

# WITTGENSTEIN'S LATER CRITICISM OF THE *TRACTATUS*

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## I. A dispute about how to read the *Tractatus*

Cora Diamond and I, along with others, have sought to advance and defend an interpretative framework for understanding Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* that has come to be known as "the resolute reading of the *Tractatus*".<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I want to isolate, explore, and respond to one particular strand of criticism of this reading. The problem with this reading, it is sometimes alleged, is that it commits one to the view that *there is only one Wittgenstein* (whereas

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1. This paper is excerpted from a much longer paper, entitled "Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism", which is forthcoming in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond*, edited by Alice Crary, M.I.T. Press: Cambridge, MA. – I have allowed myself to speak here, in the first sentence of this paper, of "the resolute reading" because those are terms in which our critics define their target. From now on, however, I will speak rather of resolute readings. For, as some of my remarks below will help to make clear, there is no reason why there should not be a variety of such readings. A resolute reading is better thought of as a *program* for reading the book than as itself comprising a *reading* (in any very demanding sense of the term "reading"). To be a resolute reader is to be committed at most to a certain programmatic conception of the lines along which interpretative questions pertaining to the text are to be worked out. The approach to reading Wittgenstein here at issue is also sometimes called "the austere reading". This seems to me an unfortunate label, as it suggests that the commitment to austerity (i.e., the claim that there is no such thing as substantial nonsense) drives the commitment to resolution rather than the other way around. It is also sometimes called "The New Reading" – another label I am not prepared to use. It is for others to judge how new it is. But it seems to me that various strands of extant resolute readings are anticipated in the writings of all of the following earlier commentators: Hide Ishiguro, Brian McGuinness, Rush Rhees and Peter Winch. The characterization of certain readings as "resolute" is first due to Thomas Ricketts and first used in print by Warren Goldfarb 1997, "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*", in *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22, pp. 57-73, at p. 64.

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every educated person, of course, knows that there are at least two Wittgensteins).

Resolute readers urge that any reader of Wittgenstein ought to be uncomfortable with the following sort of account of the relation between Wittgenstein's early and later thought: The *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* are both trying to answer the same philosophical questions, but in each case in which early Wittgenstein aimed to show that the answer to a given philosophical question was *p*, later Wittgenstein aims to refute his earlier self and show instead that the answer to the question is really not *p*. Let's call this "the doctrinal schema". It is not that resolute and their critics disagree about which doctrines are to be plugged in for *p* above (in a proper reconstruction of Wittgenstein's own understanding of character of his philosophical development). It is rather that resolute readers hold that any schema of this form must yield a distorted account of Wittgenstein's philosophical aims early and late. The dispute between resolute readers and their critics has tended to center on how to understand the following climactic moment in the *Tractatus*:

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 out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (TLP 6.54)<sup>2</sup>

In section 6.54 of the *Tractatus*, the author of the work does not ask us to understand his sentences, but rather to understand *him*. Resolute readers take this particular nicety of formulation to be tied to the way in which we are supposed to come to see, regarding those sentences of the work that are at issue here, that there is nothing that could count as understanding *them*. The primary characteristic that marks out a reading of the *Tractatus* as "resolute", in the sense of the term at issue here, is its *rejection* of the following idea: what the author of that work, in 6.54, aims to call upon his reader to do (when he says that she will understand him when she reaches the point

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2. My emphases. Quotations from the *Tractatus* will be drawn from either the David Pears and Brian McGuinness translation or the reprint of the C.K. Ogden translation (Routledge: London, 1981), or some emendation or combination thereof.

where she is able to recognize his sentences as nonsensical) is something that requires the reader of the work first to grasp and then to apply to the sentences of the work a *theory* that has been advanced in the body of the work – a theory that specifies the conditions under which sentences make sense and the conditions under which they do not.<sup>3</sup> In order to be able to give content to the idea that we are able to come to grasp the commitments of such a theory, a commentator must hold that there is a fairly substantial sense in which we can come to “understand” the sentences that “explain” the theory, despite the fact that we are eventually called upon to recognize these very same sentences as nonsense. Resolute readers hold that to read the *Tractatus* in this way is seriously to underestimate what is involved in the request that we come to recognize these sentences as *nonsense*.

On standard readings of the book, the point of a significant number of the sentences of the work is to achieve the formulation of an adequate set of theoretical *criteria of meaningfulness*. These criteria when applied to the very sentences that adumbrate them yield the verdict that they do not meet their own criteria and thus are to be condemned as nonsensical. Resolute readers are unhappy with any such reading for a variety of reasons. For the present purpose, however, it will suffice to note that they are committed to rejecting any such reading because they are committed to rejecting the idea that the author of the work *aims* to put forward substantive theories or doctrines. Wittgenstein tells us that the kind of philosophy he seeks to practice in this work consists not in putting forward a theory, but rather in the exercise of a certain sort of activity – one of elucidation.<sup>4</sup> The core commitment of a resolute reading for the purpose of this paper lies in its insistence that a proper understanding of the aim of the *Tractatus* depends upon taking Wittgenstein at his word here. If one adopts it as a point of departure for reading the text and allows oneself “strictly to think it through”<sup>5</sup>, resolute readers take a proper understanding of the avowed aim of the work to have far-reaching exegetical consequences. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that, once

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3. Notice: this feature of a resolute reading – as, too, with regard to each of the other features to be mentioned below – merely says something about how the book ought *not* to be read, thereby still leaving much undetermined about how the book ought to be read.

4. For more discussion of this topic, see James Conant 2002, “The Method of the *Tractatus*”, in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives in Early Analytic Philosophy*, Erich H. Reck (ed.) 2002, OUP: Oxford, pp. 374–462.

this business of strictly thinking it through gets underway, many of the further commitments of resolute readers can be seen to fall into place as corollaries that follow from it. I will confine myself here simply to mentioning three such corollaries.

The first corollary (of a resolute rejection of an intended commitment on the part of the author of the work to any theory or doctrine) is the rejection of any intended commitment to an *ineffable* theory or doctrine. This means that resolute readers are bound to reject the widely held view that the relevant “propositions” of the work (namely, those concerning which Wittgenstein said, at *TLP* 6.54, that they are to be recognized as “nonsensical”) are to be “understood” as conveying ineffable insights that the reader is to “grasp” even though the author cannot “express” them. On standard readings of the work, the alleged insights here in question are held to be individuated through an identification of substantive constraints on sense adumbrated through the aforementioned criteria on meaningfulness set forth in the body of the work. It is through the “violation” of these constraints that the sentences in question are revealed as simultaneously meaningless yet able to convey something determinate. The form of their meaninglessness is supposed to highlight, in each case, a particular feature of the general conditions on sense specified by the theory in question. This requires that the meaninglessness of these sentences has, in each case, a logically distinct and specifiable character. It becomes, on standard readings, a central burden of the theory (supposedly adumbrated in the book) to give content to this idea of logically determinate forms of nonsense – where each of these forms of nonsense is alleged to acquire the potential for communication that it specifically possesses in virtue of its violation of a distinct requirement on sense laid down by the theory. This commits standard readers to the idea that the sort of nonsense that is at issue here must come in a variety of logically distinct kinds.

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5. I am alluding here to a formulation of Wittgenstein’s regarding what is involved in philosophical elucidation that surfaces in passages such as the following: “[I]dealism, strictly thought out [streng durchgedacht], leads to realism.” (*NB* p. 85; I have emended the translation) – and: “[S]olipsism, strictly followed through [streng durchgeführt], collapses into pure realism.” (*TLP* 5.64; I have emended the translation). For further discussion of the importance in Wittgenstein’s work of such a conception of thinking things through, see James Conant 2003, “On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy”, in *The Possibilities of Sense*, John Whittaker (ed.) 2005, Macmillan: NY.

This brings us to the second pertinent corollary: the rejection of the idea that the *Tractatus* holds that there are logically distinct kinds of nonsense. This is sometimes put by saying that the *Tractatus* aims to show that there is no such thing as substantial nonsense. From the perspective of a resolute reader, it makes little difference whether the candidate criteria for lending substance to nonsense involve considerations of verifiability, bipolarity, logical well-formedness, or some other putative respect in which a “proposition” is held to be intrinsically flawed because of its own internal logical or conceptual structure. Part of what the *Tractatus* seeks to show, according to resolute readers, is that all such “criteria of meaningfulness” cannot do the sort of work to which we want to put them in our philosophical theorizing. Any reading of 6.54 that takes the recognition on the part of a reader there called for to require a substantive employment of such criteria qualifies as an instance of an irresolute reading, as long as it is committed to ascribing to the *Tractatus* a theory which its author must endorse and rely upon (if he is to be able to prosecute his program of philosophical critique) and yet which he must also regard as nonsense (if he thinks through the commitments of his own theory).

At a minimum, what a resolute reading seeks to avoid here is the mess that commentators get into when they refuse to (allow that they are, at the end of the day, supposed to) throw away the following paradoxical idea:

The author of the *Tractatus* wants its reader to reject the sentences of the book as nonsense on principled grounds; yet, in the very moment of rejecting them, the reader is to continue to retain a grip on these grounds by continuing to identify, grasp, and believe that which these sentences would say, if they had a sense.<sup>6</sup>

To be resolute in one’s approach to the *Tractatus* involves taking this paradoxical idea itself to form a *part* of the ladder that we, as readers, are meant to climb up and throw away (rather than taking it to be an account of what it *is* to throw away the ladder). Thus, it involves taking the sort of recognition that readers of the work are called upon to attain in *TLP* 6.54 to require us

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6. This idea that we can grasp what certain sentences would say if they had a sense is sometimes called *chickening out*. See Cora Diamond 1991, *The Realistic Spirit*, M.I.T. Press: Cambridge, MA, especially pp. 181-2, 194-5.

to recognize that the intermediate stages which we, as readers, seem to occupy (when we take ourselves to be able to identify, grasp, and believe what these sentences intend to convey) are *aspects of the illusion* that the work as a whole seeks to explode – that they are themselves rungs on the ladder that we are asked to climb up and throw away.

The third corollary has to do with how one ought to conceive the details of the Tractarian procedure of elucidation – and, in particular, the role of the many notational devices (the Sheffer stroke, the truth tables, the special notation for quantification, etc.) that are introduced in the course of the book. It is evident that logical notation is supposed to play some sort of important role in a reader's ascent up the ladder. A standard reader will assume that the notation at issue here is one which is to be constructed so as to reflect the requirements of the theory that is laid down in the book: only those sentences the theory deems permissible will be constructible in the notation; and those sentences the theory deems nonsensical will involve illegitimate constructions forbidden by the syntactical rules governing the employment of the notation. It should by now be evident that it is not open to a resolute reader to construe the role of logical notation in Tractarian philosophical clarification in anything like this way. According to a resolute reader, the forms of logical notation employed by the author of the *Tractatus* (in order to make certain philosophical confusions manifest) must be elucidatory instruments whose employment is not itself supposed to require commitment (on the part of those engaged in an elucidation) to any particular philosophical theses.

We are familiar in ordinary critical discussion with procedures in which confusion in thought can be brought to a person's attention through a procedure of reformulation – in effect, through substituting one expression for another. This is most commonly accomplished by substituting one expression in the speaker's native language for another. But if the speaker is familiar with a foreign language, then that familiarity can be exploited to bring further elucidatory resources to bear on the situation. Thus, an equivocation involving 'or' in ordinary English can be brought to a speaker's notice, if he speaks Latin, by asking him whether he wants to translate his English sentence into Latin using "aut" or "vel". No "theory of Latin" is required in order for the speaker to take advantage of this elucidatory tool. All that is required is knowledge of how properly to translate English sentences into

Latin ones. By being forced to reflect upon what is involved in the task of having to choose one of these Latin expressions over the other, the speaker can be made to realize that he has been hovering between alternative possibilities for meaning his words without determinately settling on either one.<sup>7</sup> According to resolute readers, this is what nonsense is for the author of the *Tractatus*: an unwitting wavering in our relation to our words – failing to make genuine determinations of meaning, while believing that we have done so (see *TLP* 5.4733). And the *Tractatus*'s understanding of the character of nonsense, according to resolute readers, is internally related to its understanding of the proper role of logical notation in philosophical clarification.

If our English speaker above did not know Latin, but instead had been taught an appropriately designed logical notation (in which each of these two different possible translations of the English sign “or” corresponds to a different symbol in the notation) then exactly the same clarification could be effected using this notation. No theory of the notation is supposed to be here required, merely a mastery of its proper use. What is needed here – to paraphrase *TLP* 4.112 – is not a commitment to some doctrine, but rather a practical understanding of how to engage in a certain sort of activity. The forms of notation to which the *Tractatus* introduces us, of course, involve manifold degrees and dimensions of designed regimentation (in our use of distinct signs to express logically distinct modes of symbolizing) far beyond a single distinction in the use of signs to mark a mere distinction between two different ways of using a particle of speech such as “or”. In principle, however, if our aim is restricted to the Tractarian clarification of thought, then the point of the exercise of mastering and applying such notation and the justification of the procedures involved need not differ in any essential way from those involved in the case of asking someone to translate “or” as either “vel” or “aut”. The difference here (in the character of the exercise and the procedures it involves) is one of degree not of kind. The forms of notation introduced by the *Tractatus* therefore are not conceived by its author as requiring independent theoretical justification; and, if they did, this would defeat their purpose. They are put forward as *proposals*. If we try this nota-

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7. For further discussion of this example, see James Conant & Cora Diamond 2004, “On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely”, in Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (eds.) 2004, *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, Routledge: London, pp. 61-2.

tion, we will see that it allows us to become clear (when there is something we want to say) about what we want to say; and (when there is not) it allows us to become clear about the character of our failure in our having unwittingly failed to say anything. With respect to understanding his purpose in introducing us to these instruments of logical notation, we may be said to understand the author of the *Tractatus* each time we recognize how these alternative forms of expression (which the notation makes available) enable the recognition of nonsense. It is in this way that the notation is meant to serve as a device that facilitates a reader's ascent up the rungs of the ladder.

In a moment, I will attempt to furnish a provisional specification of some of these rungs. The extent to which one regards an exercise along these lines as a fairly straightforward matter (rather than one requiring considerable delicacy) will depend largely upon how closely one thinks the body of sentences that make up the rungs of the ladder coincides with the body of sentences that make up the text of the *Tractatus*. To see why an issue of some complexity can open up here, two things need to come into focus. First, one needs to see that there is nothing in the characterization of a resolute reading furnished above that requires resolute readers to agree with one another on this issue. Secondly, one needs to notice that, in *TLP* 6.54, the author of the work does not ask the reader to recognize *all* of the sentences of the work as nonsense. Rather the reader is told that those of the sentences in the work which are to serve as elucidations are able to serve their purpose only through the reader's eventually (through gradually working her way through the book) coming to recognize them as nonsensical. This leaves it open for a resolute reader to claim that not every sentence in the book constitutes a stretch of elucidatory discourse. Only those sentences that are thus to be surmounted (or defeated, *überwunden*) form rungs of the ladder that is to be thrown away. Which sentences are these?<sup>8</sup> I will attempt to address this question in the next section of the paper, by trying to specify some of the rungs in the form of a list.

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8. This question has been pressed by critics of the resolute reading, most notably Peter Sullivan, and it *should* be pressed. I think it is fair to say that the plausibility of a resolute approach to reading the book will depend partly upon how satisfying an answer this question can be given.



Two things should be true of each of the numbered propositions that figure on such a list: first, it should be a sentence that can be associated with a philosophical thesis that readers of the *Tractatus* might be inclined to ascribe to the work, and, second, it should be a sentence that resolute readers take to be an example of Tractarian elucidatory nonsense. If a given standard reader compiles a set of sentences of the first sort and a given resolute reader compiles a set of sentences of the second sort, then the intersection of those two sets will constitute the list of the sentences about whose role within the dialectical strategy of the *Tractatus* they disagree most.<sup>9</sup> If they can come to agreement about the sentences which belong on such a list, then they will be in position to specify with a useful further degree of precision how the terms “standard reading” and “resolute reading” are to be understood at the outset of their dispute. Armed with such a list, they can say that what makes something “a standard reading” of the work (for the purpose of their dispute) is its ascription of these theses to the work (as integral elements of the philosophical doctrine that its author seeks to impart and defend), so that in order to understand the work we must understand *them*. What makes something “a resolute reading” (for the purpose of their dispute) is its adherence to the claim that as long as we continue to ascribe to the author (as doctrines that he seeks to uphold) what these sentences (seem to) say then we have not yet completed the task of reading that he has set us, and as long as we fail to realize this we fail to understand *him*.

According to resolute readers, to take an item on the list to be a *rung of the ladder* is to take it to form a part of this task that the author of the work has set us. The reader reaches a moment in which she understands the author (and what he is doing with one of his sentences) each time she moves from a state of appearing to herself to be able to understand one of these sentences to a state in which it becomes evident to her that her earlier “state of understanding” was only apparent. This point is reached not through the reader’s coming to be convinced by an argument that forces her to believe *that* such-and-such is the case, say, by convincing her that the sentence fails

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9. Any two standard readers may disagree about which sentences belong in the first set; and any two resolute readers may disagree about which sentences belong in the second set. Thus any talk about such a list in the context of a more general discussion of debates between standard and resolute readers, such as the one that follows, will involve a certain degree of idealization.

to meet certain necessary conditions on sense. (Why should she ever believe the conclusion of such an argument, if she takes herself still to be able to understand the sentence in question? As long as she is able to do this, doesn't she have good reason to question the premises of the argument?) Rather, the point is reached, in each case, by her experience of the sentence (and the sort of understanding it can seem to support) undergoing a transformation. Each such moment of "understanding the author" involves, in this sense, *a change in the reader*. Her sense of the world as a whole, at each such moment, waxes or wanes, not by her coming to see *that p* for some (effable or ineffable, propositional or quasi-propositional) *p*, but rather by her coming to see that there is nothing of the form '*that \_\_\_*' (of the sort she originally imagined) to believe. So a point of understanding the author is reached when she arrives at a moment in her relation to a given form of words when she is no longer able to sustain her original experience of "understanding the sentence". The task of thus overcoming each particular appearance of sense that each such rung on the ladder at first engenders in a reader is an arduous one. The form of understanding that is at issue here for resolute readers can be attained only piecemeal,<sup>10</sup> sentence by sentence.<sup>11</sup> (That is to say, every reader must begin life qua reader of the *Tractatus* as a standard reader and climb her way up to a different way of understanding her task as a reader from there. To attempt to skip this stage in one's evolution qua reader of the

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10. The term "piecemeal" was, as far as I know, first employed by Goldfarb 1997 in connection with this issue.

11. The successive publications of a number of commentators bear witness to how considerable a span of time and effort can intervene between a first resolute recognition of the collapse of a particular sequence of rungs and a subsequent resolute recognition of the collapse of a further sequence of rungs. (For instance certain readers – who are now resolute readers – seem to have first noticed that the apparently realist doctrines in the work collapsed, well before they realized that their idealist counterparts must fall, too.) That this sort of time and effort can be required to climb the ladder is one of the features of the phenomenology of seriously working with the book to which a resolute reading aims to do justice. One complaint that such readers are apt to have about standard readings is that they make the process of assimilating the teaching of the work look much *easier* than it is. A slightly arch way to put this point would be as follows: according to resolute readers, the *Tractatus* is much longer than it looks – a quarter of a century of intensive engagement with the text (judging from my own case) may well not be enough time for a reader to be able to claim to have completed a single ascent of the ladder. This seemingly bottomless character to the task of simply working through the text is one of the respects in which resolute readers are apt to think there is an important similarity between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*.

*Tractatus* is to undertake to miss the experience of the work altogether.) Since they hold that the *Tractatus* has no general story about what makes something nonsense, resolute readers are obliged to hold that these moments of recognition that a reader is called upon (in *TLP* 6.54) to attain must come one step at a time. This is contrary to the spirit of most standard readings, according to which there can be a possible moment in a reader's assimilation of the doctrines of the book when the theory (once it has been fully digested by the reader) can be brought to bear *wholesale* on all of the (putatively nonsensical) propositions that make up the work.

## 2. The first list

There are many possible variations on the actual list below that would have sufficed for our present purpose – though none of them without its troubles. As we shall soon see, a reader constrained by nothing more than a bare commitment to resolution will encounter a variety of sorts of difficulty in trying to offer a specification of the rungs of the ladder in anything that approximates the form of a list. The difficulties that arise here will later prove instructive in clarifying the sorts of philosophical and exegetical difficulty that must beset any attempt to offer anything approaching a resolute account of the relation between the thought of the early and that of later Wittgenstein.<sup>12</sup> Rather than specifying the rungs by picking out swatches of text drawn from the *Tractatus* in the form of particular quotations, I do so, on the actual list below, by specifying particular lines of “thought” that either figure centrally in the book or are naturally provoked by those that do and to which commentators (standard and resolute alike) have rightly attached particular importance. This allows us to achieve a higher level of generality in specifying rungs of the ladder than would be possible if we confined ourselves to the letter of particular local formulations of each of these as they surface and resurface over the course of the text. So, in that spirit, I offer the following sample of candidate rungs:

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12. I take the difficulties at issue here not to be ones that are mere artifacts of a resolute account of this relation, but rather to be ones that themselves belong to Wittgenstein's conception of the task of philosophical criticism and, in particular, to his conception of the *difficulty* of that task.

1. A proposition is able to represent a state of affairs because it pictures it.
2. A proposition is a logical picture of a state of affairs when the fundamental elements of the proposition, the simple names, are logically combined in a fashion that parallels the manner of combination of the fundamental elements of the state of affairs, the simple objects.
3. Thought and language are able to represent reality because they mirror the logical form of reality.
4. The logical form that language and reality share cannot be expressed in language.
5. The features of reality that underlie the possibility of sense (or: the features of language that underlie the possibility of representation) are *there* all right, even if they cannot be expressed.
6. These features, though they cannot be expressed, can be conveyed by appropriately structured forms of nonsense.
7. These nonsensical “propositions” are not mere nonsense – they are not utterly devoid of logical structure.
8. Such “propositions” involve determinate violations of logical syntax.
9. Each such violation is coordinate with an (inexpressible) insight into an (ineffable) feature of reality.
10. Each such insight can be “conveyed” through the employment of the corresponding piece of nonsense.
11. What is brought out into the open in each such case, through its transgression, is a general condition on the meaningfulness of propositions.
12. The totality of such conditions constitutes the limits of (our, my) language.
13. The limits of language are the limits of the (our, my) world.
14. It is the role of a proper theory of language to demarcate these limits.
15. It thereby demarcates the boundary between sense and nonsense.
16. It thereby also demarcates the limits of the (my, our) world.
17. The demarcation of these limits enables one (me) to contemplate from above (outside, sideways on) our (my) language (world) as a bounded totality.

It is important here that each of the items on this list be taken to correspond to a sentence, not a thought. The foregoing is a list of examples of candidates for sentences that ought to be associated with rungs on the ladder. The point of furnishing such a sample of candidates is to attempt to gesture at the sorts of sentence that might be held by a resolute reader to belong on what I shall henceforth call “the first list”.

If one fully enters into the spirit in which the items on it are put forward, then it will soon become evident that even in the case of the so-called

“actual list” given above a variety of dimensions of reconstruction and idealization are already in play. First of all, one could certainly fill in the list in far greater detail. Each of the lines of “thought” in question is indicated only in a highly schematic fashion, admitting of far greater specification. But, far more importantly, almost every item on the list is meant to indicate a number of other equally pertinent items. Taking the most straightforward case of this first, at many junctures an item on the list could be replaced with something that has the form of its philosophical opposite, without rendering its candidacy for inclusion on the list any less appropriate. Thus, a realist-sounding thesis, such as 3 above, could be replaced by its anti-realist counterpart:

- 3a. Reality is representable in language because it mirrors the logical form of thought and language.

This, in turn, could be modified to take on a more palpably idealist-sounding edge:

- 3b. Our world is representable because it mirrors the logical form of our language.

Or, if you prefer, you can have a solipsist-sounding variant:

- 3c. My world is representable because it mirrors the logical form of my language.

There are standard interpretations of the *Tractatus* on offer that advocate each of 3, 3a, 3b, and 3c above, arguing in favor of the candidate item’s role as a central doctrine of the work. Thus, for example, much of the secondary literature on the *Tractatus* has come to assume the form of a debate between those who hold that the direction of explanation should flow from the nature of reality to the nature of language and those who hold that this order of explanation should be reversed. (Though there are also interpretations which hover unstably between these options without ever settling clearly on either.) Resolute readers hold that each of the philosophical positions that results from privileging either of these directions of explanation figures equally as a rung on the ladder that we are invited to climb up and then throw away. For such readers, one has failed to understand the aim of the work as a whole if one takes oneself to be obliged to try to figure out which of such opposed options we are supposed finally to settle upon: the *Tractatus*

aims to show that the sense of any of 3, 3a, 3b, and 3c above depends on the others and that they all stand or fall together – that, strictly thought through, realism, idealism and solipsism all collapse into one another.

With regard to 3, 3a, 3b, and 3c, there is nothing that debars a resolute reader from placing all four of these items on the same list. For standard readers, such (apparently) logically incompatible “propositions” crowd one another out as candidate rungs on the ladder because such propositions are to be associated with genuine, albeit ineffable, *insights* into the nature of thought, language and reality, and their negations are to be associated with denials of those insights. For resolute readers, these items need not crowd one another out as candidates for inclusion on the first list, since the rungs of the ladder they represent are all equally associated with merely *apparent* insights into the nature of thought, language and reality – all equally to be overcome. This has implications for how a resolute reader ought to conceive of the *continuation* of the actual list given above. For a resolute reader, at many points, the above list should be continued in any of several different directions, as it were<sup>13</sup> – each equally pertinent to specifying candidates for inclusion on the first list. Similarly, many of the items that *already* figure on the above list could be unpacked in either of two ways, where each way would be associated with one of two opposed philosophical doctrines. Thus, for example, 2 above, admits of both a radical atomist and radical holist variant, where, once again, each of the variants in question has frequently been ascribed to the author of the *Tractatus* by standard readers, and where the truth of each has been understood to depend on the falsity (and thus intelligibility) of the other. The two variants at issue here might be specified as follows:

- 2a. A proposition means what it does (solely) in virtue of the (prior and independent) meaning of the names of which it is composed and the logical relations into which these are (then) combined.
- 2b. An expression means what it does (solely) in virtue of the logical role that it plays in the totality of propositions in which it can occur.

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13. If there figures on the list at some point both a certain form of words and its (apparent) negation, then the list can be continued in two different directions. If there figures on the list a triad of (apparently) mutually divergent philosophical options (such a realism, idealism, and solipsism), then it can be continued in three different directions. And so on.

Here, too, much of the secondary literature on the *Tractatus* has assumed the form of a debate between (i) those who hold that the direction of explanation should flow from the nature of the fundamental elements of the proposition (above all, names and the process by means of which meaning is first somehow independently conferred upon them) to the nature of the proposition (understood as a combination of such antecedently available elements) and (ii) those who hold that this order of explanation should be reversed. And there is a parallel debate about the relation between the nature of simple objects and that of states of affairs. Do the objects first exist and then enter into certain combinations? Or are they what they are only in virtue of their antecedently fixed possibilities of combination? The opposed theses here might be specified as follows:

- 2a'. A state of affairs is the sort of complex it is (solely) in virtue of the (prior and independent) character of the elementary objects out of which it is composed and the particular sort of logical relation into which these have been combined.
- 2b'. An object is the sort of element it is (solely) in virtue of the antecedently fixed possibilities of combination into which it can enter and thus can be identified only as the object it is through a specification of the totality of states of affairs in which it occurs.

Here, too, resolute readers will hold that either of the philosophical positions that thus results (from privileging either of these directions of explanation) figures equally centrally as a rung on the ladder that we are invited to climb up and throw away.

Starting with item 5 on the list, I have indicated possible (sometimes apparently minor, sometimes apparently momentous) variants on the rung in question through a sort of parenthetical shorthand. Each occurrence of this parenthetical notation indicates the possibility of a further (sometimes apparently logically or philosophically opposed) candidate item for the list. Resolute readers will agree that if any member of a set of parenthetically indicated variants on the actual list above belongs on the first list, then all of the other variants (i.e., including the original numbered item of which the parenthetically indicated ones are variants) belong there as well. For what all of the items on the first list are supposed to have in common – i.e., what marks them out as sentences belonging on the first list – is that each of them expresses an apparent commitment that figures in the *Tractatus* as a philo-

sophical temptation that the author intends to help the reader to overcome. On a resolute understanding of the method of the *Tractatus*, in which these candidate answers to metaphysical questions are to be made to vanish through the vanishing of the questions themselves, at the end of the day, such clusters of answers either have to have been made to vanish all together or not at all – regardless of whether they purport to be about “language”, “thought”, or “reality”, or whether they purport to be about “the”, “our”, or “my” language (or thought, or reality). You cannot resurrect a piece of nonsense from the grave of semantic emptiness merely by adding or subtracting a “not”, or by substituting a “my” or an “our” into a mere sequence of signs. To raise it from the grave, you must confer a determinate method of symbolizing on the propositional sign; and once you have done this you have thereby also conferred a sense on certain counterparts of it (such as those that can be formed in the appropriate manner by introducing a “not” into the propositional symbol).<sup>14</sup>

### 3. The second list

Before we turn to the actual list below, it might help briefly to remind ourselves what sorts of moment in his early work are singled out for attention in Wittgenstein’s later criticisms of it. Here is a representative passage that, I take it, attempts to summarize an aspect of how things looked to his early self at the time of writing the *Tractatus*:

But now it may come to look as if there were something like a final analysis of our forms of language, and so a *single* completely resolved form of expression. That is, as if our usual forms of expression were, essentially, unanalysed; as if there were something hidden in them that had to be brought to light. When this is done the expression is completely clarified and our problem solved.

It can also be put like this: we eliminate misunderstandings by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation. (*PI* § 91)

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14. For discussion of the distinction between propositional sign and propositional symbol in the *Tractatus*, see Conant 2002, pp. 398–405.



This is a characterization of how things came to look to the author of the *Tractatus* at the time of writing that book. It is a characterization of some of the implicit philosophical preconceptions that came with his earlier practice of eliminating misunderstandings by subjecting the sentences that occasioned them to his earlier procedures of interrogation – preconceptions regarding what must be involved in the prosecution of such an activity for eliminating philosophical perplexities (that it must involve, e.g., a transition from a state of comparative inexactness in our mastery of language to a state of complete exactness in which our relation to our words and their essential possibilities of meaning can be laid completely bare and open to direct view). The target in this passage therefore is not the set of items that figure on the first list – the philosophical doctrines which (resolute readers must hold) already figured as candidates for dissolution through the activity of clarification in the *Tractatus*. Rather the target here (resolute readers may hold) is the undissolved metaphysical residue that came with his early understanding of what such an activity must itself involve (an uncovering of hidden structure) and the (exact and essential) character of that which is thus brought to light.

Again, rather than specifying the commitments here at issue by picking out swatches of text drawn from the *Tractatus* in the form of particular quotations, I do so again, on the actual list below, by specifying particular preconceptions about how things must be that figure centrally in the book and to which any sensitive reader of the *Investigations* cannot help but attach importance – only now what are at issue are philosophical conceptions from which the author of the *Tractatus* failed to wean himself (rather than, as before, ones from which he attempts to wean his reader). Again, this procedure will allow us to achieve a higher degree of clarity and generality in specifying the relevant sorts of commitment than would be possible if we confined ourselves to the letter of their manifestations in the text. The need for such a procedure, with respect to the items on this list, is even greater than with the previous list because (though some figure fairly explicitly in the text) many of the relevant commitments are incurred in a relatively oblique, peripheral, implicit or otherwise indirect fashion, and several are, as it were, textually off-stage. So, in that spirit, I offer the following candidate formulations of some of the unwitting commitments that figured in the early work that are singled out in the later work for criticism:

1. The logical relations of our thoughts to each other can be *completely* shown in an analysis of our propositions.
2. These relations can be displayed through the employment of a logically *absolutely* perspicuous notation.
3. Through the employment of such a notation, it is possible for propositions to be rewritten in such a way that the logical relations are *all* clearly visible.
4. A proposition *must* be complex.
5. *Every* proposition can be analyzed.<sup>15</sup>
6. Logical analysis will reveal *every* proposition to be either an elementary proposition or the result of truth-operations on elementary propositions.
7. *All* inference is truth-functional.
8. There is *only one* logical space and everything that can be said or thought forms a part of that space.
9. There is such a thing as *the* logical order of our language.
10. Antecedent to logical analysis, there must be this logical order – one that is *already there* awaiting discovery – and it is the role of logical analysis to uncover it.
11. By rewriting them in such a notation, *what* propositions our propositions are will become clear.<sup>16</sup>
12. By rewriting them in this way, it will also become clear what *all* propositions have in common.
13. There is a general form of proposition and *all* propositions have this form.

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15. This commitment involves a great many subsidiary commitments about the character of the process of analysis, about such a process presupposing a point at which the analysis terminates, about when such a point is reached, about what is thereby disclosed, etc. A great many items could be added to the list in this connection.

16. There are a great many subsidiary commitments that come into play here through the commitment to the idea of an absolutely perspicuous notation. That any entailment can be set out as a truth-table tautology is perhaps the most famous such commitment. Additional commitments come into play through his attachment to the Sheffer-stroke notation and the topic of the nature of logical constants, through the operator *N* and the topic of the general form of the proposition, and through the *Klammerausdruck* notation and the topic of the nature of quantification. It would go well beyond the scope of this paper to show why Wittgenstein did not, at the time of writing the book, take his attachments to any of these to reflect a substantial doctrine and why he later changed his view about each. The point that matters for our present purpose is simply that a great many additional items, tied to be more determinate commitments regarding *the* logic of our language, could be added to the list in this connection.

14. In its thus becoming clear what propositions are, it will also become clear how misleading their appearances are – how much the outward form *disguises* the real *hidden* logical structure.
15. A logically perspicuous notation is *the* essential tool of philosophical clarification.
16. Through our inability to translate them into *the* notation, despite their resemblance in outward form to genuine propositions, certain strings of signs can be unmasked as nonsense, i.e., as strings in which signs to which no determinate meaning has been given occur.
17. *All* philosophical confusions can be clarified in this way.
18. By demonstrating the significance of this tool and its application in the activity of clarification, the problems of philosophy have *in essentials* been finally solved.

Each item above is associated with something that a resolute reader may hold that the author of the *Tractatus* at the time of writing that work (1) was committed to (given his conception of how philosophical elucidation proceeds and the role that a perspicuous logical notion must play in it), (2) would not have taken to be in any way inconsistent with his aspiration to eliminate metaphysics (by means of an activity in which no philosophical theses are propounded), and (3) would not have taken to be a contentious theoretical commitment (let alone one that was somehow peculiarly his). The second list illustrates the extent to which, from the standpoint of his later thinking, there was an entire metaphysics of language tacitly embodied in his earlier method of clarification. Once one goes about making such a list and begins to see how long it can become, one begins to see how much hidden dogmatism there is in the book.

No parentheses occur in the second actual list. But, more to the point, parentheses cannot play the role here that they did formerly. (Instead we now find a different form of notation for which no need was felt formerly: the italics.) What is at issue in the first actual list are commitments that for the author of the work are merely apparently substantive (though for the reader they can only gradually come clearly into view as such); whereas what is at issue now in the second actual list are commitments that are neither merely apparent nor philosophically innocuous (though for the author they cannot come clearly into view as simultaneously neither). With the first actual list, at many junctures, an item on it could have been replaced with something that had the form of its logical opposite, without threatening its

candidacy for inclusion. For resolute readers, (apparently) opposed items did not crowd one another out as candidates for inclusion on the first list, since they were all equally to be associated with merely *apparent* insights into the nature of thought, language and reality – all equally to be overcome. In this respect the items on a resolute reader’s version of the second list resemble those on any standard reader’s list of candidates for rungs on the ladder: in both cases, the negations of the items on the list do not belong. Any alternative understanding of the items on the actual second list above (that would admit of their negations also being placed on the list) would threaten the underlying conception of *the* logic of our language (that underwrites the logically perspicuous forms of notation upon which the activity of Tractarian elucidation relies). This conception requires that there be a significant asymmetry for the author of the *Tractatus* between the items on the second list and their negations (and hence between the items on the second list and those on the first) – an asymmetry that his understanding of the activity of philosophical clarification both requires and to which it cannot be entitled.

Tremendously delicate questions attach to the issue of where one should draw the line between the first and second lists. The line cannot be a bright one. These questions become particularly evident if one considers any of items 5, 6, 12, 13 or 17 – items in which the surface form of the proposition already strongly suggests that what must be at issue is an attempt to quantify over *all* (possible) propositions – a fairly reliable (though not sure-fire)<sup>17</sup> tell-tale surface-syntactical sign, by the lights of the author of the *Tractatus*, that no determinate method of symbolizing has been conferred on a propositional sign. And many of the other items have surface-syntactical forms that bespeak a corresponding aspiration to attain such an apparently maximal degree of quantificational generality – an appearance characteristic of many of the merely apparently meaningful sentences that constitute rungs on the ladder. So, once explicitly formulated (as a self-standing set of mutually self-supporting commitments) and collectively exhibited (as a list of commitments expressed in propositional form), it is difficult to see how the resulting sentences could escape a sustained encounter with Tractarian elucidatory

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17. For discussion of this point see Part IV of Conant & Diamond 2004 in which they reply to Peter Sullivan’s article “What is the *Tractatus* About?”, also in Kölbel and Weiss (eds.) 2004, pp. 32-45.

procedures with their pretensions to intelligibility unscathed.<sup>18</sup> Having achieved a full appreciation of the unsustainably fragile character of the items on the second list, there are two options open to a resolute reader at this point. The first is for her to take this as evidence that these items do not belong on the second list at all, but rather on the first list (and hence that there is no second list). The second is for her to take this as evidence that the author of the *Tractatus* was remarkably able to blind himself to the character of the apparent commitments here incurred. As we shall see, there is good reason to think she will only be able to make sense of the author of the *Investigations* (and his criticisms of the author of the *Tractatus*) if she takes the second option.

We saw that there was no room (in specifying candidates for the second list) for the sort of parenthetical notation employed on the first actual list. The time has come to explain its successor: the notation of italics deployed on the second actual list. The inapplicability of the one sort of notation is internally related to the need for the other. The first sort of notation has no place because the commitments in question on the second list cannot be discarded as merely apparent. They must surreptitiously play a genuinely weight-bearing role in the elaboration of the early philosophy; and this means, for example, as we just saw, that their (putative) negations cannot join or replace them on the list. This raises the need for a form of notation in the specification of candidate items for the second list that highlights the logical or modal feature of the commitment that would go missing in a complementary candidate item that sought to modify the modal character of the commitment – for example, by placing the relevant aspect of the commitment within the scope of a negation.

In the actual list above, the italicized expressions in each of the above sentences indicate the occurrence of a moment of (what would count by later Wittgenstein's lights as) *metaphysical insistence* – a moment in which a requirement is laid down. The feature of the items on this actual list that marks them out as the sort of thing that properly belongs on the second list

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18. Such sentences themselves could not be expressed in anything that would count, by the author of the *Tractatus*'s lights, as a proper logical grammar – i.e., a perspicuous logical notation with the sorts of properties that these sentences aspire to claim such a notation must have.

is the way in which their insinuation of such a requirement escaped the notice of the author of the *Tractatus*. In some of these cases, the note of metaphysical insistence comes with an emphatic accenting of the italicized expression (such as “completely”, “absolutely”); in others, the metaphysically emphatic note is already present (prior to any emphasis introduced by italicization) in the apparent modal force of the expressions themselves (“all”, “every”, “must”). So, in some cases, the role of the italics is to sharpen the note of metaphysical emphasis; in others, merely to highlight the presence of such a note. Thus, for example, if the italics were simply omitted from items 1 and 2 on the list and the adverbial expressions (formerly italicized) are construed as having their point relative to an elucidatory purpose, then the resulting sentences could easily be construed as saying something that would be perfectly innocuous by Wittgenstein’s later lights. With items 3–7, 12, 13, 17, the moment of metaphysical insistence comes with the modality of expressions such as “all”, “every”, and “must” – one that insinuates a requirement on how things must be. In items 9, 15, 16, if the definite article were replaced by an indefinite one, the note of metaphysical insistence would vanish. And so on. This is not to say, however, that the metaphysical moment in each of these remarks is confined to the italicized portion of each. On the contrary, on the one hand, the italicized expression in each case may be understood to induce a moment of philosophical subliming that laterally affects many of the other expressions that occur in each numbered remark above – “proposition”, “language”, “analysis”, “logical”, “complex”, “elementary”, “notation”, “thought”, “relation”, “meaning”, “possible”, “order”, “in common”, “general”, “form”, “clarity”, “clarify”, “perspicuous”, “visible”, “problems”, “philosophy”, “solved” – a moment of subliming to which the author of the *Tractatus* was himself oblivious. On the other hand, it is perhaps more accurate to put things the other way around: it is the author’s tendency to sublime what proposition, language, logic, order, clarity, etc., are – it is his prior conception of how and what these *must* be – that induces the requirements that the italicized expressions (“all”, “every”, “the”) above each in its own way reflects.<sup>19</sup>

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19. In my subsequent remarks in this section, I occasionally borrow and elaborate points made in the final pages of Conant & Diamond 2004.

Each of the items on the list is to be associated with an example of what later Wittgenstein refers to as the dogmatism into which we so easily fall when doing philosophy.<sup>20</sup> The author of the *Tractatus* would not have viewed himself as proceeding dogmatically – putting forward theses (that are to be associated with each of the items above) that might be taken by a reader to seem to call for vindication. Rather, he would have regarded each of the above as pertaining to matters that become clear through the process of clarifying propositions, and, in particular, through the adoption and employment of a perspicuous notation – a notation that enables one to avoid “the fundamental confusions” (“of which the whole of philosophy is full”, *TLP* 3.324) by furnishing an *absolutely* clear way of expressing thoughts. The italicized expression in this last sentence again highlights one such undetected moment of dogmatism. But the freedom from such moments to which the later work aspires will seem easier to attain than it is, if one fails to register how much of the ambition of the early program of philosophical clarification is to be retained in the later work, both in its peculiarity of method (providing the reader with a *perspicuous* representation of the possibilities available for making sense) and its peculiarity of aim (making the problems *completely* disappear).<sup>21</sup> The task of the later philosophy lies in seeking a way to retain these early original aspirations to perspicuity and completeness while purging them of the metaphysical spirit with which they are unwittingly imbued in the early work.<sup>22</sup> The point of each of the italicized expressions (in the candidate items for inclusion on the second list) is to underscore a particular moment within his early conception of clarification which must be purged in order that features of its general outline may continue to be of service in his later conception of how philosoph-

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20. “The only way namely for us to avoid prejudice – or vacuity in our claims, is to posit the ideal as what it is, namely as an object of comparison – a measuring rod as it were – within our way of looking at things, & not as a preconception to which everything must conform. This namely is the dogmatism into which philosophy can so easily degenerate.” (*CV*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1998, p. 30) See also *PI* § 131: “For we can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison--as, so to speak, a measuring-rod; not as a preconceived idea to which reality *must* correspond. (The dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy.)” The differences that come out through Winch’s and Anscombe’s respective translations of (these two slightly different versions of) this passage are helpfully suggestive and pertinent to our present topic.

ical clarification must proceed if it is to eschew any moment of dogmatism.<sup>23</sup>

Each of the italicized expressions on the above list furnishes an example of how, as later Wittgenstein puts it, the most crucial moments in the philosophical conjuring trick are the ones that are apt to strike one as most innocent (*PI* § 308). This directly bears on the evolution of his later philosophy in two ways. First, it is tied to his later apprehension that it is much more difficult to avoid laying down requirements in philosophy than his earlier self had ever imagined – where this is tied in the later work, in turn, to the need to develop a form of philosophical practice that can diagnose, identify, and clarify the precise moments in which such requirements on thinking are first unwittingly laid down, well prior to their manifesting themselves to the thinker as commitments of any consequence.<sup>24</sup> Second, it required a set of procedures for the conduct of the new activity of diagnosis, identification, and subsequent clarification that would not themselves prove to carry further unwitting commitments in their train (introducing yet a further metaphysics, now newly built into the successor conception of clarification). Hence the need to develop a non-dogmatic mode of philosophical correc-

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21. The later Wittgenstein differs from the early even here, however, in as much as there is no longer room on his later conception for anything that could be correctly described as *the* method or *the* aim of his philosophy. Not only the realization of “the aim” and the application of “the method” must unfold piecemeal over time (as was already the case in his early philosophy), but now a new dimension of pluralism is introduced into the heart of his very conception of each. The aims and methods of the later philosophy no longer have the unity of the aspects of a single great problem, but rather that of a family, deriving their unity from the interrelated family of problems of which they treat – a form of unity which admits of the possibility that hitherto unanticipated members of the family may constantly continue to burst onto the scene, newly demanding a degree of genuine innovation in both aim and method. This difference in the early and later philosophies is, in turn, tied to a profound difference in their respective conceptions of *essence* – e.g., of language – and the forms of novelty, surveyability, and surprise that these can tolerate.
  22. The difficulty of attaining a clear view of this is compounded by the fact that in his later writings Wittgenstein is primarily concerned to highlight what is *wrong* in his earlier way of thinking; he is not primarily concerned to highlight continuities in his philosophy. His overt aim, generally, when later reflecting on one or another aspect of his earlier way of thinking, is to try to pinpoint its philosophical Achilles heel. One therefore needs to handle such retrospective comments in his later writings with some care, if one wishes to tease out of them a portrayal of what his earlier way of thinking might have been, such that it would have had the power to captivate a philosopher with his high standards of rigor and clarity, with his determination to think things through to the bloody end, and with his desire not only to avoid but to put an end to metaphysics.



tion (an, as it were, further layer of correction directed at each of the moments of correction themselves, and a further layer upon that, and so forth). An elucidatory procedure whose steps are arranged in the form of a ladder is no longer up to this task: the procedure must be able to crisscross in such a way as to allow each step in the investigation devoted to exorcising a philosophical demon to itself be pondered, reassessed, and purged, in turn, of the possible latent forms of overstepping or overstatement that may unwittingly have insinuated themselves in the course of the elucidation of the original misconception (*PI*, Preface). It is in this context (of cultivating such a non-dogmatic mode of philosophizing) that a method of writing characterized by an alternation of voices (including ones of overly insistent temptation and ones of overly zealous correction) proves its value and comes to transform the face of Wittgenstein's authorship.

This raises many questions (regarding the aims and methods of Wittgenstein's later philosophy) well beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to confine our attention here briefly to the ever-recurring first step in this crisscrossing procedure – a step that has no role and can have no role to play in his earlier ladder-climbing mode of philosophical elucidation: namely, the step in which one seeks to uncover that crucial sleight of hand in the philosophical conjuring trick that is apt to strike one as most innocent. Attention to this step alone (without attending to much else that is also new and no less important in the later work) suffices for our present purpose in as much as an appreciation of it suffices to allow us: (1) to see why it is precisely the moments in the early work that correspond to items on the second list that come under repeated fire in the *Investigations* (while items that belong on the first list essentially never do)<sup>25</sup> qua criticisms of the author of the *Tractatus*, and (2) why the moment of discontinuity in question here must become

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23. Do the “must” and the “any” in this sentence reintroduce moments of dogmatism into Wittgenstein's later philosophy? This question takes us beyond the scope of this paper. But it is the right sort of question to ask, if one wants to begin to locate the fundamental differences between the early and the later work.

24. One way of summing up this immense difference between early and later Wittgenstein would be to say that the following question assumes a pivotal importance in later Wittgenstein's investigations that it never (could have) had in early Wittgenstein's procedures: How does philosophy begin? On this, see Stanley Cavell 1996, “Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Hans Sluga and David G. Stern (eds.) 1996, CUP: Cambridge, pp. 261–295.

invisible if one imposes the doctrinal schema (thereby permitting moments of discontinuity to come into view only if they correspond to explicit doctrines which early Wittgenstein self-consciously sought to advance and defend and which later Wittgenstein rejected).<sup>26</sup>

Wittgenstein's original aim, in writing the *Tractatus*, was to bring metaphysics to an end; and the method of clarification he thereby sought to practice, to achieve that end, was to be one that was itself free of all metaphysical commitments. The following remark brings out how his later writing (unlike most of the commentary on it) continues to keep this feature of his earlier thought firmly in perspective while seeking to focus attention on its problematic commitments:

We now have a theory, a “dynamic theory” of the proposition; of language, but it does not present itself to us as a theory. For it is the characteristic thing about such a theory that it looks at a special clearly intuitive case and says: “*That* shews how things are in every case; this case is the

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25. This parenthetical remark involves some overstatement in part for the following reason: the first step on the ladder must be one whose character is equivocal as to whether it represents an unobjectionable aspect of the elucidatory process or part of the beginning of an ascent up the ladder. This therefore allows a different sort of consideration to acquire importance in reflection upon the shape of the first list – one that puts a new pressure on the question: how should the list begin? The first item on the actual first list above, if shorn of its insinuation of an explanatory order, might be turned into a formulation about which it would no longer be clear as to which list it belonged on. As long as the so-called “picture theory” of the *Tractatus* is formulated so that its theoretical pretensions are unmistakable (which requires slanting “the theory” so as to privilege a direction of explanatory order) the resulting formulation corresponds to a rung on the ladder. As long as formulations of observations about picturing take on the aspect of (what for the author of the *Tractatus* might be) remarks internally related to those on the second list, it must become less clear as to how we should answer questions as to which list these particular formulations themselves belong on. (These are questions for *us*. There are no such questions for the author of the *Tractatus* – there is no second list made up of items of this sort for him.) Resolute readers are committed to the idea that any version of something properly called “the picture theory” is, at the end of the day, to be thrown away. (Incidentally, and for internally related reasons, a similar point holds about the notion of *showing* that the *Tractatus* opposes to saying – as long as a formulation of that notion turns it into a form of “quasi-saying” resolute readers are obliged to see it as comprising a rung of the ladder; as long as it does not, they are not obliged thus to regard it.) So a mere commitment to resolution cannot suffice to decide the question as to whether any given remark about picturing in the *Tractatus* is best regarded as a candidate for inclusion on the first or on the second list. For it depends on the point at which one thinks the second list begins to bleed into the first. (Again, it must be an interpretative error to suppose that this point could have itself been a clearly marked one for the author of the *Tractatus*.) These are matters about which resolute readers can disagree and whose adjudication can be settled only through closer attention to the details of the text.

exemplar of *all* cases.” – “Of course! It has to be like that”, we say, and are satisfied. We have arrived at a form of expression that *strikes us as obvious*. But it is as if we had now seen something lying *beneath* the surface. (Z § 444)

This passage brings out nicely why things must go wrong if one’s reading of Wittgenstein is organized around the following question: “Which parts of the theory that the *Tractatus* aimed to put forward did later Wittgenstein think was wrong?” If one reads Wittgenstein in this way, then one is apt to skip over the following seven aspects of later Wittgenstein’s interest in (what one thereby calls) “the theory of the *Tractatus*”: (1) that what we are able to see (often with the benefit of later Wittgenstein’s help) as heavily freighted philosophical commitments in the early work did not present themselves to the author of the *Tractatus* as such, (2) that it is the characteristic thing about such “theories” that, at the deepest level, they garner their conviction not from a conscious intention to put forward an ambitious philosophical claim, but rather from an apparently innocent attention to what presents itself as a special clearly intuitive case, (3) that an unprejudiced view of such a case already appears to permit one (without any additional theoretical underpinning) to exclaim: “*That* shews how things are in every case; this case is the exemplar of *all* cases”, (4) that it is therefore particularly helpful to look at examples of philosophers who are already in the grip of such apparent forms of clarity in those moments in their thinking that occur prior to any in which they take themselves yet to have begun philosophizing, (5) that it is even better, if one can find one, to look at the example of a philosopher who, in the teeth of an avowed aim to eschew any such commitments, nonetheless falls into them, (6) that the author of the *Tractatus* is later Wittgenstein’s prime example of such a philosopher, and therefore, at least in this

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26. It is interesting in this connection to note how many of the doctrines of the sort that standard readers ascribe to the *Tractatus* and that resolute readers are committed to rejecting – such as the commitment to the existence of ineffable truths, and various optional subsidiary doctrines (such as realism, mentalism, solipsism, etc.) and optional subsidiary commitments (such as the distinction between understanding propositions and “understanding” nonsense, between saying and “conveying” truths, etc.) – never figure in any of the passages in Wittgenstein’s later writing where he is explicitly concerned to criticize something he identifies as a questionable philosophical commitment actually held by the author of the *Tractatus*. What figure in such passages instead are the sorts of metaphysical commitments that belong on the second list.

respect, his favorite target of philosophical criticism, (7) that the ultimate quarry of philosophical criticism here for later Wittgenstein is never this or that philosophical thesis or theoretical commitment, but rather a characteristic form of expression – one that holds us captive and strikes us as so very obvious that we imagine that it allows us to be able to penetrate the appearance of language and see what *must* lie beneath the surface.

#### 4. The third list

Each of the items on the list below corresponds to a moment in Wittgenstein's work, early and late, that a resolute reader may take to mark either a moment of continuity or one of discontinuity, or (alternating between variant understandings of the sentences that figure on the list) both. Now, with respect to the third list, it becomes well-nigh impossible to specify the relevant items in a useful way without remaining fairly close to the wording of swatches of Wittgenstein's own text. But some delicate degree of abstraction is still required in as much as the items in question must also be able to mark moments of continuity. For this requires that they can be closely correlated to sentences in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. In this spirit, I offer the following small sample of candidate formulations of such moments of continuity/discontinuity in Wittgenstein's thought:

1. Every sentence in our everyday language is in order as it is.
2. There must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence.
3. A sentence of ordinary language must have *a* definite sense.<sup>27</sup>
4. An indefinite sense would not really be a sense at all.
5. In philosophy, we are driven to seek elsewhere, in the abstract features of an ideal language, what is already be found in the most concrete features of our everyday language.
6. Philosophical misunderstandings are often caused by superficial analogies between forms of expression drawn from different regions of language.
7. Such misunderstandings can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another.

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27. The italics in items 3 and 21 on this list are Wittgenstein's.

8. What does not get expressed in the signs (words) themselves comes out in their application (use): what the signs (words) fail to express their application (use) declares.
9. In order to gather the logic (grammar) of what is said we must consult the context of significant use.
10. In philosophy the question, "Why do we actually use this word or this proposition?" repeatedly leads to valuable insights.
11. The object of philosophy is the logical (grammatical) clarification of thought(s).
12. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity.
13. The result of philosophy is not a number of "philosophical propositions", but to make propositions clear.
14. Anyone who understands me eventually recognizes certain of my sentences as nonsensical.
15. We cannot give a sign the wrong sense.
16. Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed.
17. If a sentence has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to it.
18. Logic (grammar) must take care of itself.
19. We cannot draw a limit to thought. That would require that we could think both what can be thought and what cannot be thought.
20. Strictly thought through, idealism and realism can be seen to collapse into one another.
21. Doubt can exist only where there is a question; a question only where there is an answer; and this only where something *can* be *said*.
22. The solution of the problem lies in the vanishing of the problem.

Each of the items on this list are to be associated (on one understanding of it) with (1) a particular unwitting preconception about how things must be and how philosophy must proceed that falls out of the early conception of clarification (and therefore is to be included on the second list), and (on another understanding of it) with (2) something that may be ascribed to both the author of the *Tractatus* and the author of the *Investigations* without obviously misrepresenting either (i.e., something that might therefore be included on a possible fourth list devoted merely to detailing moments of continuity in Wittgenstein's thought). It is in this latter connection that the parenthetical notation plays its role here (serving a very different purpose than before): namely, helping to bring into sharper relief such moments of

continuity by allowing for the reformulation of his earlier ideas into his preferred later idiom.

I have drawn the first five items on the actual list above from what is essentially a commentary on certain sections of the *Tractatus* (above all, on 5.5563) – one that is initiated in § 97 and continues through the following sections of the *Investigations*. This is an autobiographical fact about me and where I first went to look for items to place on the third list. I take it that something like these items might have arrived on the list by a very different route, in as much as they each represent the sort of thing that an attentive reader of the *Tractatus* might find herself with occasion to say in writing about the teaching of that work. Taken out of context, some readers of Wittgenstein might take any of the first four items to suggest metaphysical elements present in the old way of thinking that the new seeks to undo. On the other hand, read within their dialectical context (i.e., §§ 97ff of the *Investigations*), they do not obviously represent exclamations on the part of a voice in the grip of a wayward philosophical temptation. Part of my point in placing some items with this particular provenance on the actual list above is to bring into sharpest possible relief the degree to which moments of breathtaking continuity surface even in those later passages whose concern is focally one of criticizing the *Tractatus*.<sup>28</sup> This means that even in those stretches of the later writing where criticism of the *Tractatus* reaches its highest pitch, candidates for the third list are still not in short supply. Conversely, as a matter of the mere letter of their formulation, the majority of the remaining items, starting with the eighth, on the actual list above are most easily recognized as corresponding to sentences from the *Tractatus*. Yet I take it that they each represent the sort of thing that an attentive reader of the *Investigations* might find herself having occasion to say in writing about the

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28. Of particular interest in this connection is the entire stretch in *Philosophical Investigations* that runs from § 89 to § 133. In almost every remark we have some effort on Wittgenstein's part to bring his later methods of philosophy into relief by contrasting them with his earlier conception of *the* method (cf. § 133) of philosophy, and yet numerous local moments of continuity surface within this overarching contrast. This contrast – between *the* (early) method and the (later) methods – draws many of the other points of difference between the early and later philosophies together and, in particular, the difference between the *Tractatus*'s point of view on the problems of philosophy (according to which they have in essentials been solved) and the refusal of such a point of view in the *Investigations* (in which the essentials can no longer be separated in such a manner from the details).

teaching of that work. One point of the exercise of attentively trying to construct a candidate third list of one's own is to discover the (possibly surprising) extent to which the following is true: you don't have to look far or wide in Wittgenstein's writings to find items that belong on it.

It is important here, again, that each of the items on the third list corresponds to sentences, not thoughts. Each sentence on it admits of alternative understandings of how much its affirmation commits us to, and thus of what it says. Would the author of the *Investigations* want to agree with that which his earlier self here would, in each case, want to affirm in affirming the item in question? When we come to the items on the third list, if we try to locate the differences between early and later Wittgenstein in this area by sorting them into the items early and later Wittgenstein agree on and those they do not, then (qua narrators of the story of Wittgenstein's development) we are lost. The only accurate thing to say here, at this hopelessly unhelpful level of generality, is perhaps the following: later Wittgenstein agrees with early Wittgenstein about each of these items (in wanting to affirm a sentence that the other would affirm) and he disagrees with him about each of them (in not wanting to affirm precisely what the other would thereby affirm). For there are significant aspects of the *Tractatus's* unwitting commitments that substantially color its early understanding of each of the philosophical issues associated with the items of the above list. For example, his early understanding of what is at stake in each of the following expressions (at least some one of which figures in each of the items on the list above) is implicated in the surreptitious metaphysics of the early work: "order", "perfection", "form", "vagueness", "definiteness", "sense", "logic", "language", "application", "use", "context", "say", "show", "philosophy", "abstract", "concrete", "ideal", "language", "everyday", "clarity", "clarification", "theory", "sign", "proposition", "thought", "strictly thought through", "solution", "problem", "vanishing".

This collection of expressions, considered as a set, nicely epitomizes both the extent of the continuity and the discontinuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy. A significant moment of continuity can be uncovered by reflecting on the parallels in Wittgenstein's early and later philosophies that can be associated with how these expressions occur in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively. Yet a significant moment of discontinuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy can also be uncovered by reflecting on the points at which these

parallels begin to give out (with respect to the manner in which each of these expressions occurs in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively). What marks a sentence out as belonging on the third list is that it simultaneously invites alternate construals of terms such as these – on a first construal, the sentence in which it figures says something that early Wittgenstein has it at heart to say; on a second construal, it says something that later Wittgenstein equally has it at heart to say – where what each would mean would in part be importantly the same and in part importantly different.

In reflecting upon what to make of the items on the third list, in the context of trying to understand the relation between early and later Wittgenstein, one way of going extremely wrong is to take the possibility of constructing such a list itself to constitute a proof of the truth of some very severe claim of continuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy. But there is also an opposite way of going extremely wrong here. It takes its departure from the following (in itself perfectly sound) thought: any sort of understanding that the author of the *Tractatus* is able to have of any of the items on the third list must be shaped through and through, at every point, by his (metaphysically emphatic) understanding of the items on the second list. This is true as far as it goes: any attempt to construe the third list as a list of things that early and later Wittgenstein "simply agree about" may run the risk of attributing to later Wittgenstein an allegiance to items on the second list – i.e., to the very commitments of the *Tractatus* that he is later most concerned to single out for criticism. What this shows is the following: one must be careful about taking items on the third list to represent unproblematic formulations of points of common ground between the early and later philosophy. But it would be equally point-missing to go to the other extreme and to construe the items on the third list as merely a set of ambiguous sentences which coincidentally each admit of the relevant pair of alternative understandings. It would be perverse to conclude that early and later Wittgenstein, while agreeing about nothing of importance, are for some reason happy each to call upon almost precisely the same forms of words to express their respective utterly incommensurable philosophical aspirations. Clearly the truth must be somewhere in the middle, between these two unhappy extremes (of overly zealous mono-Wittgensteinianism and overly intractable poly-Witt-



gensteinianism); and the telling of it is nothing if not a delicate matter, requiring exquisite care.

By reflecting upon what belongs on each of our three lists the true complexity of the relation between early and later Wittgenstein can come into view. All three lists involve sentences that figure (or appear to be implied by sentences that figure) in the *Tractatus*. Those commentators (including most standard readers) who wish sharply to emphasize the discontinuities in Wittgenstein's development tend to move, when identifying the early doctrines that are criticized in the later work, indiscriminately between items drawn from the first and those from the second list (as if the mere existence of items of the second sort sufficed to show that what resolute readers say about items of the first sort must be mistaken). Those commentators (including some overly zealous resolute readers) who wish sharply to emphasize the continuities in Wittgenstein's development tend often to distinguish items belonging on the third list from those that belong on either of the other two, but fail not only to distinguish those that belong on the second list from those that belong on the first (as if they were all figured in the *Tractatus* as rungs of the ladder to be thrown away), but, in so failing, thereby also fail to appreciate the extent to which later Wittgenstein, in his criticism of items on the second list, is at one and the same time concerned to criticize his earlier self's understanding of the supposedly "shared" items on the third list. When the first (standard) note of sharpness is introduced into a narrative of the story of Wittgenstein's development, the most interesting moments of continuity are obliterated. When the second (overly zealous) note of sharpness is introduced, the already devilishly difficult task of balancing these moments against those of equally profound discontinuity becomes impossible.<sup>29</sup>

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