^{xviii}

When we are told to ‘throw away the ladder’, it seems, we are meant, on pain of ‘chickening out’ as she puts it, to throw *everything* away, including the bogus distinction between things that can be said and things that cannot be said but only shown.

This is a radical interpretation of the *Tractatus*, according to which the whole book is a dialectic in which one proceeds from one nonsensical rung of a ladder to another. Unlike Hegelian dialectic, however, there is no final synthesis which incorporates what was right about the antecedent theses and antitheses — for it culminates not in a final synthesis of all that precedes it, but in its total repudiation. It is a ‘dialectic’ only in the sense that the reader is supposed to interrogate the book while reading it, and to realise, as each transitional stage is transcended, each rung ascended, that it was actually nonsense, and indeed to realise in the end, that the whole book is nonsense. James Conant has developed her interpretation in

^{xv} Ibid., p.195.

^{xvi} Juliet Floyd, by contrast, argues that there is a difference between ‘deep nonsense’ and ‘plain nonsense’ (ibid., p. 85). Deep nonsense, in her view, is the nonsense that interests Wittgenstein, for it does have sense ‘in the ordinary grammatical sense; it is not *just* gibberish’, although like plain nonsense, it ‘yields’ no ineffable insight. She does not, however, explain what ‘having sense in the ordinary grammatical sense’ means or give any evidence to show that Wittgenstein drew any such distinction.

^{xvii} Diamond, *ibid.*, pp. 197f.

^{xviii} C. Diamond, ‘Wittgenstein’, p. 514.

‘Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense’ and attempted to draw parallels between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. In particular, he compares the author of the *Tractatus* to the pseudonymous Kierkegaardian ‘humourist’ Johannes Climacus, who wrote his book in order to revoke it. Conant represents the book as an exercise in Kierkegaardian irony. Following Diamond, he writes, ‘I would urge that the propositions of the *entire* work are to be thrown away as nonsense.’^{xix} The aim of the book, he claims, ‘is to undo our attraction to various grammatically well-formed strings of words that resonate with an aura of sense. The silence that ... the *Tractatus* wish[es] to leave us with in the end is one in which nothing has been said and there is nothing to say (of the sort that we imagined there to be). ... [It] is not the pregnant silence that comes with the censorious posture of guarding the sanctity of the ineffable.’^{xx}

This ‘deconstructive’ interpretation^{xxi} seems to me to be a most curious way of reading a great book and of dismissing the philosophical insights that it contains, even though many of them are, as Wittgenstein himself later realized, ‘seen through a glass darkly’, and many of the claims are, as he later laboured to make clear, erroneous. The *Tractatus*, as he remarked to Elizabeth Anscombe, is not *all* wrong: it is not like a bag of junk professing to be a clock, but like a clock that does not tell the right time.^{xxii} On Diamond’s interpretation, it was never meant to be a working clock, but a self-destructive one designed to explode as soon as wound up. But it is perhaps not surprising that this interpretation should appeal to the post-modernist predilection for paradox characteristic of our times. I shall argue that it is mistaken.

3. *Criticism of the post-modernist interpretation: the Tractatus — internal evidence*

The following critical assessment of this interpretation involves a pincer movement. On the one hand, we must examine internal evidence of the *Tractatus* text and the manner in which the proponents of the interpretation handle it. On the other hand, we must examine what Wittgenstein wrote and said to others about his work both before, during and after the composition of the book. Both are equally important, and present the proponents with a large array of difficulties which they have not confronted. In this section I shall be concerned only with internal evidence.

One cannot but be struck by the hermeneutic method that informs the interpretation of the *Tractatus* given by Diamond, Conant, Goldfarb and Ricketts, and by the sparseness of the evidence they muster. First, they rightly take seriously the preface to the book and the notorious concluding remarks. But they surprisingly disregard the fact that in the preface

^{xix} J. Conant, ‘Must We Show What We Cannot Say’, p.274, n.16. In ‘Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense’, he makes the same point: ‘when Wittgenstein says “nonsense” he means *plain nonsense*, and when he says “throw the ladder away”, he means *throw it away*’ (p. 198).

^{xx} Conant, ‘Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense’, p.216.

^{xxi} In so far as ‘deconstruction’ subscribes to the hermeneutic principle that an author never says what he means or means what he says, this epithet seems eminently suitable to characterize many of the tactical moves of the proponents of this interpretation in disregarding what Wittgenstein actually wrote and said about what he had written.

^{xxii} G.E.M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (Hutchinson, London, 1971), p.78.

Wittgenstein speaks of *the thoughts* expressed in the book, asserts that their *truth* is ‘unassailable and definitive’, and expresses the belief that he has found, ‘on all essential points, the final solution of the problems’. This is problematic, since ‘the frame’ was supposed to be taken literally and not ‘dialectically’ or ‘ironically’. But it seems evident that, on their interpretation, the frame too is written ‘tongue in cheek’ — since, in their view, no thoughts are expressed in the book and there are no unassailable and definitive truths, effable or ineffable, in it.

Secondly, they are methodologically inconsistent. (a) Apart from the ‘frame’, Diamond and Conant implicitly exempt TLP 4.126 - 4.1272, 5.473 and 5.4733 from condemnation as nonsense, since these are the passages upon which their argument depends, which distinguish formal concepts from concepts proper, equate formal concepts with variables in order to show that one cannot say that, e.g. ‘There are objects’, and which explain that ‘Socrates is identical’ is a possible proposition. I shall return to this point below. (b) When it is convenient for their purposes, proponents of the post-modernist interpretation have no qualms in quoting and referring to further points Wittgenstein makes in the *Tractatus*, which they take to be correct rather than plain nonsense. Thus, for example, Goldfarb argues that Wittgenstein’s discussion of objective *possibilia* in TLP 2ff. involves intentional inconsistency. It is merely discourse ‘in the transitional mode’. If we press these passages, we shall see the inconsistency.

Then, in 5.525 Wittgenstein says, “The ... possibility of a situation is not expressed by a proposition, but by an expression’s ... being a proposition with sense.” So we see what the transitional vocabulary was meant to lead us to: an appreciation that our understanding of possibility is not ontologically based in some realm of the possible, but arises simply from our understanding of ... the sensical sentences of our language.^{xxiii}

^{xxiii} Goldfarb, *ibid.*, p. 66. Goldfarb’s argument is derived from Ricketts, who argues as follows (using the Ogden translation). The discussion of TLP 2ff. is intentionally misleading, and intended to be seen as such. (i) It suggests that the determination of the range of possibilities by the forms of objects is itself some sort of fact. (ii) Talk of atomic facts as obtaining or not obtaining (TLP 2, 2.04 - 2.06, 4.21) reifies possibilities and treats actualization as a property that some possibilities possess. But this is inconsistent with claiming that an object’s form is not any sort of fact about it. It is also inconsistent with identifying atomic facts with combinations of objects (TLP 2.01, 2.031). Objects being configured thus and so constitute the obtaining of the atomic fact. The obtaining is not a property that the combination of objects has or lacks. So, if an atomic fact does not obtain, there is nothing, no entity that fails to obtain. Finally, the reification of possible atomic facts would make them independent of what is the case. They would then play the role that the 2.02s assign to objects.

This is a mistaken interpretation. First, the determination of the range of possibilities by the forms of objects is not suggested to be a form of fact. For a fact is precisely what is contingently the case. But possibilities of occurrence in states of affairs are *essential* to, and part of the *nature* of, objects. Every possibility is necessarily possible (TLP 2.012f.), hence not ‘some sort of fact’. Second, TLP 2, 2.04 - 2.06, and 4.21 do not speak of atomic facts as obtaining or not obtaining. It is states of affairs that obtain or fail to obtain. By the lights of the *Tractatus* there is no such thing as a fact that does not obtain (for which Wittgenstein criticized himself later — cf. PG 199). Third, it is true that if, as Ricketts puts it, an atomic fact (i.e. a state of affairs) fails to obtain, there is no *entity* that fails to obtain. But a state of affairs is not an entity of any kind — any more than is a fact. Fourth, states of affairs are not ‘possible facts’ (a phrase Wittgenstein studiously avoids). Positive facts are the existence or

So this passage is, apparently, not nonsense (even though it employs formal concepts). Diamond discusses approvingly TLP 3.323, which says that in the proposition ‘Green is green’ — where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective — these words do not merely have different meanings, they are different symbols.^{xxiv} Yet here too, formal concepts are being used (e.g. name, proposition, symbol). Similarly, she holds that Wittgenstein really did think that the signs ‘*p*’ and ‘ $\sim p$ ’ can say the same thing (TLP 4.0621), that his criticisms of Frege in 4.063 are not ‘plain nonsense’ but genuine, powerful criticisms, as are his criticisms of Russell’s theory of judgement.^{xxv} With this one must agree, but wonder whether this is not a case of trying to have one’s cake and eat it.

Thirdly, they pay no attention to the other numerous passages in the *Tractatus* in which it is claimed that there are things that cannot be said but are shown by features of the symbolism. But it is surely necessary, if their interpretation is sound, to examine these too, in order to show the adequacy of their interpretation. They cannot be brushed aside as ironic or transitional, but must be argued to be so on the basis of evidence from the text and from Wittgenstein’s own remarks on the book.

Finally, those among them who contend that some of the propositions of the *Tractatus* are ‘transitional ways of talking’ in a ‘dialectic’ in effect distinguish between two kinds of nonsense: plain nonsense and transitional nonsense. Assuming that it is important that we come to realize that apparent sentences that we think make sense are actually nonsense, then transitional nonsense is important nonsense, unlike plain nonsense. So Diamond reinstates the distinction she deplors, not in order to hold on to ineffable truths about reality, but rather to hold on to effable truths about what does and what does not make sense. Moreover, if some bits of (transitional) nonsense enable us to understand that other bits of nonsense are indeed plain nonsense, how do they do this? Not, presumably, by *saying* that they are — for then the ‘transitional nonsense’ would not be nonsense at all. Nor by *showing* that the other bits of nonsense are nonsense — for the distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said

obtaining of states of affairs; negative facts are the non-existence or non-obtaining of states of affairs (TLP 2.06). But unactualized states of affairs are possibilities. And they are indeed independent of what is the case, of the facts. They do not play the role of objects, which constitute the substance of the world. It is the objects that determine the range of all possible states of affairs in virtue of their combinatorial possibilities (TLP 2.0124). When he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein would have denied that actualization is a property that some possibilities possess: it is no more a *property* of states of affairs than existence is a property of an object or a complex (which is not to be confused with a fact). But it is important to note that Ricketts’s penetrating point was precisely one of the criticisms Wittgenstein directed against himself in his later writings (PG 136 - 8). It is also noteworthy that TLP 2.01 ‘A *Sachverhalt* is a combination of objects’ is a comment on TLP 2 — hence obviously a comment on existing or obtaining *Sachverhalten*. A *Sachverhalt* that does not obtain is a possible combination of objects (TLP 2.0121 - 2.0123). An obtaining *Sachverhalt* is an actual combination of objects — a positive fact. There is no intentional incoherence here.

^{xxiv} Diamond, ‘Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, pp. 70f.

^{xxv} These remarks are taken from Diamond’s paper ‘Truth before Tarski: After Sluga, After Ricketts, After Anscombe, After Geach, Goldfarb, Hylton and Van Heijenoort’, which she presented at the Boston Colloquium on the History and Philosophy of Science on 23 April, 1998.

but only shown is itself, according to Diamond, plain nonsense.^{xxvi} Can Diamond and her followers, without themselves ‘chickening out’, explain how this is effected?

I shall now turn to details of this interpretation of the *Tractatus* and demonstrate its inadequacies:

(i) *Sawing off the branch*: Diamond argues that Wittgenstein did not *really* think that there is anything which cannot be said by well-formed propositions but which can nevertheless be shown. *All* features of the world can be described by well-formed propositions with a sense, and there is nothing that can be shown but not said. So he did not *really* think that there are objects (properties, relations, states of affairs, facts) or that such and such propositions are tautologies or contradictions, or that such and such a proposition entails such and such another proposition, or that red is a colour, 1 is a number, being-greater-than a relation. He did not think that these combinations of words, which employ formal concept-words as if they were genuine concept-words or which predicate internal properties of propositions, are, despite being ill-formed, attempts to say what can only be shown. He thought that they are plain nonsense, and that there is really nothing at all to be shown — neither tautologousness nor contradiction, and not entailment either. But why, in her view, are they nonsense, or rather, why, in her view, did the author of the *Tractatus* think they are? After all, it is natural enough to reply, red *is* a colour, 1 *is* a number, the proposition that $p \vee \sim p$ is a tautology, and the proposition that $p \& \sim p$ is a contradiction. If it is misguided to say such things, some argument is necessary. Diamond rightly claims that Wittgenstein thought these combinations of words lack sense because they employ formal concept-words as if they were proper concept-words, and formal concepts are expressed by propositional variables. And a well-formed proposition with a sense cannot contain an unbound variable; hence a formal concept-word cannot occur in a fully analysed well-formed proposition (TLP 4.126 - 4.1272). But *these claims themselves* involve the use of formal concepts (proposition, variable, concept, formal concept, formal property, function). They too are nonsense. Wittgenstein did not say, in TLP 6.54, ‘My propositions elucidate in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical — *except for propositions 4.126 - 4.1272*’! So, on Diamond’s interpretation, the argument in support of the claim that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are plain nonsense is itself, by the standards of the *Tractatus*, plain nonsense. So too is her claim that, according to what Wittgenstein *really* thought, all features of *the world* (a word which, she has told us (see quotation on p.? above), has been given no meaning in the *Tractatus*) are describable. Similar considerations apply to Diamond’s reliance upon TLP 5.473 and 5.4733 in order to sustain the claim that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are mere nonsense in as much as we have given no meaning to words, otherwise used as formal concept-words, when they occur as predicates. These claims likewise employ formal concepts (e.g. proposition, property, symbol). And they are surely not bipolar propositions with a sense, contingent truths that could be otherwise. Nor are they senseless but well-formed tautologies. So they too are nonsense, and cannot legitimately be invoked to support Diamond’s thesis.

The merit of Diamond’s interpretation was supposed to be that it saves Wittgenstein from the embarrassment of sawing off the branch upon which he is sitting. But it now turns out that Diamond’s interpretation involves exactly the same embarrassment.

(ii) *The rationale for the showing/saying distinction*: Diamond rightly emphasizes the

^{xxvi} I owe this point to John Hyman.

fact that the rationale for the claim that one cannot say that A is an object, or that there are objects is that ‘object’ is a formal concept-word. But it is not the only kind of rationale for claims concerning what cannot be said. One similarly cannot attribute internal properties to an object or to a fact (TLP 4.122 - 4.125). It is impossible to assert by means of propositions that such internal properties and relations exist: rather they make themselves manifest in the propositions that represent the relevant states of affairs and are concerned with the relevant objects (TLP 4.122). Hence one cannot say that Cambridge blue is lighter than Oxford blue (cf. TLP 4.123) or even that a light blue object is lighter than a dark blue one, even though no formal concepts are involved here. But it is shown by the pair of propositions ‘The Cambridge flag is light blue’ and ‘The Oxford flag is dark blue’.^{xxvii} Similarly, one cannot say that a proposition is a tautology or contradiction, or that one proposition follows from another. For such assertions ascribe formal properties and relations to propositions (which are facts^{xxviii}). So they both contain a formal concept, viz. ‘proposition’, and ascribe internal properties and relations. But whatever plausibility attaches to the claim that ‘there are objects’ is, according to Wittgenstein, plain nonsense (and he certainly thought it was nonsense), very little attaches to Diamond’s suggestion that there is never, *stricto sensu* anything to be shown. For on her interpretation, such propositions as ‘The Cambridge flag is lighter than the Oxford flag’, “‘ $p \vee \sim p$ ’ is a tautology’ and “‘ q ’ follows from “‘ $(p \supset q) \cdot (p)$ ’” are also, according to the *Tractatus*, plain nonsense which does *not* try to say something that is otherwise shown. But here there evidently *is* something that is manifest — in the first case by the above pair of propositions (which also show that light blue is lighter than dark blue), in the second by the TF notation which visibly *shows* a tautology to be a tautology, and in the third case by the tautologousness of the formula ‘ $(p \supset q) \cdot (p) : e : (q)$ ’.

(iii) *Diamond on the Tractatus*: (a) Diamond suggests, as we have seen, that if we take ourselves to have understood a metaphysical sentence such as ‘A is an object’ (‘1 is a number’, ‘Light blue is lighter than dark blue’, ‘12 o’clock (here, today) is a time’) we take *both* its truth and its falsehood to be graspable. Even in thinking of it as true in all possible worlds, ‘we think of it as itself *the case*’, and think of possibilities and necessities as fixed some particular way rather than some other. To interpret Wittgenstein as holding that there are ineffable truths which he tried to indicate by means of the illegitimate sentences of the *Tractatus* is to view possibility and necessity as fixed some particular way rather than some other way — to conceive of them as being *in a space*.

But this is not so. These sentences purport to ascribe either formal or internal properties and relations (or both) to things. An internal property, as we have noted, is one which it is *unthinkable* that its object should not possess. We do indeed think that

^{xxvii} Cf. WWK 55 where he introduces for the first time a distinction between a complete and an incomplete description, thus licensing the incomplete description that the Cambridge flag is lighter than the Oxford flag but excluding the pseudo-proposition that the light blue Cambridge flag is lighter than the dark blue Oxford one. See below, pp. 2 and footnote 44.

^{xxviii} It has been objected by Professor R.J. Fogelin that Wittgenstein does not hold that propositions are facts (R.J. Fogelin, ‘Feature Review Article’, *International Philosophical Quarterly* XXXVIII (1998), p.77) since what he wrote is that ‘A propositional sign is a fact’ (TLP 3.14). But since a proposition is a propositional sign in its projective relation to reality (TLP 3.12), if a propositional sign is a fact, so too is a proposition.

we apprehend that 1 is a number, but we would not know what to make of the claim that 1 might not be a number. We see that Cambridge blue is lighter than Oxford blue, but we rightly find it *inconceivable* that this ‘necessity’ be otherwise, that *these* very colours might *not* stand in the relation of one being lighter than the other. So we manifestly do *not* take the falsehood of these metaphysical assertions to be graspable — we take it to be inconceivable. We do not take A’s being an object to be something that is the case and might not be the case, we take it to be something that could not be otherwise. And, of course, that is *one* reason why Wittgenstein does not think that these sentences express genuine propositions: they do not satisfy the essential requirement on a proposition with a sense, namely bipolarity. They attempt to say something that cannot be said.

(b) Diamond rightly claims that ‘A is an object’ is nonsense in exactly the same sense as ‘Socrates is identical’ or ‘A is a frabble’. But, more contentiously, she claims that the *only* difference between them is that the first is likely to mislead us, for it may lead us to think that we mean something by it, something that lies beyond what Wittgenstein allows to be sayable. But if Diamond allows herself to invoke the nonsensical sentences of TLP 5.473 - 5.4733, then we should surely turn to other pertinent passages too which stand on exactly the same level. In particular we should note TLP 4.1272, which holds that ‘Whenever the word “object” (“thing”, etc.) is *correctly* used, it is expressed in conceptual notation by a variable name. ... Wherever it is used in a different way, that is as a proper concept-word, nonsensical pseudo-propositions are the result’ [emphasis added]. What are these ‘nonsensical pseudo-propositions’? Wittgenstein’s examples are not mere possible sentences to one of the constituents of which we have patently failed to give a meaning, like ‘A is a frabble’. Nor are they such gibberish as ‘Good has is’. Rather, they are (nonsensical) putatively metaphysical sentences such as ‘There are objects’ or ‘A is an object’, ‘1 is a number’, Russell’s axiom of infinity, viz. ‘There are !_o objects’ (ibid.), identity statements (TLP 5.534) and the propositions of mathematics (TLP 6.2). And, of course, the sentences of the *Tractatus* itself. These are rungs on the ladder up which we must climb to attain a correct logical point of view from which we shall see that what they try to say cannot be said but is shown by features of our means of representation.

Diamond, to be sure, can try to explain this while denying the conclusion. These strings of words tempt us to think that they make sense, and we need to be disabused of this illusion. Not only are they nonsense in her view, but they are *not* attempts to say what cannot be said — for it is a further illusion to think that there is any such thing. One cannot but sympathize with Diamond and Ramsey: nonsense is nonsense. But the question is whether Ramsey is right in thinking that Wittgenstein was trying to whistle it, or whether Diamond is right that he was not. To be sure, the later Wittgenstein would deny that ‘A is an object’ is nonsense at all — it is a grammatical proposition, a *rule* (in a misleading guise) licensing, for example, the inference from ‘A is on the table’ to ‘There is an object on the table’ (although other examples would be handled differently). But that is not what he thought when he wrote the *Tractatus*, for he did not then think (as he later did) that the concept of a proposition is a family resemblance concept, admitting grammatical propositions, as well as many others excluded by the *Tractatus*, into the family. Did he then think that such pseudo-propositions, as he then conceived of them, are attempts to say something that is, or, *if correct*, would be, shown by features of our symbolism? Yes: ‘What the axiom of infinity is intended to say would express itself in language through the existence of infinitely many names with different meanings’ (TLP 5.535). And by parity of reasoning, the denial of the axiom of infinity is nonsense too, but what *it*

intends to say would be shown through the existence of finitely many names with different meanings. What Wittgenstein is saying to Russell when he denies that one can say that there are !_o objects is precisely, *pace* Diamond (see above p. ?): *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.

How do these pseudo-propositions differ from ‘A is a frabble’? In four ways. First, in that they involve the use of expressions which do indeed have a use in our language. For ‘object’, ‘number’, etc., unlike ‘frabble’, do have a use — as variables. The fact that they will not occur in fully analysed propositions does not mean that they are not legitimate signs when used as bound variables. Furthermore, ‘The propositional variable signifies the formal concept, and its values signify the objects that fall under the concept’ (TLP 4.127) — so: a name *shows* that it signifies an object, a numeral *shows* that it signifies a number, and so on (TLP 4.126).

Secondly, in that they involve *misuses* of these expressions, *incorrect* uses — uses which do not accord with the rules of logical syntax or grammar. For pseudo-propositions such as ‘A is an object’ employ formal concept-words as if they were genuine concept-words rather than variables. Consequently ‘A is an object’ is not a proposition, since the rules for the use of ‘object’ preclude its occurrence as a predicate name and we have given no meaning to any homonym which can occur as a predicate.

Thirdly, with the exception of the axiom of infinity, they are, unlike ‘A is a frabble’, attempts to state necessary truths that are not tautologies — truths the denial of which is traditionally taken to be inconceivable.

Finally, and this is the nub of the dispute, unlike ‘A is a frabble’ and ‘Socrates is identical’, they are attempts to say what can only be shown. Forms, *pace* Russell, are not logical constants, logical objects of which we must have logical experience.^{xxix} Expressions for forms are not names but variables. So one cannot say what the form of an object is; but it is shown by features of the name of the relevant object, namely those features which it has in common with all other names of objects of the same general form, i.e. the combinatorial possibilities in logical syntax of the relevant name. These are represented by the variable of which the name, and all other names of the same logico-syntactical category, are substitution instances. ‘A is an object’, ‘R_n is a colour’, etc. are nonsense, in the same *sense* in which ‘A is a frabble’ is nonsense, for there are no different *senses* of the word ‘nonsense’. Nor are there different *kinds* of nonsense — nonsense no more comes in kinds than it comes in degrees. But the nonsense of the pseudo-propositions of philosophy, in particular of the philosophy of the *Tractatus*, differs from the nonsense of ‘A is a frabble’, for it is held to be *an attempt to say what cannot be said but only shown*. In this sense it can be said to be ‘illuminating nonsense’. It is the motive behind it and the means chosen for the objective (e.g. the illegitimate use of formal concepts) that earmarks the nonsense of the *Tractatus*. Unlike such gibberish as ‘A is a frabble’, the propositions of the *Tractatus* are rungs on the ladder whereby to climb to a correct logical point of view, from which one will apprehend what cannot be said but which manifests itself in what can be said — the essence of the world, the transcendence of good and evil, what the solipsist means, etc.^{xxx} It is, however, noteworthy that the self-styled ‘resolute’ interpretation of the

^{xxix} B. Russell, *Theory of Knowledge, the 1913 Manuscript*, Vol. 7 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1984), pp. 97ff.

^{xxx} Goldfarb holds that ‘irresolute’ interpretations of the *Tractatus* cannot adequately answer

Tractatus does not make it clear how ‘plain nonsense’ can be ‘transitional’, let alone how some bits of ‘transitional nonsense’ can make it evident that other bits of nonsense *are* nonsense — since they can neither *say* this nor *show* it.

(c) Diamond and Conant make much of the fact that Wittgenstein never uses the phrase ‘in violation of the rules of logical syntax’. Indeed, on the authority of TLP 5.473, they suggest that according to Wittgenstein there is no such thing as violating the rules of logical syntax. As they conceive matters, it seems, a rule can be violated only if its violation results in doing something that is prohibited, as when we violate the rule against murder. But violating the rules of logical syntax does not result in doing something, e.g. describing something, the doing of which is illicit. So there is no such thing as violating the rules of logical syntax.

But this is at best misleading. For not all rules prohibit something that can be done but should not be done. And one can follow or fail to follow rules even when they do not prohibit something that can be done — as when one follows the rules for making contracts. Failure to follow such rules does not result in illegal contracts, rather it results in invalid contracts. And an invalid contract is not a kind of contract. The pertinent passage in the *Tractatus* runs as follows:

Logic must look after itself

If a sign is *possible*, then it is also capable of signifying. Whatever is possible in logic is also permitted. (The reason why “Socrates is identical” means nothing is that there is no property called “identical”. The proposition is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination, and not because the symbol, in itself, would be illegitimate.)

In a certain sense, we cannot make mistakes in logic. (TLP 5.473)

It seems to me that in taking this to mean that rules of logical syntax cannot be transgressed they have misinterpreted the import of this passage.^{xxx1}

There is no such thing as a linguistic rule which cannot (in principle) be followed, and by the same token, no such thing as a linguistic rule that cannot be transgressed (i.e. not complied with, not followed or not observed). Syntax consists of the grammatical rules governing a sign-language (TLP 3.334, 3.325). *Logical* syntax consists of *logical grammar*. A sign-language governed by logical grammar *obeys* (*gehört*) the rules of logical syntax (TLP 3.325). These rules *exclude logical mistakes*. (The conceptual notation of Frege and Russell is such a language, though an imperfect one since *it fails to exclude all mistakes* (TLP 3.325,

Ramsey’s question of how the nonsensical sentences of the book can be helpful. To say that the sentences of the text gesture at the ‘what’ that is shown, i.e. the ‘unutterable’ features of reality, is not a good answer. For no account of gesturing has or can be given (op. cit., p. 71). The expression ‘gesturing at’ unutterable features of reality is Diamond’s phrase (see above, p.?), not mine. The well-formed sentences of language do not ‘gesture at’ categorial truths and truths concerning internal properties and relations, they *show* them by their form and their formal relations (TLP 4.126 - 4.1272, 6.1201). The sentences of the *Tractatus* ‘gesture’ at the truths that they futilely try to state only in the sense that they try to say what cannot be said, but is shown by other sentences. They do so by studiously employing the relevant formal concepts in illicit ways, since these formal concepts represent the forms exhibited by the appropriate well-formed sentences and constituent names (TLP 4.1271) that *do* show what the *Tractatus* tries to say.

^{xxx1} Goldfarb takes it to mean that there is no such thing as a theory of language (op. cit., p. 71).

emphasis added)).^{xxxii} Wittgenstein does not *appear* to say the opposite of the view Floyd ascribes to him, he *does* say the opposite — not only in the passages she cites from WWK, but also in ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ (see footnote 33 below). It is true that he always thought that logic could not specify the forms of elementary propositions a priori. But *all* his remarks make clear that he thought that this *is* to be done, but: ‘in a certain sense *a posteriori*’ (RLF 163) — for it belongs to ‘the application of logic’ (see below p. ??). Logical syntax allows us, for example, to substitute certain symbols for certain other symbols (TLP 3.344). By the same token, it does not permit substituting certain signs for others, in particular, it prohibits using the same sign for different symbols or using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification (TLP 3.325). To use the term ‘object’ as a variable name (formal concept) is *correct* (for this is the use we have assigned to it), but to use it as a proper concept-word is *incorrect* — for no meaning has been assigned to it as a concept-word (and to do so would generate undesirable ambiguity). To fail to follow or observe, to transgress, go against or *disobey* (to use the negation of Wittgenstein’s ‘*gehört*’) the rules of logical syntax is to string together words in a manner that is excluded, not permitted, by logical syntax.^{xxxiii} Once we have assigned a use to the sign ‘object’ as a variable, it will be incorrect to go on to use it in a form of words such as ‘A is an object’ (or ‘A is not an object’),

^{xxxii} It is surprising to see Floyd assert that in the *Tractatus* no appeal is ever made to definite rules, and claim that according to Wittgenstein there is no such thing as a correct logical notation, either in Frege’s or Russell’s sense or a correct philosophical account of adequate notation. Genuine “logical syntax”, she claims, is a matter of use. ‘Of course’, she adds, ‘Wittgenstein does not say this. ... In fact Wittgenstein seems to say the opposite in several retrospective remarks, where he appears to say that at the time of writing the *Tractatus* he held the goal of a complete analysis to be achievable and desirable (WWK 42, 73ff., 182ff., 250). However, these remarks make clear that Wittgenstein always rejected as nonsensical the idea that logical analysis could specify the forms of elementary propositions either a priori or in general.’ (ibid., pp. 87, and n. 9)

This is deconstruction with a vengeance. According to the *Tractatus* logical grammar consists of rules of logical syntax. In order to avoid philosophical mistakes ‘we must make use’ of such a sign language (TLP 3.325). He later explained that in the book ‘I laid down rules for the syntactical use of logical constants’ (WWK 74). He introduced a notation for the logical constants (the T/F notation), ‘which has the advantage of rendering some things more clearly recognizable. It shows for example what all propositions of logic have in common ... The multiplicity of my symbolic system is correct from the beginning, and for that reason I do not need Russell’s syntactical rules’ (WWK 80).

^{xxxiii} Later Wittgenstein explained matters more explicitly. In ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ he wrote: ‘The rules of syntax which applied to the constants must apply to the variables also. By syntax in this general sense of the word I mean the rules which tell us in which connections only a word gives sense, thus excluding nonsensical structures. The syntax of ordinary language, as is well known, is not quite adequate for this purpose. It does not in all cases prevent the construction of nonsensical pseudo-propositions. ... The idea is to express in an appropriate symbolism what in ordinary language leads to endless misunderstandings. That is to say, where ordinary language disguises logical structure, where it allows the formation of pseudo-propositions, where it uses one term in an infinity of different meanings, we must replace it by a symbolism which gives a clear picture of the logical structure, excludes pseudo-propositions, and uses its terms unambiguously.’ (RLF 162-3).

for there it does not occur as a variable but as a genuine name — and no such use has been assigned to the term ‘object’; nor should it be, since the term already has a use. However, the rules of logical syntax are constitutive rules. Failure to follow them does not result in a form of words that describes a logical impossibility, for logical impossibilities are expressed by logical contradictions — which *describe* nothing since they are senseless (limiting cases of propositions with a sense). Nor does it result in the description of a metaphysical impossibility, for there is no such thing. To repeat, a logical or metaphysical ‘impossibility’ is not a possibility that is impossible. *A fortiori*, there is no such thing as describing one. Hence too, failure to comply with the rules of logical syntax does not result in a form of words that describes a logical or metaphysical necessity either — for the only expressible necessities are logical necessities, which are expressed by tautologies that describe nothing since they are senseless. And internal, formal and structural properties and relations, which metaphysics aspires to articulate cannot, by the very nature of a symbolism, be stated or described. But ‘they make themselves manifest in the propositions that represent the relevant states of affairs and are concerned with the relevant objects’ (TLP 4.122).

Failure to comply with the rules of logical syntax results in nonsense. Consequently, like other constitutive rules such as contract law, they do not need a sanction. Their ‘sanction’ is nonsense, just as the ‘sanction’ of contract law is invalidity — and, to be sure, these are not properly speaking sanctions. It is in this sense that logic, like contract law, ‘looks after itself’.^{xxxiv} There is another sense in which ‘logic must look after itself’, namely that logic cannot be *justified* by reference to reality. *In a certain sense*, we cannot make mistakes in logic — although that is precious little consolation for Frege and Russell whose notation does not exclude certain *mistakes*. The point is that if we fail to comply with the rules of logical syntax the result is not the expression of a *thought* that is illogical (since there is no such thing), but a nonsense. So it is nonsense to do as Russell did in prefixing the symbol ‘ $p \ e \ p$ ’ (intended to mean ‘ p is a proposition’ — which is, anyway, a nonsense) to certain propositions in order to exclude from their argument-places everything but propositions. For arguments which are not propositions render the sentence nonsensical anyway, without the assistance of the prefix (TLP 5.5351). So one *can*, contrary to Diamond and Conant, fail to follow the rules of logical syntax.

To this it might be replied that to make an invalid contract is not to *violate* the law. There is no law against making invalid contracts, only against intentionally passing them off as valid ones. Hence too, there is nothing illicit in combining words in ways that make no sense — only something dishonest in trying to pass them off as good sense. This is correct. But it does not follow that there is no such thing as failing to comply with, or to follow, the laws of contract formation, and no more does it follow that there is no such thing as failing to comply with, or to follow, the rules of logical syntax. So, one may concede that it is misleading to speak of ‘violating’ the rules of contract formation and equally misleading to speak of ‘violating’ the rules of logical syntax. One should confine oneself to speaking of *failing to comply with them*, of *failing to follow* or *observe* them. But this concession does nothing to salvage Diamond’s case. If one fails to comply with, observe or follow the rules of logical syntax one transgresses the bounds of sense, which are given by logical syntax, and to transgress the bounds of sense *is* to talk nonsense. The result of failing to comply with the

^{xxxiv} The (constitutive) laws of contract look after themselves in as much as if one fails to observe them one has not made a wrong contract, rather, one has not made a contract at all. An invalid contract is no more a kind of contract than counterfeit money is a kind of currency. But that does not stop people from making invalid contracts when they fail to observe the laws of contract-formation.

laws of contract formation is an invalid contract and the result of failure to comply with the rules of logical syntax is nonsense, a *mistaken* form of words, i.e. a form of words that is *excluded* from the language as a nonsensical pseudo-proposition. But one may, so the author of the *Tractatus* thought, deliberately and self-consciously flout the rules of logical syntax with the intention of bringing one's readers to apprehend something that cannot be said but is shown.

It is, incidentally, noteworthy that Wittgenstein did not share Diamond's and Conant's qualms about speaking of *transgressing* rules of grammar or logical syntax. In MS 110, 83 (BT 425), he wrote: 'Just as laws only become interesting when there is an inclination to transgress them (*sie übertreten*) // when they are transgressed // certain grammatical rules are only interesting when philosophers want to transgress them.'

It would, of course, be a mistake to suppose that logical syntax is given in advance of propositions with a sense, just as it would be a mistake to suppose that names have a meaning independently of the propositions in which they occur. On the contrary, logical syntax is constitutive of propositions with a sense, since it is a necessary feature of representational employment. Precisely because a nonsensical form of words is not a form of words which has a 'nonsensical sense', but simply one which has *no* sense, it would be altogether misguided to suppose that the rules of logical syntax determine which senses are genuine and which are not. Rather, the rules of logical syntax are conditions of the possibility of representation. They are not conventional stipulations, but essential conditions of sense (hence implicit in every possible conventional grammar). Transgressing, or failing to comply with, the rules of logical syntax results in a form of words which has no sense. Putative philosophical propositions, such as the metaphysical pronouncements of previous philosophers, are such forms of words, as indeed are the pronouncements of the *Tractatus* itself. However, the latter, unlike the former, do not arise out of misunderstandings of the logic of our language. On the contrary, the author of the *Tractatus* deliberately and self-consciously fails to comply with the rules of logical syntax in order to bring his readers to apprehend necessary features of reality which cannot be stated in language and to see that these features are *shown* by the propositions of our language.

(iv) *The Tractatus* — *trying to say what can only be shown*: Diamond and Conant, like Ramsey, argue (rightly) that if you can't say it, you can't say it, and you can't whistle it either. Unlike Ramsey, they think that Wittgenstein was not trying to whistle it. On their interpretation, there is nothing that the nonsensical pseudo-propositions of the *Tractatus* are *trying* to say, for one cannot *mean* something that cannot be said. But is this what Wittgenstein thought? Since Diamond and Conant allow reference to the 'nonsensical' remarks of TLP 4.126 - 4.1272, 5.473 and 5.4733, it is presumably equally legitimate to refer to related passages in the attempt to fathom Wittgenstein's intentions. If we do so, it is immediately evident that he did think that one can *mean* something that cannot be said, but rather expresses itself in a different way, viz. is *shown* by features of our language. Moreover, he insisted, we *can* apprehend, indeed, can see some things which are thus meant but cannot be said.

As noted, he asserted that what Russell's axiom of infinity *was meant to say*, would (if true) be shown by the existence of infinitely many names with different meanings (TLP 5.535). Similarly, what the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be said, but makes itself manifest (TLP 5.62). We cannot say that '*q*' follows from '*p*' and '*p e q*', for this is an internal relation between propositions. But it is *shown* by the tautology '*(p e q). (p):e:(q)*' (TLP 6.1201). We can recognize that a proposition of logic is true from the symbol alone — indeed, that is a *characteristic mark* (hence an internal property) of a proposition of logic (TLP 6.113). We can *see* that the truth of one proposition follows from the truth of another, although that is an internal relation that cannot be described (TLP 6.1221). In complicated cases it is difficult to see these internal relations, hence we need a mechanical expedient to

facilitate their recognition — viz. a proof (TLP 6.1262), which enables us to *recognize* something that cannot be said. In the T/F notation of the *Tractatus*, we can recognize such formal properties of propositions as being tautologous *by mere inspection of the propositions themselves* (TLP 6.122). So there are, according to the author of the *Tractatus*, ineffable truths that can be apprehended. Indeed, in some cases, they can literally be perceived — for one can *see* that dark blue is darker than light blue, even though, being an internal relation between colours, this cannot be said.

(v) *The Tractatus criticisms of Frege and Russell*: In the preface, Wittgenstein wrote that the truth of the thoughts set forth in the book ‘seems to me unassailable and definitive.’ Among the thoughts set forth are numerous profound criticisms of Frege and Russell on the nature of logic. There are no ‘logical objects’ or ‘logical constants’ (in Frege’s and Russell’s sense), i.e. the logical connectives are not names of concepts or relations as Frege and Russell thought (TLP 5.4 - 5.42). In a different sense of ‘logical constants’, the ‘logical constants’ are not representatives — this, Wittgenstein declared, is his *Grundgedanke*. By this he meant that, *pace* Russell, ‘object’, ‘property’, ‘relation’, etc. are not names of indefinable logical entities (pure forms), which are the most general constituents of the universe, obtainable through abstraction, with which we must be acquainted through logical experience. There can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts (TLP 4.0312). The two truth-values are not objects (TLP 4.431). A proposition is not a composite name (TLP 3.143). Frege’s and Russell’s ‘primitive signs of logic’ (the truth-functional connectives) are not primitive signs at all (TLP 5.43) and can be dispensed with in the T/F notation. The propositions of logic, contrary to Frege and Russell, say nothing — are senseless (TLP 5.43). Frege’s and Russell’s axiomatization of logic is misleading and redundant, since all the propositions of logic are of equal status, none being more primitive than others (TLP 6.127), and the appeal to self-evidence to vindicate their axioms is misguided (TLP 6.1271). There are also many positive claims about the nature of logic made in the wake of his criticisms of Frege and Russell, e.g. that the propositions of logic say nothing, are senseless tautologies (TLP 4.461, 6.1ff.), that logic must look after itself (TLP 5.473), or, anticipating (and perhaps influencing) Ramsey, a deflationary account of truth: ‘A proposition is true if we use it to say that things stand in a certain way, and they do’ (TLP 4.062).^{xxxv} These claims, and many more too, are backed with solid argument. And they are all claims about which Wittgenstein never changed his mind, even after the abandonment of his early philosophy (and of the *Tractatus* distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said but only shown). But none of these important claims is a bipolar proposition with a sense. All of them involve the use of formal concepts, and by the lights of the *Tractatus* they are illegitimate in as much as they try to say something that can only be shown. Is it really credible that the author of the *Tractatus* regarded these hard-won insights into the nature of logic as ‘plain nonsense’?

Diamond and Conant would presumably reply that points (iv) and (v) too are part of the ‘ladder’ that is to be thrown away. But whatever *prima facie* plausibility this may have with regard to Wittgenstein’s observation on solipsism (and that is a contested matter) or perhaps

^{xxxv} Indeed, this was nothing new in Wittgenstein’s reflections: “‘p’ is true’ says nothing else but p (NB 9, cf. 94, 112). On this too he never changed his mind (see PG 123, PI §136). It is surprising to see Ricketts attributing to the *Tractatus* a correspondence conception of truth (op. cit., p. 64). This is mistaken. In so far as there is a correspondence conception of anything in the *Tractatus*, it is a correspondence conception of sense. The fact that Wittgenstein speaks of a proposition’s agreeing with reality if it is true does not imply any commitment to a ‘truth-relation’ or ‘correspondence-relation’ between propositions and facts, of which being true consists. To assert that a proposition ‘*p*’ agrees with reality is to assert that ‘*p*’ says that *p* and it is in fact the case that *p*.

on his remark on the axiom of infinity, it has none at all with respect to his observations on logical propositions, to his criticisms of Frege and Russell, and to his deflationary account of truth. Throwing away the ladder is one thing, throwing away the baby together with the bathwater is another.

(vi) *The Tractatus conception of philosophy*: Diamond claims that her paper ‘Throwing away the ladder: How to read the *Tractatus*’ is an attempt to show what is involved in taking seriously what the *Tractatus* says about the remarks of which it is composed and about philosophy and its possibility.^{xxxvi} In her view, the metaphysical remarks in the main body of the book are only apparently metaphysical ‘in a way that is disposed of by the sentences which frame the book, in the Preface and the final remarks’. According to Diamond, these remarks do not indicate that there *are* things which one cannot talk about, things which can be shown but not said. On the contrary, that there are any such things is an illusion which the book is intended to dispell. Surprisingly, Diamond does not attend to 4.11 - 4.116 — the methodological remarks on philosophy. Here too Wittgenstein reiterates points made in the Preface: 4.116 says, analogously to the Preface, that everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly; everything that can be put into words can be put clearly. 4.114, like the Preface, says that the task of philosophy is to set limits to what can be thought, and also to what cannot be thought — by working outwards through what can be thought. 4.112 says that philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts, and 6.53 correspondingly explains that when someone tries to say something metaphysical, one must demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. In this sense, philosophy does not result in ‘philosophical propositions’, but rather in the clarification of propositions (4.112). So it seems that the methodological remarks on philosophy in 4.11 - 4.116 are neither ‘transitional’ (as Diamond would have it) nor ironical (as Conant intimates). Unlike much of the book, they are to be taken seriously. This makes it puzzling that tucked in between the serious claim that philosophy must set limits to what can and what cannot be thought and the claim that everything that can be put into words can be put clearly, Wittgenstein wrote: ‘It will signify what cannot be said (*das Unsagbare*), by presenting clearly what can be said’ (4.115). It seems implausible to suppose that this is a sudden intrusion of irony into an otherwise serious sequence of remarks, and equally implausible to think that *das Unsagbare* intimates that there isn’t anything that cannot be said. It seems to me similarly implausible to suppose ironic or ‘transitional’ the fourth remark from the end of the book (6.522), which Diamond excludes from what she calls ‘the frame’, namely ‘There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words (*das Unaussprechliches*)’. They *make themselves manifest* (*‘Dies zeigt sich’*). If we are to take seriously what the *Tractatus* says about philosophy and its possibility, then, I suggest, we should, above all things, take this seriously.

Wittgenstein’s crucial observation at the end of the book says that anyone who understands *him* will eventually recognize his propositions as nonsensical and transcend them (TLP 6.54). Diamond and Conant take ‘understanding *him*’ to signify understanding his temptation to engage in philosophical nonsense. The clarifications or elucidating propositions of the *Tractatus* (which are not to be confused with the ‘elucidations’ referred to in TLP 3.263 or 4.112)^{xxxvii}, on their account, are not meant to indicate, by an attempt to say

^{xxxvi} Diamond, ‘Introduction II, Wittgenstein and Metaphysics’, in *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 18.

^{xxxvii} The verb ‘*erläutern*’ and noun ‘*Erläuterung*’ are not technical terms, but common or garden ones. The elucidations referred to in TLP 3.263 are precisely parallel to Russell’s ‘explanations’ of indefinables in *Principia* *1. The sense in which the (pseudo-) propositions of the *Tractatus* elucidate (TLP 6.54) is quite different — they clarify the philosophical matters discussed in the book, *inter alia* by bring one to apprehend that what the *Tractatus* tries to say

what can only be shown, an array of ineffable truths about the logical structure of the world and about any possible form of representation. They are meant to indicate that the temptation to think that there are any such truths is no more than an illusion, that beyond the limits of language lie not ineffable truths, but plain nonsense. But this is curious, since no philosopher other than Wittgenstein had ever been tempted to think that necessary truths, or synthetic a priori truths, are *ineffable*. This is not a disease of which anyone had ever needed to be cured. For philosophers throughout the ages have thought that such truths could readily be stated in language — in the form of what have traditionally been conceived to be necessarily true propositions. The innovation of the *Tractatus* was to argue that the necessary truths of logic are *senseless*, and that all other putatively necessary truths cannot be said but can only be shown. And there is every reason to think, with Ramsey and Russell, Anscombe and Geach, that this was precisely what Wittgenstein meant. Of course, it does not follow that what he meant makes sense. It is a mistake of Diamond to suppose that the *Tractatus* is a self-consistent work. It is a mistake to suppose that it is a work consisting of transitional nonsenses culminating in wholesale repudiation, or a work of Kierkegaardian irony or of a Zen-like dialectic. The exegetical task is to make sense of his thinking what he thought, not to make sense of what he thought, since we have it on his own (later) authority that what he thought was confused. And he later elaborated, in great detail, precisely what was confused about his earlier thought.^{xxxviii}

4. *The post-modernist interpretation: external criticism*

Were the *Tractatus* the sole surviving text, there would be no option but to focus upon it and to construct the most coherent explanation of its argument possible. In fact we are fortunate enough to possess a wealth of source material prior to the *Tractatus*, documents contemporaneous with the *Tractatus*, and a vast quantity of post-1929 writings and lecture notes in which Wittgenstein often discusses the *Tractatus*. If Wittgenstein did not really believe that there are ineffable truths that can be shown but cannot be said, if he intended the ladder metaphor to indicate that the whole of the *Tractatus* was nothing but plain, though misleading, nonsense, then one should expect there to be some trace of this in his numerous later references to the book. If this expectation is disappointed, one would nevertheless *not* expect his later explanations of and allusions to what he thought in his early work to be flatly *inconsistent* with an adequate interpretation of his early views. Diamond and her followers make no attempt to demonstrate either the consistency of these discussions with their interpretation of the book or to explain any inconsistency. This is hermeneutically unsound. I shall therefore go through a selection of this material, each item of which by itself constitutes weighty evidence against their interpretation. It should be stressed that it is no less crucial for them to confront this part of the pincer movement than it is for them to block the whole of the argument thus far. For either by itself suffices to undermine their position.

(i) *Pre-Tractatus writings*: A detailed examination of the early emergence of the showing/saying distinction and of its subsequent elaboration would be a very lengthy task which I shall not undertake here. I believe that it would not even suggest that Wittgenstein

cannot be said and that the attempt merely results in pseudo-propositions; and bring one to understand that what cannot be thus spoken about is nevertheless shown by well-formed propositions.

^{xxxviii} For a detailed examination of the later fate of the various things which, according to the *Tractatus*, cannot be said but are shown by the forms of the propositions of language, see Chapter 5 below. With respect to many of the salient points, the young Wittgenstein had indeed apprehended important truths, only ‘through a glass darkly’.

thought that the distinction and its consequences were themselves to be ‘thrown away’. But it would always be open to Diamond *et al.* to claim that the *Tractatus* doctrine — according to their interpretation of it — only occurred to him later. Nevertheless, a few observations are in order. It is evident that the distinction emerged in the final section of the ‘Notes on Logic’ of September 1913. It resulted from reflecting on Russell’s theory of types, and not, as Diamond and Conant assert without textual support, from reflecting upon Frege’s puzzlement about the assertion that the concept horse is (or is not) a concept.^{xxxix} The ‘Notes dictated to Moore in Norway’ (April 1914) are largely concerned with the distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said but is shown. There Wittgenstein insisted that logical propositions *show* the logical properties of language and therefore of the Universe, but say nothing. This means that merely by looking at them, you can *see* these properties. But it is impossible to *say* what these properties are, because in order to do so, you would need a language which hadn’t got those properties, and it is impossible that this should be a proper language. A language which *can* express everything *mirrors* certain properties of the world by the properties it must have; and logical propositions show those properties in a systematic way. Indeed, every real (non-logical) proposition shows something, besides what it says, about the Universe (NB 107). And so on. Nowhere is there an intimation that all this is mere illusion. Nowhere, either here, or in the subsequent *Notebooks 1914-16*, is there any suggestion that what he is trying to do is to explode the *illusion* (whose illusion?) that there are things that cannot be said but are shown. On the contrary, he presents this idea as a profound insight:

Logical propositions *show* something, *because* the language in which they are expressed can *say* everything that can be *said*.

This same distinction between what can be *shown* by the language but not *said*, explains the difficulty that is felt about types — e.g., as to [the] difference between things, facts, properties, relations. That M is a *thing* can’t be *said*; it is nonsense: but *something* is *shown* by the symbol “M”. ...

Therefore a THEORY of *types* is impossible. ...

... Even if there *were* propositions of [the] form “M is a thing” they would be superfluous (tautologous) because what this tries to say is something that is already *seen* when you see “M”. (NB 108f.)

(ii) *Letters at the time of the Tractatus*: If we turn to Wittgenstein’s correspondence at the time of the composition of the *Tractatus* and immediately after its completion, two letters bear on our concerns. According to Diamond and her followers, Wittgenstein did not *really* think that there were ineffable things that could not be said but which manifest themselves. This makes his letter to Engelmann of 9.4.1917 either unintelligible, or a bizarre form of irony. Apropos Uhland’s poem ‘Graf Eberhards Weissdorn’, Wittgenstein wrote: ‘The poem by Uhland is really magnificent. And this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be — unutterably — *contained* in what has been uttered.’^{xl} This suggests that he took very seriously indeed the idea that there were things

^{xxxix} Diamond, in ‘Throwing away the Ladder’ p. 179, takes this on the authority of Geach in his article ‘Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein’. However, Geach presents no evidence for this claim. Conant similarly asserts it to be so, without presenting any textual evidence for the claim. That the showing/saying distinction derived from reflection on Russell’s theory of types was already argued by J. Griffin in his *Wittgenstein’s Logical Atomism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964) ch.III and further elaborated in Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (1972) ch.I. For a recent defense of this claim, see H.-J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996), pp. 332-5.

^{xl} Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir*, trans. L. Furtmüller

that are inexpressible. This was certainly what it suggested to Engelmann, who wrote apropos this letter, ‘I attach immense significance to the way in which he formulated his impression [of the poem]. It seems to me indeed that his discovery of what a proposition cannot make explicit because it is manifest in it — in my view the essential core of the *Tractatus* although only adumbrated in the book — has found a lasting expression in this letter.’^{xli}

Though not a ‘professional philosopher’, indeed *because* not a ‘professional philosopher’, Paul Engelmann is not an insignificant witness. Wittgenstein enjoyed numerous conversations with Engelmann, both in Olmütz in 1916, when he was still writing the *Tractatus*, and in later years. He not only gave Engelmann one of the original typescripts of the book, but also discussed his work in detail with Engelmann.^{xlii} As Engelmann understood the *Tractatus* and what Wittgenstein explained about it, Wittgenstein and the logical positivists shared a common endeavour in trying to draw ‘the line between what we can speak about and what we must be silent about’. ‘The difference is only that they have nothing to be silent about. ... Whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about.’ Among Wittgenstein’s ‘mystical conclusions’, Engelmann thought, are, e.g. that the sense of the world must lie outside the world (TLP 6.41) — yet, he observed, ‘he (Wittgenstein) does not doubt that there is such a sense’; that no value exists *in* the world, yet ‘that which endows things with the value they have, which they show, is therefore simply not *in* the world ... but that cannot be said’; that ‘There is indeed that which is unutterable. This makes itself *manifest*, it is the mystical’ (cf. TLP 6.522) — ‘(but not a “bluish haze surrounding things” and giving them an interesting appearance [as Wittgenstein once said in conversation]).’^{xliii} There can be no doubt at all that the idea that the *punctum saliens* of the *Tractatus* is that it is plain nonsense to suppose that there are things that cannot be said but show themselves would have horrified Engelmann and been inimical to everything that Wittgenstein had imparted to him — as far as he understood it.

The second letter is that written to Russell on 19.4.1919, shortly after completing the book. Wittgenstein wrote that his main contention in the book ‘is the theory of what can be expressed (gesagt) by prop[osition]s — i.e. by language — (and, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what can not be expressed by prop[osition]s, but only shown (gezeigt); which I believe is the cardinal problem of philosophy.’ In the same letter he explained that one cannot say in a proposition that there are two things, but it is *shown* by there being two names with different meanings. A proposition such as ‘ \square (a,b)’ does not say that there are two things, ‘*but whether it is true or false, it SHOWS what you want to express by saying: “there are two things”*’. Similarly, he insists that one cannot say that all elementary propositions are given, but this is shown by there being none having an elementary sense which is not given (CL 68). It is implausible to suppose that he was pulling Russell’s leg, and that the *real* point of the book is that there is nothing at all to be shown.

(Blackwell, Oxford, 1967), p.7. Note that Wittgenstein’s expression is ‘das Unaussprechliche’, as in TLP 6.522 (there translated as ‘things that cannot be put into words’).

^{xli} Engelmann, *ibid.*, p. 85.

^{xlii} Engelmann wrote: ‘The best way to approach an understanding of the *Tractatus* — and one that leads *in medias res* — is the way that Wittgenstein himself, steeped in these thoughts as he then was, took, almost as a matter of course, in the conversations at the start of our acquaintance.’ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

^{xliii} Engelmann, *ibid.*, pp. 97f.

(iii) *Discussions with friends*: On the assumption that Diamond's interpretation of the *Tractatus* is correct, it is surprising that Wittgenstein failed to convey what she takes to be his fundamental insight to either Russell or Ramsey. He spent a week with Russell in the Hague going over the book line by line in 1919. Deeply impressed though Russell was by it, he came away with the idea that what Wittgenstein had earlier told him (CL 68) was the main point of the book (namely 'the theory of what can be expressed by propositions and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown') was indeed its main point. 'I had felt in his book a flavour of mysticism', he wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell, alluding no doubt both to TLP 6.44 - 6.45 and to the final assertion of the doctrine: 'There are indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical' (TLP 6.522). But he was astonished, he continued, 'when I found he has become a complete mystic.'^{xliv} It is characteristic of mystics to claim that there are ineffable truths, not to indulge in elaborate existentialist wit. Russell's doubts about the validity of the idea of logico-metaphysical *ineffabilia* are expressed in his introduction to the *Tractatus*, which partly explains Wittgenstein's vehement repudiation of the introduction. It seemed clear to Russell that this idea was 'the part [of the book] upon which he [Wittgenstein] himself would wish to lay most stress' (Introduction p. xxii).

It is equally surprising, if Diamond's interpretation is correct, that Wittgenstein failed to convey it to Ramsey. For Ramsey spent two weeks with Wittgenstein in Puchberg in 1923, during which time Wittgenstein devoted five hours a day to going over the text of the *Tractatus* line by line with him. Nevertheless, Ramsey retained the impression that Wittgenstein was 'trying to whistle it'. And despite the extensive, almost daily, conversations the two had in Cambridge in 1929, Ramsey still thought that Wittgenstein was 'pretending that philosophy is important nonsense', and that he failed to take seriously his own argument that it is just nonsense.^{xlv}

(iv) *The Aristotelian Society paper*: 'Some Remarks on Logical Form' was written no later than the summer of 1929. Here he turned, for the first and only time, to elaborate what he had called 'the application of logic'. The *Tractatus*, as its German title '*Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*' indicates, was intended to be a treatise on logic. He had argued that one cannot say a priori what the possible forms of elementary propositions are (TLP 5.55). For if a question can be decided by logic at all, it must be possible to decide it without more ado, without looking to the world for an answer to the problem (TLP 5.551). The 'experience' that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of affairs, but that something *is*, and that is not an experience. Logic is prior to every experience that something is *so* (TLP 5.552).^{xlvi} It is the *application* of logic that decides what elementary propositions there are. But logic cannot anticipate what belongs to its application. It cannot clash with its application, but it must be in contact with its application. Therefore logic and its application must not overlap (TLP 5.557). Accordingly, any investigation into the

^{xliv} See R. Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1990), pp. 183f. and also his *Bertrand Russell, the Spirit of Solitude* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1996), p.568.

^{xlv} The paper entitled 'Philosophy' from which this remark is taken was written in the summer of 1929.

^{xlvi} Logic 'is prior to the question "How?"', not prior to the question "What?". This is explained in WWK 54: 'A relation that says 'how?' is external. It is expressed by a proposition. "Internal" — we have two propositions between which a formal relation holds.' Hence logic is prior to statements concerning external relations, and internal relations cannot be described.

application of logic was excluded from the *Tractatus*. In ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, he turned to this task. He spelt it out clearly: if analysis is carried out far enough, it will reach atomic propositions which represent the ultimate connection of terms which cannot be broken without destroying the propositional form as such. The task is to disclose the inner structure of atomic propositions.

Now we can only substitute a clear symbolism for the unprecise one [of ordinary language] by inspecting the phenomena we want to describe, thus trying to understand their logical multiplicity. That is to say, we can only arrive at a correct analysis by, what might be called, the logical investigation of the phenomena themselves, i.e. in a certain sense a posteriori, and not by conjecturing about a priori possibilities. ... An atomic form cannot be foreseen. And it would be surprising if the actual phenomena had nothing more to teach us about their structure. (RLF 163f.)

The programme coheres perfectly with the *Tractatus*.

In the course of the paper, Wittgenstein repeats without more ado numerous central doctrines of the *Tractatus*. Some are metaphysical. For example: space and time are forms of spatial and temporal objects (RLF 165; TLP 2.0251). Colours and sounds are objects (RLF 165; TLP 2.0131). Other doctrines are logico-syntactical. For example: all propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions (RLF 162; TLP 5). Yet others are logico-metaphysical. For example: internal relations in reality are represented by an internal relation between the statements describing the items that stand in such internal relations (RLF 168; TLP 4.125). The forms of entities described by a proposition are contained in the form of the proposition which is about those entities (RLF 169; cf. TLP 3.13). A proposition must have the same logical multiplicity as what it represents (RLF 169f.; TLP 4.04). Some are general remarks about language. For example: that ordinary language disguises logical structure [form], allows the formation of pseudo-propositions, uses one term in an infinity of meanings (RLF 163, 165; TLP 3.323, 4.002).

Apart from these numerous and striking reaffirmations of *Tractatus* claims, there are also points of disagreement. ‘I used to think’, Wittgenstein writes, that statements of degree were analyzable (RLF 168, emphasis added), referring to TLP 6.3751. ‘One might think — and I thought so not long ago — that a statement expressing the degree of a quality could be analysed into a logical product of single statements of quantity and a completing supplementary statement’ (RLF 167, emphasis added). ‘The mutual exclusion of unanalysable statements of degree *contradicts an opinion of mine which was published by me several years ago* and which necessitated that atomic propositions could not exclude one another’ (RLF 168, emphasis added).

It is obvious, and well known, that ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ represents the last phase of Wittgenstein’s adherence to the overall philosophy of the *Tractatus*. Indeed, it was, in part, his realization in this paper that elementary propositions are not independent, that not all logical relations are consequences of truth-functional composition (since determinate-exclusion is not), which led to the collapse of the philosophy of the *Tractatus*. But if Diamond’s interpretation were correct, it would be unintelligible that Wittgenstein should repeat in this paper central metaphysical, logico-syntactical and logico-metaphysical claims made in the book which had been demonstrated by him to be plain nonsense. It would be equally unintelligible that he should refer to sentences in the book as expressions of his opinions and as statements of what he used to think.

It might be argued that ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ was a temporary aberration. After all, Wittgenstein never delivered it at the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association in 1929, and later described it to Elizabeth Anscombe as ‘quite worthless’. To block this move, we can turn to reports of Wittgenstein’s lectures and discussions in 1929-32.

(v) *Lectures and discussions*: In Desmond Lee's notes of Wittgenstein's lectures 1930-32, we find — in the early lectures (prior to Wittgenstein's rapid shift away from his first philosophy) — that he reaffirms numerous *Tractatus* doctrines. Some of these are points upon which he never changed his mind. For example: Words have no meaning save in propositions; they function only in propositions, like levers in a machine (LWL 2; TLP 3.3); such words as 'and', 'not', 'or', etc. obviously do not stand for anything (LWL 45; TLP 5.4 - 5.44); all grammar is a theory of logical types; and logical types do not talk about the application of language (LWL 13; TLP 3.33 - 3.333). Others are cardinal doctrines of the *Tractatus*, which he was subsequently to repudiate or drastically to reinterpret. For example: the proposition is a picture of reality (LWL 4; TLP 4.01); mathematical propositions so called are not propositions at all (LWL 13; TLP 6.2 - 6.21); the relation of proposition to fact ... is an internal relation (LWL 9; TLP 4.014); in order that propositions may be able to represent at all, something further is needed which is the same both in language and in reality ... thought must have the logical form of reality if it is to be thought at all (LWL 10; TLP 2.16 - 2.171, 2.18 - 2.2); there are no logical concepts, such, for example, as 'thing', 'complex', 'number' — such terms are expressions for logical forms, not concepts — they are properly expressed by a variable (LWL 10; TLP 4.126 - 4.1272). And yet others concern the *Tractatus* doctrine of what cannot be said but only shown by language. What can be expressed about the world by grammar being what it is cannot be expressed in a proposition (LWL 9). Language cannot express what cannot be otherwise. We never arrive at fundamental propositions in the course of our investigations; we get to the boundary of language which stops us from asking further questions. We don't get to the bottom of things, but reach a point where we can go no further, where we cannot ask further questions. What is essential to the world cannot be *said about* the world; for then it could be otherwise, as any proposition can be negated (LWL 34). What expression [of expectation] and fulfilment have in common is *shown* by the use of the same expression to describe both what we expect and its fulfilment ... this common element in expectation and fulfilment cannot be described or expressed in any proposition (LWL 35f.).

All these assertions immediately become baffling if, as Diamond claims, the ladder metaphor of the *Tractatus* (and the preface) show that Wittgenstein threw away all the claims apparently made in the book, including the idea that there are ineffable truths concerning the logical form of the world, the essential nature of representation, etc., etc. If *that* was the lesson which the *Tractatus* was trying to convey by Kierkegaardian means, as Conant holds, how could Wittgenstein re-affirm them in his lectures in 1930/31?

If we turn to Wittgenstein's discussions with Schlick and Waismann in Vienna in 1929-31, the same picture emerges. He explicitly refers to things he said in the *Tractatus* in order to reaffirm them. For example, that we cannot foresee the form of elementary propositions; only when we analyse phenomena logically shall we know what form elementary propositions have (WWK 42; TLP 5.55 - 5.557). Logic is prior to the question 'How?', not prior to the question 'What?' (WWK 77; TLP 5.552). It is the essential feature of the proposition that it is a *picture* and has compositeness (WWK 90; TLP 4.01, 4.032). A proposition reaches through the whole of logical space; otherwise negation would be unintelligible (WWK 91; TLP 3.42). To understand a proposition is to know what is the case if it is true and what is the case if it is false (WWK 86; TLP 2.223, 4.024; NB 93f.). He reaffirms the correctness of his T/F notation: the multiplicity of this notation is correct from the beginning, which is why he does not need Russell's syntactical rules (WWK 80). He reaffirms his claim that there are things that cannot be said, but that are shown by other well-formed propositions. For example, that $2 > 1.5$, which makes itself manifest by the statement that *a* (which is 2m long) is 0.5 m longer than *b* (which is 1.5 m long) (WWK 54). Similarly, that one colour is darker than another, cannot be said, 'for this is of the essence of colour; without it, after all, a colour cannot be thought'. But this makes itself manifest in the

proposition that this (dark blue) suit is darker than that (light blue) one^{xlvii} (WWK 55; TLP 4.123 - 4.124). He refers to other things he wrote in the *Tractatus* in order to repudiate or qualify them. These, he said, are things *he used to believe*. He once wrote, he remarks, ‘A proposition is laid against reality like ruler. Only the end points of the graduating lines actually *touch* the object that is to be measured.’ (TLP 2.1512 - 2.15121). He now prefers to say that a *system of propositions* is laid against reality like a ruler.’ When he was writing the *Tractatus*, he did not know this: ‘At that time I thought that all inference is based on tautological form. At that time I had not seen that an inference can also have the form: This man is 2m tall, therefore he is not 3m tall. This is connected with the fact that I believed that elementary propositions must be independent of one another, that you could not infer the non-existence of one state of affairs from the existence of another (WWK 63; TLP 2.062, 4.211, 5.1314 - 5.135).’ In the same vein he refers to TLP 2.0131: viz. that a visual object is surrounded by colour-space, an audible object by sound-space, etc. ‘When I wrote this’, he continues, ‘I had not yet seen that the number of positions in this space form the graduating marks of a yardstick as it were and that we always lay the entire system of propositions against reality like a yardstick’ (WWK 89). He explained to Waismann his views on elementary propositions.

First I want to say what I used to believe and what part of that seems right to me now.

I used to have two conceptions of an elementary proposition, one of which seems correct to me, while I was completely wrong in holding the other. My first assumption was this: that in analysing propositions we must eventually reach propositions that are immediate connections of objects without any help from the logical constants, for ‘not’, ‘and’, ‘or’, and ‘if’ do not connect objects. And I still adhere to that. Secondly, I had the idea that elementary propositions must be independent of one another. A complete description of the world would be a product of elementary propositions ... In holding this I was wrong, and the following is what was wrong with it.

I laid down rules for the syntactical use of the logical constants, for example ‘ $p.q$ ’, and did not think that these rules might have something to do with the inner structure of propositions. What was wrong about my conception was that I believed that the syntax of logical constants could be laid down without paying attention to the inner connection of propositions. That is not how things actually are. ... The rules for the logical constants form only part of a more comprehensive syntax about which I did not know at the time. ... Thus I can, for example, construct the logical product $p.q$ only if p and q do not determine the same coordinate twice.

But in cases where propositions are independent everything remains valid — the whole theory of inference and so forth. (WWK 73f., 76)

In the final recorded discussion in July 1932, by which time his views had changed dramatically, he remarked, alluding *inter alia* to TLP 2.1511, ‘At that time [when he wrote the *Tractatus*] I thought that there was “a connection between language and reality” (WWK 210). Nowhere is there any suggestion that, of course, he did not *really* believe these things, that he knew at the time that all these assertions were ‘plain nonsense’, written in a spirit of Kierkegaardian irony or in the manner of a Zen master. On the contrary, what he explicitly

^{xlvii} This modifies the position of the *Tractatus*, for Wittgenstein distinguishes here between complete and incomplete descriptions. To say that this line is longer than that one, or that this suit is darker than that one is to give incomplete descriptions. But, he claims, if we describe such states of affairs completely, the external relation disappears, and *no* expressible relation is left — only an ineffable internal relation between lengths or between colours (WWK 55).

accused himself of was *dogmatism* (WWK 182ff.).

In response it might be held that these reports of discussions and lectures are unreliable, that we can rely only upon what Wittgenstein himself wrote. So I now turn to that.

(vi) *The post-1929 manuscript volumes and typescripts*: The early MS volumes from 1929-30 convey exactly the same picture. It is evident, even from brief scrutiny, that Wittgenstein continued (for a while) to adhere to his distinction between what can be said and what cannot be said but only shown. He wrote: ‘Remember that “the length *a* is divisible” is not a proposition, but nonsense; that it is divisible is shown by the form of its symbol’ (MS 106, 205, my translation). Again, ‘What belongs to the essence of the world cannot be expressed by language. For this reason, it cannot *say* that everything flows. Language can only say those things that we can also imagine otherwise’ (MS 108, 1 = PR 84). ‘But the essence of language is a picture of the essence of the world; and philosophy as custodian of grammar can in fact grasp the essence of the world, only not in the propositions of language, but in the rules for this language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs’ (MS 108, 2 = PR 85).^{xlviii} Similarly, he continued to hold that the harmony between language, thought and reality cannot be described in language, but only shown. He wrote: ‘The agreement of thought as such with reality cannot be expressed. If one takes the word agreement in the sense in which a true proposition agrees with reality, then it is wrong, because there are also false propositions. But another sense cannot be reproduced by means of language. Like everything metaphysical the (pre-established) harmony between *this* thought and *that* reality is given us by the limits of language’ (MS 109, 31, my translation). More generally, he remarks, ‘What is common to thought and reality which is expressed in language by common components of the expression / shows itself through something common in the expression / in the expressions/ can for that very reason not be represented (described) in language. Here we are again at the *limits of language*. One cannot describe in language the essence of language’ (MS 109, 53, my translation).

According to Diamond and her colleagues, Wittgenstein never cleaved to an ontology of facts constituted of objects, and of objects as sempiternal simples.^{xlix} For further evidence regarding his own ideas about his earlier logical atomism, see the above discussion. The ontological statements of the *Tractatus*, according to their interpretation, are plain nonsense — not anything Wittgenstein ever believed, and believed to be shown by well-formed analysed propositions of language. In MS 110, 250 (= PG 200), written in July 1931,

^{xlviii} It is noteworthy that this remark signals the beginning of his move away from the *Tractatus* conception that ineffable necessities are shown by features of the symbolism to his later view that what seemed to be attempts to express ineffable necessities are no more than grammatical rules that owe no homage to reality.

^{xlix} Floyd remarks that ‘It is one of the great myths of twentieth century philosophy that the early Wittgenstein was a “logical atomist”’ (ibid., p. 85). If this is a myth, it is one Wittgenstein accepted in 1929, for he wrote ‘our analysis, if carried far enough, must come to the point where it reaches propositional forms which are not themselves composed of simpler propositional forms. We must eventually reach the ultimate connection of the terms, the immediate connection which cannot be broken without destroying the propositional form as such. The propositions which represent this ultimate connection of terms I call, after B. Russell, atomic propositions. They, then, are the kernels of every proposition, *they* contain the material, and all the rest is only a development of this material. It is to them that we must look for the subject matter of propositions’ (RLF 162f.).

he examined in detail the use and abuse of the terms ‘object’ and ‘complex’. ‘To say that a red circle is *composed* of redness and circularity, or is a complex with these component parts, is a misuse of these words and is misleading. (Frege was aware of this and told me.)’ And he proceeds to anatomize the confusions of the *Tractatus* ontology of facts, complexes and objects. Is he criticizing himself? Or merely making clear the plain nonsense of which he had already been aware when he wrote the *Tractatus*? He resumed the discussion in the following MS volume the same year. He noted that one *can* speak intelligibly of combinations of colours and shapes, e.g. of combinations of the colours red and blue and the shapes square and circle. (I suppose that one might describe a Matisse cut-out thus.) *This*, Wittgenstein observes, is the root of the confusing expression: a fact is a complex of objects (MS 111, 19). Is this a criticism of the *Tractatus* or merely an amplification of what he then knew was plain nonsense? It is still unclear. The topic was resumed in 1937/8 when he composed MS 142 — the first draft of the early version of the *Investigations*, which was then made into a polished typescript (TS 220). §108 of this ‘Proto-Philosophical *Investigations*’ was evidently derived from MS 111, 19 since the same remark is repeated. But now he writes ‘This is the root of my erroneous expression: a fact is a complex of objects.¹ To say: a red circle “*consists of*” redness and circularity, is a complex [consisting] of these constituents is a misuse of these words, and misleading ... The fact that this circle is red does not *consist* of anything. (Frege objected to my expression, in that he said: “the part is smaller than the whole.”)’ This looks fairly clearly as if it is a recantation. And this impression can be strengthened by tracing Frege’s remark. For now that we have Frege’s letters to Wittgenstein, we know that this was a criticism Frege directed against the *Tractatus* ontology *after* completion of the book. In his letter of 28th of June, 1919, he observed: ‘You write “It is essential to things that they should be possible constituents of states of affairs”.^{li} Can a thing also be a constituent of a fact? The part of a part is part of the whole. If a thing is a constituent of a fact and every fact is part of the world, then the thing is also part of the world.’ It is patently to this criticism that Wittgenstein is referring (probably from memory), and it is a criticism to which he had paid no attention whatsoever at the time. It was only in 1929 and later that he realised the nature of his misleading and erroneous expression, came to recognise that he had misused the expressions ‘object’, ‘complex’, ‘fact’, ‘constituent’ and ‘to be constituted of’, and that Frege’s criticism, though not exactly on target, was correct. Interestingly, as late as 1st of March, 1944, Wittgenstein was preoccupied with the same error. On that day, in MS 127, he copied out TLP 4.22, 3.21, 3.22, 3.14, 2.03, 2.0272, and 2.01. He then wrote: ‘the ungrammatical use of the words “object” and “configuration”! A configuration may consist of five balls in certain spatial relations; but not of the balls *and* their spatial relations. And if I say “I see here three objects”, I don’t mean: two balls and their respective position.’ He then repeats the passage from MS 111, 19, and remarks yet again: ‘Here is the root of my mistaken expression.’ There can be no serious doubt that this is self criticism. Moreover, it should be noted that the criticism is not that ‘object’ and ‘fact’ are formal concepts which may not occur in a well-formed elementary proposition. It is rather that it is a grammatical mistake to call spatial positions or relations ‘objects’ and to speak of facts as having ‘constituents’ or as ‘being composed’ of anything.

It might be replied that all Wittgenstein is doing is noting that he had not found the very best way of articulating the nonsenses of the *Tractatus*, that he knew that it was all nonsense, but that Frege pointed out to him that the nonsense should be more persuasively put. This is wildly implausible, and there is not a shred of evidence to support any such

¹ He is inaccurate here, since he was more careful in the *Tractatus* to distinguish fact from complex, and said that a fact consists of, or is constituted of, objects.

^{li} TLP 2.011.

hypothesis.

A few further points to confirm his later critical stance. In TS 220, the ‘Proto-*Philosophical Investigations*, §92, in a passage that was meant as a sequel to *Investigations* §102, he wrote: ‘The ideal, strict construction seemed to me like something concrete. I used a simile; but due to the grammatical illusion that a concept-word corresponds to *one thing*, that which is common to all its objects, it did not seem like a simile.’ A different version of this, discussing the illusion of strict clear rules of the logical structure of propositions, is to be found in MS 157b, 10f. (also written in 1937): ‘I used a simile (of a method of projection, etc.) But through a grammatical illusion of the actual concepts it did not seem like a simile.’ In MS 142, 114, commenting on the general propositional form, he wrote: “‘Every proposition says: Things are thus and so.’ Here is a form that can mislead us. (And did mislead me.)’ And in TS 220, §95b, in a passage that is actually repeated in the *Philosophical Investigations* §108, he remarked: ‘We see that what we call “sentence” and “language” has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is a family of structures more or less united.’ But if the *Tractatus*, preface and conclusion apart, is nothing but plain nonsense and was intended by its author as such, it cannot be true that he imagined any such thing, or that he was misled by the propositional variable ‘things are thus and so’, or that he succumbed to illusions of determinacy of sense.

It is striking that defenders of Diamond’s interpretation have produced no evidence at all from the post-1929 documents to support their view. If Wittgenstein was, as they argue, practising a subtle form of ‘dialectic’, or Kierkegaardian irony, or Zen pedagogy, it would be little short of miraculous that among the 20,000 pages of *Nachlass* and the further thousands of pages of students lecture notes and records of conversations, *there is not a single trace* of any such strategy. It would be extraordinary that in all his conversations with and dictations to his friends and pupils, with Engelmann, Russell, Ramsey, Waismann, Schlick, Lee, Drury, Rhees, Malcolm, von Wright, Anscombe, etc., of which we have records, he *never*, even once, mentioned or explained what he was up to. If the internal and external evidence mustered in the foregoing arguments against this interpretation does not suffice to undermine it, it would be instructive of Diamond and her followers to inform us what *would* count as sufficient or telling evidence against their account.

I suggest that all the evidence points to the conclusion that when he wrote the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein did indeed embrace the very view Diamond and her colleagues reject. ‘There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical’ (TLP 6.522). They cannot be said or indeed thought (for thought too ‘is a kind of language’) — a conception to which any doctrine of the ineffability of mystical insight into the essence of the world or the transcendence of all that is higher must cleave. But they can be apprehended, *inter alia* by a grasp of the *forms* of what can be expressed. He did indeed think that when one has thrown away the ladder, one is left with a correct logical point of view and that this point of view includes an understanding of *why* the essence of the world and the nature of the sublime — of absolute value — are inexpressible. Any attempt to state such insights inevitably runs up against the limits of language. What one *means* when one tries to state these insights is perfectly correct, but the endeavour must unavoidably fail. For the ineffable manifests itself, and cannot be said. He was indeed, as Ramsey claimed, trying to whistle it. Moreover, it seems that when he did finally realize the untenability of this position, his reaction was to jettison the ladder metaphor, rather than to jettison the philosophical insights of the *Tractatus* that he wished to preserve and sometimes to reinterpret. ‘I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me (MS 109, 207; CV 7).’

Footnotes

A shortened version of this paper was presented at the Boston Colloquium on the History and Philosophy of Science on 23rd and 24th of April, 1998. Professors Diamond, Dreben, Floyd, Goldfarb and Ricketts laboured generously to make their views clearer, even if they did not succeed in making them any the more plausible, to me.

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