Reading *Tractatus*, Understanding Wittgenstein

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> To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non–horse to show that a horse is not a horse.
>
> Zhuangzi

At 6.54 of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical". A task is thereby set for the reader, to learn to read the *Tractatus* so as to understand its author. My interest is in the nature of this task. It is, however, complicated, first, by the fact that Wittgenstein later changed his mind about at least one central theme of the *Tractatus*, and also by the history of readings of that work over the past century. Given the complexities, what is attempted here can only be some first steps in pursuit of an adequate understanding.

§ 1. The canonical history

According to the received view, the history of our learning to read *Tractatus* has unfolded in three phases[1]. In the first phase, beginning with the publication of *Tractatus* —in the original German in 1921 and in Ogden's English translation in 1922— the *Tractatus* was read by members of the Vienna Circle as a development and defense of fundamental positivist themes, most notably,

[1] It seems to have been Warren Goldfarb who first told the story this way. See his "*Das Überwinden*: Anti–Metaphysical Readings of the *Tractatus*", which was presented at a conference at the University of Utrecht in 2000 as "a response to and appreciation of the then–recently published book, A. Crary and R. Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*" (Goldfarb 2011, p. 19, n. 1), and published in 2011, in *Beyond the Tractatus Wars*.

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logical atomism and the verificationist theory of meaning. In the second phase, catalyzed by the publication of G. E. M. Anscombe's *Introduction to the Tractatus* in 1959, the positivist reading was superseded by what has come to be known as the ineffability reading, sometimes the standard reading, according to which Wittgenstein did have a theory of language (as the positivists had claimed, though it was not atomistic) but it was not one that could be said. Because the picture theory of language outlined in the first part of the book entails that that theory cannot be stated, it is instead to be understood as having only been shown. The theory, though true, is ineffable. The third and final phase commences with Cora Diamond's 1988 essay "Throwing Away the Ladder", which enjoins that we not "chicken out" in our reading of *Tractatus*, that we go all the way through the dialectic it presents culminating in 6.54, at which point we are to see that *Tractatus* does not aim even to show us truths that cannot be said. There are no such truths. According to what has come to be known as the resolute reading —also the elucidatory reading, sometimes the anti–metaphysical reading, or even the "New Wittgenstein" reading[2]— philosophy is not in the business of showing truths that cannot be said but is and can only be an activity of elucidating. On this reading there is no theory of language or of meaning in *Tractatus*, not even one that is ineffable. Instead, we are to come to see, first, that no such theory is possible, and second, that we lose nothing by not having one. Our philosophical questions and concerns are to evaporate, leaving no residue[3].

The canonical history, then, is of a series of three readings, each subsequent one an improvement on the previous, and an improvement because it reads further into the text. This historical shaping can seem unsurprising, even obviously correct insofar as, in general, later accounts have available to them whatever insights were achieved in the earlier while at the same time incorporating new insights. It can also happen, however, that later readings achieve insights (assuming they are such) only at the expense of insights achieved in earlier readings. In that case, what one finds is not a wholehearted

[2] In some discussions, for example, that of Hutchinson and Read (2006), the label "elucidatory reading" is given to readings such as those of McGinn (1999) and Hutto (2003), that aim to split the difference between the ineffability reading and the resolute reading, to take a middle ground between them, assuming such is to be had.

[3] We will soon see that the resolute reading is not as unified as these remarks suggest. Nor, according to some, is it even a reading but only a program for a reading, or perhaps something even less than that. See, for example, Conant (2007) as contrasted with Conant (2002), also Sullivan (2002).

embrace of the new reading, as in fact happened following Anscombe's reading, but instead an ongoing debate between the readings, with some defending the earlier and some the later. It is a dialectic of just this shape that we have seen unfold downstream from the emergence of the resolute reading. Not only has the resolute reading not superseded the ineffability reading, it has splintered into two different approaches, a more radical one most closely associated with the work of Juliet Floyd (who takes her inspiration from Diamond), and a less radical reading defended by Conant and others[4]. There appear, then, to be three different readings, or at least three overall approaches to readings, currently vying for adoption, the ineffability reading, and both the weak resolute reading and the strong resolute reading.

According to the positivist reading, *Tractatus* presents what has come to be known as the picture (*Bild*) theory of meaning, a theory that clearly demarcates the bounds of sense, namely, what "can be said, i.e., propositions of natural science" (6.53). And *Tractatus* does present such a theory. But it does other things as well, among them to put into question that very theory, and indeed, any such overarching theory of the relation of thought, language, and the world. The positivist reading ignores (as mystical and nonsensical) everything but the theory itself, and even then, misunderstands the theory (by reading it as committed to some form of atomism about meaning). Anscombe aims to remedy these defects and, at least according to the received view, takes her orientation from the Tractarian distinction between saying and showing[5]. The basic idea is very simple: although some sentences clearly say that things are thus and so (by picturing something that is, or is not, the case), others do not either because they are sheer nonsense (mere word salad) or because they are illuminating nonsense, because they try to say what can only be shown. Illuminating nonsense can also be shown in a more direct way in sentences of the first sort. Anscombe provides an example to illustrate the point.

Suppose that a philosopher says that 'somebody' refers to, is a name for or of a person, that 'somebody' names somebody in essentially the way that 'Plato'

[4] See Floyd (1998, 2000, and 2007), and Conant (2007).

[5] On a closer reading, it becomes apparent that a key insight driving Anscombe's reading is not the saying/showing distinction, or not only that, but Wittgenstein's commitment to Frege's context principle, which is not only incompatible with the atomism of the positivist reading, but also introduces already something very like the conception of nonsense that is held to be a central insight of the resolute reading. See Diamond (2013).

names Plato[6]. The philosopher does not mean that some particular person has been named 'Somebody', or goes by that name. What the philosopher means is that the word 'somebody' functions as a name, that it has the logical form or role of a name, that it names someone as the name 'Plato' names the ancient Greek philosopher. A logician then might (correctly) object that this is not so, and in voicing their objection, say that 'somebody' does not refer to, or name, anyone. The logician does not, in this case, mean to deny the original claim as a matter of fact, does not mean to deny that anyone actually is named 'somebody', though someone could be so named. What the logician aims to communicate is that nothing *could* be referred to by the word 'somebody' (in the relevant use), that the word does not work that way at all, that 'somebody' is not a referring expression, not a name. But in suggesting that there is a kind of nonsense (as contrasted with a mere factual error) in saying, as the philosopher did, that 'somebody' refers to somebody, the logician is (on this theory of language) equally committed to its being a kind of nonsense to say that 'somebody' does not refer to anybody, a kind of nonsense to assert the negation of the original claim. Neither the original claim nor its negation is anything other than nonsense. And yet it also seems clear that it is, in some way, a confusion to assert, and an insight to deny, that 'somebody' names somebody. On the ineffability reading, what we have in the sentence "'somebody' is not a name for somebody" is something that, as our logician sees, is in some sense true, an insight, but which cannot be said because when you try to say it, you inevitably come out with something that, as one can see on reflection, is nonsense[7]. Assuming, then, that there is no other way to say what one is trying

[6] Anscombe (1959, 85) mentions A. G. N. Flew in his Introduction to *Logic and Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959). See also Diamond (2019), Chapter 2, which discusses this example, and Anscombe's treatment of it.

[7] In her discussion of this point in Chapter 13 of her introduction to the *Tractatus*, Anscombe explicitly points out that the result of attempting to say what is shown is not senseless, *sinnlos*, as a tautology is, but instead nonsense, *Unsinn*. The difference is that tautologies show the "logic of the world" but do not attempt to say that the world has a certain logic; attempts to say what can only be shown, as when one says that 'somebody' is not a name for anybody, or that tautologies show the logic of the world, result in sheer nonsense (Anscombe 1959, 163). Others, such as Black (1964, 376 – 379), argue that Wittgenstein does not mean to say that such propositions are nonsense but only that they are senseless (as, on Wittgenstein's Tractarian view, tautologies and contradictions are). In Ogden's 1922 English translation of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's claim (6.54) that his propositions are nonsensical (*unsinnig*) is translated instead as that they are senseless (*sinnlos*).

to say in this case, "Wittgenstein would . . . have said it was something which *shewed* —stared you in the face, at any rate once you took a good look— but could not be *said*" (Anscombe 1959, p. 87). The closest one can get to saying, expressing in a proposition that 'somebody' does not refer to or name somebody, is showing the use of that word in a perspicuous notation using a variable and a quantifier. So, it seems, we are forced to recognize truths about language, thought, and reality that can only be shown, that cannot be said, stated in any (sensical) proposition.

And now, Diamond argues, we have a problem. Perhaps someone, perhaps even Frege (for whom logic is a science) might think that what it is to be, say, a name or a predicate, an object or a concept, or a first–level as contrasted with a higher–level concept, can be shown in a language, or perhaps in its use, and hence that there is some kind of fact, some feature of reality that is thereby shown. But this cannot be what *Wittgenstein* thinks, not if we take seriously his claim that "philosophy is not a body of doctrine" (4.112) together with his remark at 6.54, his suggestion that his own propositions are nonsensical. Some passages in *Tractatus* do indeed seem to suggest that what we can think of as the logical form of reality can be shown but not itself expressed in language, that it is shown in the form of a sentence and cannot without vicious circularity be made a part of the content of any sentence. "So," as Diamond puts it in "Throwing Away the Ladder" (1988, p. 181), "it looks as if there is this whatever–it–is, the logical form of reality, some essential feature of reality, which reality has all right, but which one cannot say or think it has". But, as she immediately continues, "what exactly is supposed to be left of that, after we have thrown away the ladder? Are we going to keep the idea that there is a 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"? To try to do that, Diamond thinks, is to chicken out.

> To throw the ladder away 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 this 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 taken to be real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to an ineffable truth. (1988, p. 181).

According to Diamond (1988, p. 194), P. M. S. Hacker chickens out in just this way. But Anscombe, though not mentioned in that early essay, seems also to chicken out insofar as she claims of things that are shown that "it would be right to call them 'true' if, *per impossibile*, they could be said; in fact, they cannot be called true, since they cannot be said, but 'can be shewn', or 'are exhibited', in the propositions saying various things that can be said" (Anscombe 1959, p. 162). What is shown, on Anscombe's account, has the form of a fact, an aspect of reality that is of the sort that is expressed in a proposition but cannot be so expressed.

On Diamond's account, although we start with a theory of meaning only to discover that the theory can only be shown, we are finally to see that there is nothing at all to be said in philosophy, that *any* attempt to state theses in philosophy, theses such as that such–and–such is the logical form of reality, or even that logical form can only be shown, results in sheer nonsense. It is just as Wittgenstein says: "philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations" (4.112)[8]. The point of philosophical work, as Wittgenstein would later put it in *Philosophical Investigations*, is "to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (sec. 464).

There are, however, problems. First, as must surely strike any attentive reader, there is a crucial asymmetry between how the resolute reader reads 6.54 and how such a reader reads other passages in the book. *Tractatus* 6.54 is to be read *straight*, that is, as meaning just what it says, among other things, that the propositions of *Tractatus* are nonsensical. But if so, it seems that a distinction must be drawn between what can be thought of as the frame of the book, a kind of note to the reader, on the one hand, and the body, that which is enframed by the frame, on the other. So, for example, one might expect that the Preface together with the final sentences of the work constitute the frame, serving to orient a reader in their reading, with the remaining sentences as body, as what is to be read. Unfortunately, as soon as one tries to think through such a distinction in the context of a resolute reading, it becomes clear that many

[8] Diamond begins her reading of *Tractatus* in "Throwing Away the Ladder" with this point. According to her, "there is almost nothing in Wittgenstein which is of value and which can be grasped if it is pulled away from that view of philosophy" (Diamond 1988, p. 179), if it is pulled away, that is, from the thought that one cannot, in philosophy, put forward theses or doctrines.

passages in what had been designated as "body", and hence as nonsense, must be read "straight"[9]. What, then, is body and what frame? And on what principle is this to be decided? These questions admit of no easy answers, perhaps no answers at all. Conant (2002, p. 457–458, n. 135) suggests that it depends on the particular reader what is to count as frame and what as body. That is, the distinction is to be seen as real and important, but not as Wittgenstein's distinction. In a very recent work Diamond also turns to this issue of the frame of the book; as she now thinks, "the image of the 'frame' of the *Tractatus* turns out to be unhelpful" (Diamond 2019, p. 5). According to Diamond, the distinction between frame and body can be jettisoned. Both responses are puzzling given that on any standard reading of the resolute view the distinction, however it is to be understood, is constitutive. That Diamond thinks that she can do without the distinction altogether is especially puzzling. Is Diamond perhaps not a resolute reader in the sense that Conant is?

A second issue is related, and again is bound to arise for any attentive reader: given that Wittgenstein clearly has some point he is trying to make in writing as he does, how can we take the propositions of *Tractatus*, or even many or some of them, to be strictly nonsense, mere gibberish? The claim of the resolute reading is that at least some of the sentences that make up the *Tractatus* are to be taken to be strictly nonsensical, that is, as empty of sense as a nonsense string of words such as (say) 'red helps quickly now the jump' despite the fact that they, unlike that sentence, at first appear to have sense. The problem is that we readers need those sentences — and not in the way someone might need, or have a use for, a "sentence" such as 'red helps quickly now the jump' (as I do here). Wittgenstein's elucidating sentences are not presented as examples of nonsense; they belong to a philosophical discussion aimed at bringing clarity to our thoughts. And if they do succeed at that, despite not saying anything substantive, anything that is strictly speaking true or false, then how is the resolute reading any different from the ineffability reading? Perhaps what is ineffable in the relevant sense just is the message of the work, whatever it is. We seem to be caught in a dilemma one horn of which is to take at least some sentences of *Tractatus* as sheer nonsense and so (apparently) having no role to

[9] Among such passages would seem to be those defending the context principle (for example, 3.3: "only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning") and with it the distinction between signs and symbols, (elucidated in the 3.3s), as well as those that describe what Wittgenstein seems to endorse as the correct conception of philosophy (e.g., the 4.11s).

play in the work, the other of which takes those same sentences to have a role to play in the work as a whole and so as having some sort of sense, just as on the ineffability reading. Whether or not the "nonsense" of the *Tractatus* communicates truths, surely it must serve to communicate something to a reader. But if so, it can seem that the resolute reading is not so very different from the ineffability reading after all[10].

Another, again related, criticism is that to deny that there is any relevant and useful say/show distinction, and so to assert thereby that there is only one sort of nonsense, seems to require a theory of meaning as the ground of such a view. But if so, the resolute reading seems to presuppose, illicitly given the view, that Wittgenstein has a substantive notion of meaning, and indeed, that that conception of meaning is in some way known. As Goldfarb (2011, p. 17), a resolute reader, puts the point, "it must be admitted that 'nonsense' cannot really be a general term of criticism. If it were a general term of criticism, it would have to be legitimized by a theory of language, and Wittgenstein is insistent that there is no such thing". The problem is that 'nonsense' does seem to be a general term of criticism in the *Tractatus*, even on the resolute reading, and is intended as such in 6.54. Once again, the resolute reading seems to be caught between the horns of a dilemma: either it is committed to the idea that the work proposes or presupposes something substantive, a particular theory of meaning, in which case it seems to be a version of the ineffability view, or it is not so committed because it is resolute in holding nonsense to be nonsense, in which case it seems to undermine itself.

A final problem is this. On the resolute reading, Wittgenstein is not committed in *Tractatus* to a picture theory of meaning, as he is not in his later work. But Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* explicitly and unambiguously criticizes the *Tractatus* and its author for espousing a picture theory of meaning. Wittgenstein, by his own lights, does present a theory of meaning in *Tractatus*, one that he later thinks is mistaken. But if he does then, once again, it seems there is something right after all about the ineffability view.

[10] Sullivan highlights the difficulty. We are told by Diamond (1988, p. 183), that "for Wittgenstein the provision of replacements for terms in the philosophical vocabulary ["by features of a notation designed to make logical similarities and differences clear"] is not an incidental achievement but a principal aim [of the *Tractatus*] and, more important, it is the *whole* philosophical vocabulary which is to be replaced, including that of the *Tractatus* itself". As Sullivan (2002, p. 48) asks, "can a notation be designed to make logical similarities and differences clear *unless there are* logical similarities and differences?"

No one denies that a theory of meaning, the *Bild* theory, is presented in *Tractatus*. The question is as to its status. Is the theory something Wittgenstein espouses but recognizes cannot be said, that it can only be shown? Or is the theory finally discarded even in *Tractatus*, in which case we are left with the puzzle that it seems clearly to be only some years later that Wittgenstein repudiates that theory.

On the resolute reading, Wittgenstein's propositions are sheer nonsense, as devoid of meaning as any random collection of words, distinguished from a random collection of words only in appearing at first sight to be meaningful. But those propositions do not serve in *Tractatus* merely as an example of propositions that appear to have meaning but are in fact nonsensical, *unsinnig*. They are meant somehow to convey that very message, to bring us to see, to recognize and understand that they are without meaning. If so, not only do we seem (again) to be committed to a substantive conception of meaning, we seem to be committed to the idea that the propositions of *Tractatus* can and do show something that they cannot say. Though not just what Anscombe originally held them (or relevant alternatives) to show, namely, logical form, still, on this reading, they do somehow show something that a reader is to get, to come to understand. And if we do not admit that the nonsense of *Tractatus* can show this *because* it is nonsense (just as word salad is), then the whole work collapses into a mere heap of words that can teach us nothing.

What started out following Diamond as a promising, and philosophically exciting, new reading of the *Tractatus*, has been revealed to be beset with problems, problems that may be resolvable but are nonetheless somehow especially disconcerting, so much so it seems not unreasonable to begin to wonder if there is a reading here at all, or even the promise of one. Worse, the philosophical interest of the reading has, at least for some readers, begun to evanesce. Wittgenstein and what his *Tractatus* might have to teach us is in danger of being buried under the minutiae of interpretive epicycles. Something seems to have gone badly wrong. We need to understand what it is.

§ 2. Some resources for thinking

Recent skirmishes in the so–called "*Tractatus* wars" (indeed, the very fact that the philosophical discussion is so described) have left us with very significant problems in our reading of *Tractatus*. In particular, while both the ineffable and the resolute readings seem to be onto something important and right, both also

seem to be wrong in some way — as is evident given the enduring appeal of the other reading. We need a diagnosis of the difficulties. Since the diagnosis to be offered here relies on some unfamiliar ideas, we begin with those ideas, ideas that will then be applied to our interpretive tangle.

The first conceptual tool we need is a distinction between two attitudes or orientations one can have in listening and reading. On the one, a person's attention is focused on the words that are spoken/written, what it is that is said, the text (in a broad sense that includes the combinations of words uttered in spoken discourse). On the other, one attends instead to the speaker, what *they* aim to convey through the act of speaking/writing they perform. In the latter case, one listens not to the words so much as to the speaker/author, *through* the words to what they are saying, or trying to say[11]. And we can also speak and write either way, with either orientation, either intending our words to be free standing or intending our words to convey (somehow) the thought that is "behind" them. A mathematical proof is a paradigm of the former, written with an attitude or orientation in speaking (or writing) that aims to put everything necessary to communication in the words so that another, the hearer or reader, can understand the proof, *see* how the reasoning goes from start to finish, just by attending to what is on the page, what is said. And statings of fact generally, whether in ordinary conversation or in the natural sciences, are like this, though with one small difference.

Because statements of fact are contingent, known, if at all, only on the basis of perceptual experience, to accept someone's claim that *p*, where *p* is some (putative) fact, one needs to assume or know (or at least believe) that the speaker is both competent and sincere. Unlike in the case of a mathematical proof, an empirical claim, as a claiming that things are as presented, is not self–standing but relies on testimony, either (in one's own case) the "testimony of one's senses" or (in other cases) the testimony of other speakers. In the case of a proof, one can, at least in principle, see for oneself that it is true; the sincerity and competence of the mathematician who authored it is irrelevant. The mathematical text is self–standing, then, both as to content, what is claimed, and as to its truth. It itself shows in the proof that is provided that it is true. No merely empirical claim can do this. So, there is a difference. The mathematical

[11] Once we are on the lookout for it, we can find what seems to be just this distinction being made in various works concerned with understanding Wittgenstein. See, for example, Monk (2001) and Diamond (1996, p. 259, n. 25).

proof is, as we say, a priori; one can see for oneself that it is true—which is not to say that one is infallible, that one might not mistakenly think that one has a proof when one does not, but only that one can, when one gets things right, see for oneself that things are as presented. The empirical claim is a posteriori insofar as one's knowledge of it relies on testimony, again, either that of one's own experience or that of another speaker. But the relation of the speaker and hearer (writer and reader) to the *content*, not to the claim of truth but simply to what is said, is the same in the two cases. More exactly, it can be, and is in the case in which the event of communication is successful given that, in that case, both speaker and hearer do indeed end up with a grasp of the same content. The speaker aims to put some content, some thought about how things are, whether mathematical or empirical, into words so that another might recover that content, that thought, by hearing or reading those words. (Again, what is different in the two cases is the relation to truth, whether the claim is, as we say, a priori or a posteriori.) The collection of words, the sentence or series of sentences, functions in such a case quite like a picture or series of pictures of a state (or states) of affairs.

A paradigm of the second attitude or orientation is (a performance of) a work of art, a poem, say, or even something that involves no words, no propositional content at all, such as a piece of music. Here the point is to listen attentively in order to grasp what the artist aims to convey *through* the act, or its trace (as in a poem). But it is not only works of art that can require such an orientation to be understood, that can require listening to the speaker/writer, to the saying rather than merely to the content said, the content as given in the words uttered. This can also happen in the case of a philosophical text, for example, Descartes' *Meditations*. Descartes' *Meditations* can be read either on the model of a mathematical proof or on the model of a poem, that is, with either of the two orientations we are concerned with here. Read on the model of a proof, the *Meditations* is a self–standing text laying out premises and conclusions. Read on the model of a poem, that same work is something Descartes in particular is trying to say to a reader, something he is trying to communicate by writing as he writes. On the first reading, the arguments are (notoriously) not as compelling as they should be, which is a defect of the text and by extension of its author. On the second reading, Descartes is not presenting something on the model of a proof in mathematics but instead aims to speak with a reader like himself, a person who sometimes has doubts and is to some extent puzzled just by the fact of being human.

Suppose we take the second, more literary attitude in our reading of Descartes' text, that is, we look not at the words themselves, but listen for what Descartes seems to be trying to say using words as he does. We can, if we listen, if, that is, we attend not merely to what Descartes says but to how he says it, hear Descartes formulating radically new thoughts, thoughts that have not (at the time of writing, had not) before been thought, or indeed been thought so much as possible. As a means of communicating those thoughts to a reader Descartes does not, indeed, could not, merely state those thoughts and give reasons for believing them true. Insofar as Descartes is trying to get the reader to think in a new and hitherto unimaginable way —to see possibilities where no one had seen any possibility before, to think thoughts that were, until then, literally unthinkable— he cannot give reasons, arguments, proofs. His reader does not (yet) have the concepts that would be needed in such an argument or proof. Instead, Descartes cajoles the reader, and even subtly manipulates them; he tells the reader to meditate with him, and then to suppose that the reader alone exists in all reality, all in an attempt to get the reader to think in the new and hitherto unimaginable way that Descartes has achieved[12]. Descartes' task in the text so read is to present a radically new understanding of our being in the world, which requires, more generally, a profound and global reconceptualization of the space of possibilities within which thought moves. No self–standing text could do this. Only writers and thinkers can do it, though to be sure they do it with text, that is, in words, whether spoken or written, both with the presence of text, what the text says, and (curiously) with the absence of text, what it does not say.

If we suppose that Descartes is trying to teach us to think in a radically new way, a way hitherto unimaginable to us, and thereby to open up the space of possibilities within which our thought moves, then he cannot in the nature of the case provide a self–standing argument, a proof. We must, then, read the *Meditations* with a literary rather than a mathematical orientation. We begin with the thought that nothing that the reader already knows prepares the reader to read the *Meditations* as Descartes intends it to be read. Because the reader is not yet in a position to understand what Descartes is trying to say, the reader must *trust* Descartes, trust that he knows what he is doing, and *listen*, attend not merely to Descartes' words but to how he says what he says, hints he gives as to how to read the words he writes, choices he makes in what words to use where,

[12] See Chapter Three of my *Realizing Reason* for an elaboration of such a reading of Descartes' *Meditations*.

how to order his thoughts, and what not to say, what to leave out. And as with Descartes' *Meditations*, so perhaps it is with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Maybe we can read that text too in either of these two ways, either in a mathematical way that is oriented to the text, what is written, as we might read a proof in mathematics, or in a literary way, a way that is oriented to its author, to Wittgenstein, to what *he* is trying to say through the text.

Perhaps it will be objected that all this notwithstanding, still, all we do have to go on is the text, and perhaps some contextual clues, such as the time and conversational context of the saying, or, in the case of speaking, tone of voice, and perhaps, body language. What we read (hear) are only the words in the arrangements they take in the text. Everything else is an interpretation, a reader's reading of the text. We have the text and only the text; the problem is to provide it with an interpretation that is at once faithful to the words of the text (and to the words of other texts in the vicinity, such as later writings of Wittgenstein, though perhaps to a lesser extent), and generous, where a reading is generous that makes good philosophical sense — at least by our lights, which are, of course, the only lights we have to go on. Interpret we must, because otherwise the text just stands there . . . like a sign post[13].

Here, so it seems to me, we make a philosophical mistake of inferring from what happens in the case of failure to a claim about how even in success our cognitive relations to things are mediated. Certainly, text can be misinterpreted, no matter with what orientation it is read. One can fail to understand a mathematical text and one can fail to understand a speaker or writer. And the ground of the misinterpretation is, in the usual case, the words uttered. It does not follow that in the successful case we start with the words independent of any understanding of what is being said. In the basic case, the successful case, we just do (immediately) understand, in the one case, what is being communicated in the text, and in the other, what the speaker is saying in speaking as they do.

[13] There may in fact be two different trains of thought here. One is that all we ever have to go on is the text, where text is broadly conceived to include anything "external" available to a hearer/reader whether in the case of written text or in the case of spoken. This is to assume, in effect, that the other is invariably a mere object among objects for one, that one has the sideways–on view in all one's interactions with others. The second train of thought assumes a distinction between speaking and writing, that although in speaking, one can speak one's mind, communicate through the words, in writing, there is only the text, what it states, as if the two orientations we have been concerned with correlate with speaking (the literary orientation) and writing (the mathematical orientation). The text of Descartes' *Meditations* shows already that this latter thought is wrong. We can speak and write, listen and read, with either orientation.

Notice, further, that immediacy here does not mean that effort is not involved. Even in the case in which understanding takes time and effort, repeated readings and re–readings, hypotheses and reconsiderations, the upshot of all that effort can nonetheless be an immediate apprehension. It is not unlike coming to hear the meaning in a musical composition: one must listen carefully and often, but eventually one comes to hear in the music what is going on. The apprehension is immediate, despite requiring a great deal of prior effort. Or consider the case in which one is trying to make out something in the distance, or through a fog; one peers and struggles, then finally, when all goes well, what one is seeing comes into view. In the end, one sees clearly and distinctly. The effort was to *see*, not to infer based on something (confused and indistinct) that one sees[14].

Our first thought, then, is to distinguish between two different orientations one can have both in speaking and writing and in hearing and reading, one that is essentially mathematical and another that is more literary.

The other resource we need concerns our successes and failures, specifically, the fact that when we have supposed ourselves to have succeeded in our cognitive engagements, what is thereby grasped appears to be something simply given, simply there, despite the fact that, in retrospect, when we have learned that we had been wrong, that same phenomenon shows up as a construction of some sort[15]. Because the idea that is wanted here is subtle and easily misconstrued, it will help to begin with a related but more primitive phenomenon, one in which the outlines of the key idea may be more immediately accessible.

Imagine that you are looking at some bird in clear view, an eagle, say[16]. And

[14] And if it is said at this point that nonetheless all we *do* have to go on is the text, the words that are said, or written —even if what is said, or written, is something to the effect that such a person is not *listening*, not (really) paying attention, not (even) trying— I have nothing to say. The issue, at this point, is, as Wittgenstein would say, an ethical one.

[15] We just saw an example of this in the idea that a text inevitably requires interpretation. Although it seems that in success, when one understands a text, the apprehension is immediate, in failure, what happens is that one misinterprets the words of the text, puts a false construction on them. It is then inferred, mistakenly, I suggested, that in success one also interprets, that in every case the text just stands there awaiting an interpretation, either the intended one or something that is nothing more than a construction by the reader.

[16] I first used this example in an essay published in this journal, Macbeth (2019).

suppose you ask, why does this eagle have wings with the particular shape they have? We further suppose that the eagle is perfectly normal, that its wings are just as they ought to be. In that case, the right response is simply to say that the bird is an eagle and eagles have such wings. And if it is asked why eagles have such wings, then the right response is something to the effect that eagles need wings like that to do the things that eagles do, to live as eagles live. The "explanation" in such a case is simply that the individual is an instance of a particular life form: it is shaped as it is, grows, and more generally lives, as it does, because it is an eagle and eagles are like that.

Now we consider a second case, again an eagle, but one whose wings are manifestly deformed in some way. If the wings are deformed, that is, not formed as is normal for such birds, then obviously we cannot appeal to the form of life in response to the question why the wings are as they are — except as a benchmark against which to judge that they are deformed, not as they ought to be. In this case, a different sort of response is called for, one that provides a causal explanation for the state of the bird's wings. Perhaps the deformity is the result of a genetic abnormality; or perhaps the bird suffered some trauma in the course of growing from a fledgling, one that damaged its still–developing wings. Whatever the reason for the misshapen wings, what is notable is that we turn in this case to an essentially different sort of account to explain the shape or condition of the wings, to something as the cause of what is in the normal case just a matter of how things are. The two sorts of cases, that of the normal specimen and that of the abnormal one, are asymmetric. In the case of success, no explanation is needed beyond a trivial rehearsal of the agent's power as the sort of bird it is to do precisely what it does and to be just as it is. In the case of failure, there needs to be an explanation, a causal account of why things did not go as is normal for the particular form of life, and there needs to be such an explanation precisely because things did not go as they ought to have gone, as is the norm for such things[17].

Now we consider a situation in which there is again, a successful case and a

[17] Of course, one can also simply ignore that fact that the eagle is a bird with a particular form of life and give an account in terms of causes that covers both what are otherwise seen as successful cases and what otherwise are seen as failures. That, however, is to change the subject and is strictly irrelevant to the asymmetry we are concerned with here. Our concern constitutively involves the distinction between success and failure, a distinction that has no place in an account of the underlying causal mechanisms of any sort of animal growth at all.

failure, but this time involving the cognitive capacities of a person. I take myself to have seen something, say, a green tie[18]. As I later learn, I had been looking at the tie in nonstandard conditions, specifically, under lights that make blue ties appear green. The tie was not green but only looked green in that light. And so, I come to think, I had not *seen* the color of the tie at all but was instead under an illusion of seeing it, an illusion caused by the unusual lighting conditions. And now I am liable to make a very familiar sort of philosophical error, that of thinking that it follows that even in normal lighting conditions I do not *see* the color of the tie, but only have an appearance of it, that is, the same sort of thing, whatever it is, that I have in the case of the illusion. But as was true for the eagle, the two cases are in fact asymmetric[19]. In ordinary conditions, things show up as they are, which is to say, we can just *see* how they are. But of course, where conditions are nonstandard, we cannot do that — that is just what it *means* to say that conditions are nonstandard[20]. In such conditions, we cannot *see* how things are but must infer something to the effect that the tie looks green, but in this sort of light blue ties appear green, therefore, the tie is (probably) blue. As this example illustrates, having a capacity to do something (such as telling the color of something by looking) just is being able to do it, despite the fact that, inevitably, sometimes one will fail, perhaps because conditions are not standard, perhaps because one is suffering from something that undermines one's ability, or for some other reason. And where one fails, some explanation is needed. It does not follow that an explanation is needed also for the case in which one succeeds. The "explanation" in the case of success is simply that that is something one can do just as in the case of the eagle, the "explanation" for its wings being as the wings of eagles generally are, is simply

[18] The example is Sellars' in his well-known story of John in the tie shop, which he recounts in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956).

[19] Again, there is a science of vision (as there is a science of animal development), one that aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms of animal vision, and does so for all circumstances, both "standard" and "nonstandard". But this is a completely different point, one that has nothing to do with facts about normal and abnormal cases in the life of an animal, whether an eagle or a human perceiver. The notion of life brings with it the distinction between normal and abnormal cases, and the fact that in the natural sciences it is impossible to distinguish in principle between, say, processes of digestion that are part of the nourishing of an animal and chemical activity in a flask has no implications at all for this distinction between normal and abnormal cases. One can regard an animal as a living being and one can regard it as a bundle of chemical processes. That is all.

[20] Sellars (1956) also makes this point.

that it is an eagle.

When one sees that a thing is this or that color, or anything else one can tell just by looking, there seems (and I am suggesting, is) nothing more to it than that the thing is there with the feature it has, and one sees this. And when one is under the illusion of seeing such a feature, one is likewise under the illusion that one is doing nothing more than taking in the relevant feature. But perhaps one later learns that the object has no such feature to be taken in, to be seen. Then not only was one under the illusion of the object's having the feature, one was under the illusion of having taken it in. One thought one was taking in a feature of the thing; in fact, one was responding to something else about the object. One was, as we say, caused so to experience it. But again, it is a philosophical move, and one that is deeply suspect, then to go on to say that even in the veridical case, one is caused to experience as one does, that one is, even in the veridical case, responding to something else about the object. There is no such symmetry. In the successful case, I simply do something I know how to do, something I have the ability to do. In the case of failure, I fail to do what in ordinary cases I can do, and that is something that needs to be explained.

Consider now other cases of our cognitive successes and failures. One is, for example, making an investigation into something, trying to find something out, whether a priori, say, in mathematics, or a posteriori, by way of an empirical investigation. Let us say that one is looking for a proof of a theorem in mathematics or logic, a way of establishing that the theorem is true. And eventually one finds a proof, one comes to "see how it goes", to realize just how all the parts fit together, why exactly the theorem is true. And if one is right, if one is not merely under the illusion of having seen how the proof goes, then one really has realized how the proof goes. One has seen it, grasped it. If, on the other hand, one is, as one later discovers, mistaken, if one had only seemed to see, seemed to realize, then an explanation is called for. We need in that case some account of what it was that gave one the illusion of knowing, for example, that one had drawn an inference at some point, an inference from something that manifestly was there (to be seen or grasped) to something that was in fact illegitimate, only seemed to be there (to be seen, grasped). Thus, here again, what had seemed to be an immediate apprehension comes, in retrospect, once one has realized one was mistaken, to be conceived to be a mediated process the result of which was an illusion of understanding and knowledge. And here again, the philosophical error is possible, the error of inferring, given the mediated character of one's failure, that there is mediation also in the successful cases.

(Notice what is happening here: one immediately recognizes and understands the difference between the two cases, between success and failure; but then one infers from what is immediately recognized and understood that the two cases are symmetric, and in so inferring, falls into an error, into an illusion of knowing.) There are no grounds for the inference that one makes; the premise is there all right, but no valid principle governs the step that takes one to the philosophical conclusion. In success one is in an immediate cognitive relation to that which one knows; in failure one is not. In failure, and only in failure, one's relation to that about which one is mistaken is mediated by something, something that explains how the failure was possible at all. Although cognitive success is unmediated (in relevant respects), cognitive failures are essentially mediated. It follows that what at one point can seem unmediated (because a successful case) can later be revealed to be mediated because it is, after all, a failure.

Our two resources, then, are, first, a distinction between two fundamentally different orientations, mathematical and literary, one can take in speaking/writing and hearing/reading, and also an observation about the nature and structure of our errors of apprehension, the immediacy of success and mediation in failure. The task now is to apply these resources, first, in our thinking about the history of readings of the *Tractatus*, and then in our attempt to understand its author.

§ 3. Reading *Tractatus*

We have seen that one can take either of two orientations toward a text. One can focus on the text, the words themselves as they appear in the text, or one can focus on the writer, read the words as that through which the writer seeks to communicate. How, then, do readers read *Tractatus*? Is it read as a self–standing text, as in that regard quite like a proof in mathematics? Or is it read instead in a more literary way, with careful attention to what its author is trying to say? Once one is on the lookout for it, it is not hard to see that different readers have different orientations, indeed, that one and the same reader can now adopt the one orientation and now the other. Where we find talk about interpreting the text, about finding a reading of the text that is consistent and philosophically compelling, that suggests that the reader is reading the text as self–standing. Readers who talk instead about understanding Wittgenstein, about what he is trying to do, tend to be reading instead in the more literary

way. Once apprised of this difference in ways of reading, we can see the resolute reading as Conant has developed it as, if only tacitly, a reading of a text, of words. It is an interpretation among interpretations[21]. The resolute reading as Diamond means it is not an interpretation, a reading of a text, but a turning away from the text as text to its author.

Diamond does not talk about readings or interpretations of *Tractatus* but instead about what *Wittgenstein* is doing. (Diamond also comes to distinguish between what Anscombe says, Anscombe's interpretation of the text of *Tractatus*, and what Anscombe —and according to Anscombe, and Diamond following her, Wittgenstein— are doing[22]). Similarly, Diamond's complaint about the ineffability reading is not, at least not directly, a complaint about the reading as a reading, as an interpretation of the text. It is a complaint about *readers*, that *readers* chicken out. According to Diamond, although readers such as Hacker are perhaps listening to Wittgenstein (in which case she reads those readers as having a literary orientation), they resist going all the way with him. They are resistant, in particular, to the move from seeing that no *theory* can do what is wanted to seeing that no *text* can do what is wanted, resistant to shifting their orientation. Such irresolute readers have learned from Wittgenstein that a text that aims to say what we need to learn cannot provide what is needed (because there are no words that can serve to picture what it is that one wants to communicate); so, it is supposed, the words instead serve to show what it is that is wanted, what cannot be said. But as Wittgenstein indicates in the text, this cannot be the end of the matter. We are to see that the idea that a text, any text, might show what is wanted is equally problematic. Certainly, a text can show things; in particular, sentences of a text, for example, the text of a proof that is expressed in Frege's formula language of thought, can show not only how things

[21] Again, even such a reading that is on the whole interpretive rather than literary can have moments where the reader is clearly puzzling over what *Wittgenstein* is doing, what his purposes are in writing as he does. Nevertheless, the overall orientation of such a reader is to the text; the aim is to provide a reading of the words as they appear on the page that is, ideally, cogent and consistent.

[22] See Diamond (2013), reprinted as Chapter Three in Diamond (2019). In the first chapter of the latter work, Diamond notes that Anscombe's "subject really is the author of the *Tractatus* and his concerns and achievements" (Diamond 2019, p. 53): the author, and his concerns and achievements, not the text by which the author addresses those concerns. On Diamond's considered reading, Anscombe is quite resolute, at least in Diamond's sense of resolute. Floyd (1998) likewise is clearly intent on understanding *Wittgenstein*, on reading through the *Tractatus* to what Wittgenstein himself is trying to communicate to us.

are, by picturing the relevant states of affairs, but also logical form in the use of different sorts of symbols. But no *text* can show anything about the relation of a thinker to the world. Because text is one manifestation of the relation of a thinker to the world, it depends on that relation and cannot without circularity picture that relation, either by way of content or by way of form.

The mistake of the ineffability reading on Diamond's account is that it continues to assume with the positivist that philosophy, whose central concern is the relation of thought, language, and reality, is somehow a form of inquiry into how things are in the world. The positivist takes philosophy to be more or less just like the natural sciences, a form of inquiry into how things are. The ineffability reading sees that this is not right. Philosophy is unlike the natural sciences insofar as it is only in the natural sciences that one can say how things are, picture them in propositions. So, the ineffabilist reader concludes, the philosopher must show rather than say what it is they have discovered about the world. But this, Diamond urges, does not go far enough. It is not just that one cannot say the doctrines of philosophy, its theories and theses; there are no doctrines, theories, or theses in philosophy. The only task for the philosopher is that of elucidating, clarifying, first and foremost, the relation of a thinker to the world. But here, again, there are two ways to think about this. To the reader oriented to text, who sees (in practice, if not with any self–consciousness) the text as self–standing, as presenting pictures (or purported pictures) of how things are, the elucidation must be carried by the text itself; the text must show that there is nothing to be shown about how things are, in particular, how things are as concerns thinkers, language, and reality. And this, as many critics of the resolute reading have argued, collapses into incoherence. The reader oriented to the author reads differently. For such a reader, it is not the text but the author who aims to bring us to understand that philosophy can only clarify, that philosophy cannot reveal anything substantial about the world. And this does not seem so obviously incoherent. As the example of Descartes' *Meditations* reminds us, we can do all sorts of interesting things with text in order to make ourselves understood.[23]

On Diamond's reading, Wittgenstein's aim in writing the *Tractatus* is to reveal something about our cognitive involvements in the world, and in particular, about the peculiar activity we engage in that goes by the name of philosophy. We are interested in the relation of a thinker to the world, a relation

[23] See also White (2011, pp. 40–42), where we are provided with a nice example from the world of chess.

we at first thought could be illuminated by asserting that thought, language, and world share a logical form. When we saw that all such assertions inevitably fall into nonsense, because such logical form is the condition of possibility of all assertion, it was suggested instead that this logical form is shown rather than said, and shown, in particular, in meaningful propositions, paradigmatically, the propositions of the natural sciences. What Diamond objects to is the idea that this form is something known about reality, as if philosophy is (again) a positive science. There are two problems here. One is the idea that philosophy can discover substantive truths about reality. The other is the idea that a text can show something about the relation of a thinker to the world. The first is a claim about the nature of philosophical inquiry. The second is a claim about text. It is the second we need to focus on here; for it is this claim that highlights the difference between the two orientations, between reading *Tractatus* mathematically or reading it with a literary orientation (Later, we will come back to the question of the nature of philosophical inquiry).

Certainly, a text can purport to be concerned with the relation of the thinker to the world. A text can *say* (in the way of texts), for example, the words "I am my world" (5.63) — or at least, it can give the illusion of saying such a thing. But that, Wittgenstein is concerned to show on the reading we are concerned with, is an illusion. A *text* cannot say what is said by someone sincerely asserting the words "I am my world"; nor, obviously, can it show it. Only a person can speak, and write, in the first person. And only a person can speak (or write) about "my propositions", saying, meaningfully, that those propositions need, eventually, to be recognized as nonsense. Text conceived as such, that is, as self–standing, as in the case of a mathematical proof, *can* picture something. But not all text is meant in the way a proof in mathematics is meant. Sometimes we write not to present a self–standing content but in order to communicate something to a reader —though not anything "factual", not something about how things are with objects in the world— through writing (speaking) as we do. In such a case, we do communicate with another, but not by way of the words conceived as an embodiment, a picture or expression of the relevant thought. The last stage in the dialectic, as I read Diamond reading Wittgenstein, is to realize this, that what matters is what *Wittgenstein* is trying to say through writing as he does. We philosophers are not to read the text of *Tractatus* as if it were self-standing, as the text of a mathematical proof is to be read. We are to read it in a more literary way, listening for what Wittgenstein is trying to tell us with the text he has authored.

On the picture theory one pictures (in text) states of affairs that are out there, in the world as it stands (like a text) outside of one. One cannot address another, a second person, given this view of language, despite the fact that one can picture how at least some things are with others. There is, in the world so conceived, as pictured by such text, "no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas" (5.631). "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is the limit of the world" (5.632). On the picture theory, which is a theory of language and its possible uses, it is not an *orientation* in one's use of language, namely, that orientation one has in writing and speaking, reading and listening, mathematically, but *language itself* that serves to picture how things are and so to enforce the mathematical orientation. And yet, Wittgenstein is trying, on Diamond's reading, to teach us to read in a different way, to read his text not as a self–standing text, like a proof, but as *his* text, as what he is trying to say to us, if we could only learn to read text as his text needs to be read.

The last stage of the dialectic on Diamond's reading, if I have understood her, is to see that it is not the text that contains the lesson of the work but its author — which means, assuming Diamond is correct, that what we as readers need to do is not interpret the text but instead listen to its author. It is what Wittgenstein is trying to teach us that matters, indeed, that is the only lesson possible. For what we are to learn is something that no text (as text, that is, as self–standing in the way a mathematical proof is self–standing) could possibly teach. And a crucial aspect of this is realizing what a text, conceived as a means of picturing states of affairs, a text of the sort that belongs in textbooks and in proofs in mathematics, can and cannot do. Text, on the *Bild* theory, can only say, that is, picture states of affairs, though in the course of doing that it also shows its logical form. And we readers of *Tractatus* have a tendency to assume further that all texts function this way, that is, as text does in a proof in mathematics; we have a tendency to assume there are not two ways to mean a text, two attitudes or orientations one can take in writing/speaking and reading/hearing, but only one. Wittgenstein knows that this is not true, that in poetry and literature text does not function as it does in a mathematical proof[24]. What we are to realize, then, is that what matters to philosophy is not what a

[24] Wittgenstein seems, nonetheless, to have had some difficulty understanding how a speaker can use a text to say something that no text on its own can say. Indeed, that may be why he claims that in the end "the correct method in philosophy" can only be "to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy" (6.53).

text can say, or show. What matters is what a person can say, and show. Philosophy is not mathematics, and it is not any sort of a science. It is, Wittgenstein says, more like poetry, if it is like anything at all[25]. And what he means, I am suggesting, is that it is a person, and only a person, who can show something about our cognitive involvements in the world, about the relation of language, thought, and reality. And this, finally, one can show as much by what one does not say, for example, by conversations one is unwilling to have, as by what one does say, by those conversations into which one freely enters.

We have seen that different readers do seem to read *Tractatus* differently, some oriented to the text as self–standing and others in a more literary way, to the text as an attempt by Wittgenstein to communicate something to a reader not by way of a self–standing text but more directly as thinker to thinker. And the same issues arise between readers of Wittgenstein's text. Readers of other readers can also be oriented in one way or the other, both in their own writings and in their readings of other readers. As might be expected, the result is considerable confusion about just what a resolute or ineffability reading actually comes to, confusion that is especially evident in discussions of the notion of nonsense. If one is mathematically oriented then it is impossible to see how text conceived as nonsense can do any textual work at all given that what a self–standing text does is to picture: if there is no picturing, no meaning of this sort, then (on this reading) there is no meaning at all. The text collapses into a meaningless heap of words, into word salad. If one is oriented instead literarily, then even nonsense can do important work in a text. An author can use nonsense to convey something. And this is true even if the text that is nonsense is not first seen as such, if it is at first taken by a reader to be not nonsense at all but instead a fully meaningful picture of how things are. In that case, the writer may, quite intentionally, first bring the reader to see that what had seemed sensical was only an illusion, and then help them to see that in achieving that first realization, the reader was responding to the text not as a self–standing text but as the work of an author who was using text to bring a reader to a new insight. The author in that case knows from the outset that the reader is liable to read the text as self–standing, as like the text of a mathematical proof. Such a reader at first takes what the author knows is only an illusion of sense to be perfectly good sense. So the author proceeds in stages, first, revealing the

[25] As Wittgenstein will remark sometime in 1933/34, "I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*" (1980, p. 24e).

nonsense as nonsense, then helping the reader to see that in so recognizing the nonsense, the reader had to have been reading the text in a way that is different from the way they had assumed they were reading. The reader does, after all, know how to read a text with a literary orientation (we all do), even though the reader is under the (philosophical) misapprehension that one can read a text only as self–standing, as presenting a picture of how things are. The task is to bring the reader to *realize* that they can so read, by presenting a text that is intelligible only on such a reading, and then bringing the reader to see that they in fact understand it. This, in effect, is Diamond's reading. It is also Wittgenstein's writing.

The resolute reading, as it is understood by at least some writers and readers, takes the form of an interpretation of a text. It has the text of *Tractatus* doing, or trying to do, something. But that something, I have suggested, is something that no self–standing text could possibly do, no matter what the interpretation of it. Quite simply (and obviously, at least when one thinks clearly about it), no self-standing text can show that it does not function as a self-standing text. As I have further suggested, Wittgenstein himself realizes this. Further evidence is provided by the fact that Wittgenstein clearly recognizes that there are things that can be shown by not saying anything at all. This is something that a text clearly cannot do. It is not texts but (only) *people* who can show by not saying, as when, for example, one's question is met with a "stony silence", that is, a silence that is not nothing, the mere absence of sound, but instead a response, and a response that the original speaker can fully understand, despite its being nothing like the response expected. Here there is no text, no words, nor even, we can imagine, any sort of response in the form of a facial expression, or gesture, or posture. It is the utter *lack* of any response on the part of the hearer, the utter lack of any *text* that is doing the work here, that *is* the response. And any of us are perfectly capable of recognizing it as such. The point, then, is that although *people* can communicate by absence, by *not* doing anything, by not producing any text, texts cannot. And if that is right, what is needed is not an interpretation of a text, of the words of *Tractatus* but instead an account of what *Wittgenstein* is doing in saying, and not saying, what he does and does not say in that work, just as Diamond suggests.

The idea that a person might write not with the intention of producing a self–standing text but instead to communicate directly with a reader (albeit through a text), introduces already the possibility of apparent infelicities in a text, or at least what must appear as infelicities in a self–standing text.

Obviously, a self–standing text that contains, say, a contradiction, or even just a very large jump or gap in the argument, one that it is impossible to know how to overcome, is, for just that reason, deeply problematic. But in a literary text, such "infelicities" can be crucial moments in the reader's apprehension of the lesson of the text. When a trusted, perhaps even beloved teacher contradicts themselves or leaves a gaping hole in the text, especially so when it is an obvious contradiction or hole, the student would be a poor student indeed to infer that the teacher is less competent than hitherto thought. No, the teacher is trying to teach; the task is to learn, even from a contradiction, or absence[26]. If we read *Tractatus* as a literary text, if, that is, we do not aim for an interpretation of the text but instead listen for what Wittgenstein is trying to tell us, we will not try to explain away such "infelicities" but will instead seek to understand what it is we are to learn from them.

Wittgenstein was always concerned with the ultimate questions, the big questions, questions about the meaning of life. He also came at a certain point in his intellectual journey to see the logic developed by Frege and Russell as a fundamental and fundamentally significant advance *in the sciences*[27]. And for a time at least, Wittgenstein thought he saw a powerful and deeply illuminating connection between the two: the logic was to clarify and explain the relation of thought, language, and world, and thereby provide insight into ethical questions, in particular, the question of the meaning of life, if only by revealing what sort of question it is not, more exactly, that it is no sort of question at all. This suggests, as a roadmap for reading, the following tripartite structure to the *Tractatus* as a whole.

We begin with (what Wittgenstein took to be) the logical advances that Wittgenstein outlines in the early parts of *Tractatus*, advances that on his view

[26] Plato in his dialogues provides a useful guide here. Clearly, the dialogues are philosophical texts, but equally clearly, they are also literary. They are dialogues, so Plato can write in a way that reproduces speech directly, that enables us to hear directly (as it were) Socrates speaking to us. Of course, we readers must puzzle over the dialogues, both what Socrates is saying, and what Plato is doing in having Socrates, and others, say as they do, but again, this is all in service of getting one to understand the author, what Plato is doing with and through his text.

[27] More exactly, this was the logic that Russell thought was a development of Frege's ideas. In fact, Frege was doing something different from what Russell, and Wittgenstein following him, thought, though in some ways Wittgenstein was closer, and closer on just those points about which he thought he was disagreeing with Frege. See my (2005) and (2014) for what I take to be the correct, non–Russellian reading both of Frege's concept–script and of his writings about it.

belong to science, inquiry into how things are. We do not, however, need to assume that they amount to a *theory* about how things are. We can suppose instead that they are to be seen as (immediate) insights into a priori form, form that is no sort of content, about which there is no truth or falsity. The first part of *Tractatus*, on this reading, sets out a conception of logical form and (empirical) content that is, Wittgenstein thinks, an insight of then-recent work in logic. The reflections on signs and symbols and the role of the subject in the capacity of the signs to picture as they do that occupy the middle of the book can then be seen to belong instead to a second, more reflective level, to a more "philosophical" part. Here what it is crucial to see is that given how (according to the first part) language pictures, and the role of the subject in picturing, there can be no substantive philosophical inquiry, no role for philosophy beyond that of "the logical clarification of thought" (4.112). The book then ends with a gesture to what is in its way the most important part, the part that can in no way be spoken of, even in the literary way of the book as a whole. As is the case in the best novels (at least, on Wittgenstein's view), the ethical significance of the work lies precisely in what is not said in it. Wittgenstein explains in a very well-known passage from a letter to Ludwig von Ficker:

> The book's point is an ethical one. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now but which I will write out for you here, because it will perhaps be a key to the work for you. What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the ONLY *rigorous* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where many others today are just gassing [*schwefeln*], I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it. (Engelman 1968, 143)

Suppose that the most important thing is to live one's life honestly, clear-sightedly, not to deceive oneself with what one wants to be so but is not so, and that philosophers are especially prone to such self-deception insofar as what philosophers want to achieve is knowledge of the whole as a whole, the last word, the view from nowhere. The task is to realize that it is just not like that. It is not that there is such a thing only we finite, limited beings cannot achieve it, but that the very idea of such a completion (such a text) is incoherent. The only view, on this line of thinking, is the view from here, limited, perspectival, partial. And yet, nothing is lost. And if that is right, if the book really does have this tripartite structure, it is easy to see why the talk of frame and body is (as

Diamond says) not helpful. Talk of frame and body belongs to a mathematical reading of the text; it has no useful role to play in the more literary reading according to which the whole has the sort of three-part structure just indicated[28].

Consider, again, the positivist view according to which *Tractatus* presents a theory of meaning for language, all language, language as such. Such a theory clearly is not an empirical theory since it aims to set out necessary features of *language* as contrasted with the various contingent features of this or that actual human language. Because its concern is necessary features of reality rather than contingent ones, it cannot be conceived to be the fruit of an empirical investigation into, say, the languages there are in the world. The conception of philosophy at work here is a familiar one: philosophy is to be a science, to reveal truths about the nature of reality, but not an empirical science, not an a posteriori form of investigation. Kant, we may recall, developed an account of this, an account of how philosophy can be at once a science and a priori, how something can be a truth, that is, a substantive claim about how things are, and also necessary, hence, not (in any substantive sense) answerable to things as they are. On Kant's account such truths are synthetic, that is, not logically necessary, but necessary nonetheless, that is, a priori. Like most early twentieth–century philosophers in the English–speaking world, Wittgenstein has no place for the synthetic a priori, for judgments that are necessary but not logically necessary[29]. According to him, there are truths of logic (which, as for Kant, are not really truths, though they have the form of truths) and there are the contingent, empirical truths of the natural sciences. There is no third sort of judgment[30]. The only truths are those of the natural sciences, truths about empirical reality that are discovered on the basis of experience, and, by a kind of courtesy, sentences such as tautologies and contradictions (and mathematical equations) that have the form of truths but are *sinnlos*, empty of content, though not strictly speaking nonsense, not *Unsinn*. There are no other cases; everything else that

[28] I first introduced this idea that our talk can be in any of three different registers—either a first-level register concerned with what is the case, a second, more reflective, philosophical register, and finally a third, more existential register—in Macbeth (2020).

[29] The reason he (and others) did not can be traced to developments in mathematics in the nineteenth century. See my *Realizing Reason*, Chapter Five.

[30] Wittgenstein also recognizes what he thinks of as the equations of mathematics, which are neither logical truths nor empirical ones. They are nonetheless like the tautologies of logic in that they are in no sense synthetic, substantive truths, whether a priori or a posteriori.

masquerades as a truth or at least truth evaluable is nonsensical, *unsinnig*. The picture theory, then, is not and cannot be a theory about how things are, somehow alongside properly empirical theories. To think, as the positivist does, that it is such a theory is to confuse the register of our first–order talk about things there are in the world with that of talk at the second, reflective level, talk about the relation of language, thought, and reality, assuming any such talk makes sense at all.

As already noted, the ineffability reading can be seen, in turn, as attempting to characterize what is distinctive of talk at this more reflective level, the level, that is, of properly philosophical reflection the aim of which is not knowledge of objects but, somehow, a kind of knowledge that sheds light on our first–level knowledge. Such second–level philosophical knowledge, on the ineffability reading, is shown in our use of language. While the positivist reading aims to make of philosophy a kind of super–science, a science revelatory of how things are, but one that is concerned in particular with how things are and must be, the ineffability reading is careful to distinguish between the sciences, which are a posteriori, and philosophy, which is a priori. And the way this distinction is to be made out is in terms of the difference between saying and showing: whereas the fruits of scientific inquiry can be said, those of philosophy can only be shown. And they can only be shown because the concern is not with content at all but with form, the logical form that thought, language, and reality exhibit.

Clearly, this is an advance. Philosophy is not and cannot be a kind of super–science. But philosophy is, or might at least seem to be, *some* sort of a priori investigation into (necessary) facts about how things are, in particular, as on the ineffability reading, necessary facts about form. This is not what Wittgenstein thinks. According to him, again, "most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical [*unsinnig*]"; they "arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language" and the only possible response that can be made to them is to "point out that they are nonsense" (4.003). To understand the logic of our language, the form that it shares with the world, is, finally, to know that such understanding is not a form of *knowledge* at all. It is for just this reason that any attempts to make philosophical claims about the relation of thought and world, or about language (as contrasted with particular languages) yield only gibberish—which is also what this sentence must be.

On Wittgenstein's account we clearly learn something when we achieve an adequate analysis of a sentence, but what we learn is not some ordinary fact

about reality, something about how things are that could be expressed in a claim. Nor even do we learn some extraordinary fact about reality, a fact about its form. Nevertheless, we do learn something; there is an understanding of meaning in *Tractatus*, not to be sure a scientific theory, a theory that might be stated as so many theses, but still an understanding that is manifested in the analyses we give and the way we talk generally about how to think about our knowledge claims. Such analytical work is, however, not philosophy. Philosophy is, or at least aims to be, a second–order reflection on the relation of language, thought, and reality, just the sort of reflection that we find in *Tractatus*. But again, as we know from 6.43, that whole discussion is nonsensical, *unsinnig*. Although we may, as philosophers, try to say something useful, something insightful about *how* to think about the relationship of thought and reality, and about how language mediates that relationship, something that belongs at a second, more reflective level (relative to our first-level inquiries into how things are), that is, in the register that appears to be proper to philosophy, in fact we cannot. Any attempt to express our understanding in text (as opposed to manifesting it in our analyses), by showing with the sort of language Wittgenstein uses in the *Tractatus*, is sheer nonsense. We can make claims in what we have been thinking of as the first and basic register, that of the natural sciences. And there is also that about which (according to Wittgenstein) we are and must be silent, the register of our most fundamental, existential orientation, namely, ethics[31]. What is altogether absent, Wittgenstein holds, is any register in between the two, any properly philosophical reflection. Philosophy, on this view, is not any sort of inquiry at all but can only elucidate or clarify, show that what we took to make sense is in fact nonsense. And even that is not properly philosophical work, at least when it is merely a matter of showing the logical form of a sentence. Properly philosophical work, insofar as there is any such work to be done at all, is strictly therapeutic; the aim is to cure us of our philosophical confusions.

We saw in our discussion of readings of *Tractatus* that the resolute reading

[31] The 'we' here seems to be we philosophers. Poets and novelists are not silent; although poets and novelists also do not speak about the ethical, that is, they do not use words that refer or seem to refer to any such thing, they do address the ethical insofar as what they do write about can serve to "turn the whole soul" of a reader (to borrow Plato's wonderfully apt imagery in *Republic*). But again, nor is Wittgenstein silent in the relevant sense. The *Tractatus* aims, at some level, have just such an effect on a reader. In showing that one cannot do the sort of philosophy one had wanted, and that that sort of philosophy is nothing to be wanted, one is to see that what really matters in life is not what one had imagined but something else.

faces significant problems, among them: the problem of distinguishing in any principled way between the frame of the work and its body, the problem that if Wittgenstein's propositions truly are nonsensical, *unsinnig*, then they cannot teach us anything at all, and the problem that if there is only one sort of nonsense (as seems to be required by the context principle, and with it the collapse of the say/show distinction), then Wittgenstein seems committed to a particular theory of meaning after all. As we also saw, that Wittgenstein is committed to a particular theory of meaning in *Tractatus* is further indicated by the fact that he later claims that he had been so committed, and had been mistaken in that commitment. Some of these problems, we have seen, arise because one reads the text as if it were self-standing in the way a text of a proof in mathematics is self-standing. We need, as readers of *Tractatus*, to be oriented to the text as to a literary work; our concern must be not to find a coherent and compelling interpretation of the text as text but to hear what it is that Wittgenstein is trying to say through the text. Indeed, I have suggested, one of the things Wittgenstein is trying to teach a reader is that read as a self-standing text *Tractatus* undermines itself. We do (at some level) understand Wittgenstein in this work, even if not completely; the task is to understand how we can given that it cannot be by reading the text as a self-standing text (because so read the text collapses into incoherence). Wittgenstein is, then, trying to show us something in *Tractatus*, but it is not (at least not primarily, not ultimately) something about language and logical form. It is something about ourselves and our capacities of understanding, and thereby about our relationship to language and the reality that it serves to picture.

One crucial problem remains, and that is the problem of either asserting or denying that in *Tractatus* Wittgenstein espouses a theory of meaning. It appears that he must have a theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, since without such a theory he cannot appeal to the notion of nonsense he needs and seems clearly to appeal to in that work; and in any case, he later clearly thinks that in *Tractatus* he had a theory of meaning. But we also know that even in *Tractatus* Wittgenstein denies that there are any theories in philosophy, of which any theory of meaning would clearly be one. There is clear evidence that Wittgenstein has and promotes a theory of meaning in *Tractatus*, as is assumed on the ineffability reading, *and* clear evidence that Wittgenstein would reject the idea of such a theory on grounds that there can be no such thing in philosophy, as is emphasized on the resolute reading. How, then, shall we understand Wittgenstein?

§ 4. Understanding Wittgenstein

I have suggested that depending on one's orientation, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* can be read either as a self–standing text, as presenting claims and arguments, or at least motivations, much as a mathematical text does, or as a more literary text aiming to bring a reader to understand its author and thoughts that are perhaps not antecedently intelligible at all. To a reader oriented the first way, the task of reading *Tractatus* is that of finding an interpretation of its words that makes the best sense of them possible, an interpretation that is at once comprehensive in providing a coherent and consistent reading of as much of the text as possible, and cogent, that is, philosophically compelling. To a reader oriented the second way, the task is to understand Wittgenstein. And in that case, arguments for one's reading may not be possible — any more than it is invariably possible to give conclusive reasons for one's understanding of a musical phrase or of the expression on a person's face. One knows, if one is not mistaken, that one has grasped what Wittgenstein is after in writing as he does, and one can, in that case, motivate one's reading, try to help a reader to see what one has seen. What one cannot do is *compel* a reader so to read, not in the way a mathematical proof can compel assent to its conclusion.

I have also indicated that there seems to be no one thing that Wittgenstein is doing in *Tractatus*, that he writes in different registers at different points in the text, first addressing the logical form of thought, language, and reality, then addressing what such talk shows about the practice of philosophy, and finally, gesturing toward what Wittgenstein thinks of as ethics, which cannot be spoken of at all. Thus, it could be that Wittgenstein means both to set out the *Bild* conception of language as a kind of first–order conception of how things are, at least with respect to form, and then to call into question the very idea of philosophy as a mode of inquiry, as well as ultimately to provide some indication of what has not been said, of how all he has written matters to how one conceives one's life. But as we have seen, all this still leaves open the question of the status of the *Bild* conception of language in *Tractatus*. Again, that conception appears to be a philosophical theory, and indeed one to which the author of *Tractatus* is committed, but this is problematic given that even in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein thinks that philosophy is not in the business of producing theories about things, whether first–order theories about how things actually are with the objects there are in the world, or reflective philosophical theories about how

everything hangs together, theories aimed at helping us to understanding how to think about what we discover in our empirical investigations. Should we take the author of the *Tractatus* to be committed to the *Bild* theory despite his Tractarian understanding of philosophy, what it can and cannot do, as on the ineffability reading? Or should we take that author to be not so committed despite the apparent role of that theory in undergirding his claims about nonsense and his later (apparent) change of heart, as on the resolute reading? If our earlier reflections on the nature and structure of our successes and failures are sound, we do not have to choose. We can read Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* as understanding himself to have *seen* something, more exactly, to be registering the logical discoveries of Frege and Russell, as corrected by Wittgenstein, discoveries that, as Wittgenstein held throughout his life, truly are discoveries despite not being empirical, despite being strictly a priori.

But Wittgenstein did come to have second thoughts, not about the logical discoveries themselves but about their implications for language. He came to see that those logical discoveries do not entail the *Bild* theory, that that theory *is* a theory, one that Wittgenstein had posited in light of the logical findings of Frege and Russell (as corrected by Wittgenstein) but was taken at the time to be simply a part of those findings, taken to be something that "is obvious to the uncaptive eye" as he puts it in 1914 (Wittgenstein 1979, p. 5e). What had seemed to the author of the *Tractatus* simply to be given, there to be grasped, later came to be recognized as a mistake, only the illusion of understanding. What I am suggesting, then, is that although he at first took it to be an immediately available insight, Wittgenstein later came to think that the picture theory of language (as contrasted with the understanding of logical form) is, after all only a theory, and a false one at that. Wittgenstein had (mistakenly) taken the *Bild* theory to be how things are with language, but in fact he had been misled by his reflections on logic. What he thought he had seen, what he thought was there to be seen, was an illusion grounded in and explained by the insight into logical form but not justified by that insight. It is in just this way that we steer a middle course between the two readings, between thinking that Wittgenstein had a theory in the early work but changed his mind (the ineffability reading), and thinking that he had no theory, so never changed his mind (the resolute reading). On our reading, what at first seemed to be no theory at all but simply an insight into language and logical form, was later seen to be a theory *because* it came to be seen to be false, a mistaken inference from an insight into logical form. From the perspective of the later Wittgenstein, early Wittgenstein was only

under the illusion of understanding. He did grasp the logical form of thought, language, and reality (which as form does not amount to any sort of substantive knowledge of reality), but mistakenly inferred on the basis of that insight that language functions to picture states of affairs.

Although, on our reading, Wittgenstein at first assumed that the logical insights of Frege and Russell included a conception of language, he later took that conception of language to be a mere posit based on those insights and a false one at that. What Wittgenstein never questioned, though he might have done, is the idea that philosophy can serve only to elucidate, to make manifest the various sorts of nonsense we fall into and thereby to make our philosophical puzzles and problems disappear. The image is of an underlying or background understanding that is fundamentally sound, but which can become obscured by our reflective confusions. Everything is fine until we start to think, begin to reflect on things, and then we come up with all manner of nonsense. We find ourselves puzzled by what ought not to be puzzling at all, and what philosophy does is help us, through a kind of philosophical therapy, to dismantle the constructions that left us puzzled. But why should we think that our background understanding is sound? Some things really do seem puzzling, or even wrong, merely contingent, historical accidents of, say, one's sociocultural and historical moment. Perhaps the idea that *basically* one is right thinking is the biggest self–deception of all.

There can be no question that we invariably come with an understanding of things, of how it all hangs together, of what matters and does not, of what makes sense and what does not. Such an understanding is not anything like an empirical theory or empirical finding. It is not what we know but how we find ourselves thinking about what we know, that in virtue of which, for example, this joke seems funny to us and that joke not, this projection of the use of a word makes sense, feels right, but that projection fails to catch on, and this resolution of an inconsistent triad is plausible while that is not. And mostly this understanding can and does function seamlessly and invisibly in the background — like the plumbing in our homes[32]. But sometimes cracks appear. What had seemed to make sense, on closer inspection does not, or no longer does. One does not know what (more exactly: how) to think. And here we may need to develop new understandings, new conceptions of things. Such understandings and conceptions are like theories about how things are insofar

[32] The imagery is that of Mary Midgley. See, for example, Midgley (1992).

as they can be wrong (or right, that is, illuminating, workable) but they are not theories about how things are. They aim not to add to our knowledge but to give us intellectually satisfying (that is to say, successful) ways of thinking about that knowledge. They aim not to teach us what to think, what to take to be so, but how to think, how to understand the meaning or significance of what is so, how it all hangs together. The principal aim of philosophy, one might think, is precisely to identify the need for such new conceptions and understandings, and to meet that need. Wittgenstein saw no need for such intellectual endeavors[33].

If I am right, Wittgenstein made two mistakes in *Tractatus*, one that he later saw for himself and another that he did not. The *Bild* theory of language according to which sentences function as pictures of states of affairs was, he came to see, mistaken, not an insight into the relation of language, thought, and the world at all but only a false construction on what was (he thought) an insight, namely, the logical discoveries of Frege and Russell (as corrected by Wittgenstein). What I have claimed he did not see is that we inevitably come with an understanding of how things hang together, an understanding that may need to be subjected to just the sort of critically reflective inquiry that characterizes philosophical thinking[34]. Perhaps the understanding of things we find ourselves with is unproblematic, but it is also possible that we discover, on reflection, that we really do need to work towards a better understanding. Wittgenstein seems to think that when we have philosophical difficulties, when things do not make sense, do not hang together as they should, the problem is invariably that we have put a false construction on things, that all errors are errors of construction (as was his error in the case of the picture theory). But this does not seem to be right. Sometimes our philosophical difficulties arise

[33] Recall the problem that seems to arise for Diamond, the problem that if there is a notation that makes logical differences clear then there must be such differences, that is, logical form (see fn. 10 above). The problem how to think about logic and logical form may well be resolved only by our breaking out of old ways of thinking, by our finding new ways to think about what logic is.

[34] Notice that these two aspects of Wittgenstein's thought, on the one hand, the idea that Frege and Russell achieved an enduring insight into logical form, and on the other, the idea that all our philosophical confusions are due to the false constructions we put on things, may be sides of one coin. Were logical form just given, something unquestionable in principle as Wittgenstein thinks, then perhaps we could see all our philosophical errors as self-induced. But even logical form is not given. As Frege saw, we can make mistakes, even in logic—which is to say, as Sellars argues, there is no Given, nothing that cannot be called into question as reason sees fit. Wittgenstein's conception of logic as purely formal is due ultimately to Kant, and needs to be superseded. See my (2014).

because we do not (yet) have the cognitive resources we need to make sense of things. We (as inheritors of the intellectual traditions into which we are acculturated) are perhaps confusing two things that need to be distinguished, or fail to see that there is a further possibility, not because we have constructed an understanding but because we inevitably come with an understanding of things, one that at first develops willy nilly, as language does. We even can have a conception of things that makes it seem that there is no possibility at all just where one is needed to resolve our philosophical difficulties. The history of western philosophy, so it seems to me, is littered with just such problems, and the philosophical advances that enabled their resolution[35].

Why, then, did Wittgenstein not see this? Why did he continue to think that although both the natural sciences and the arts are possible, philosophy, as a positive endeavor, is not? An answer might be found in the fact that although Wittgenstein later came to recognize many uses for language, in addition to its use for stating facts, he never came adequately to understand how one can read texts in order to understand the thoughts of their authors. It was suggested above that Wittgenstein's picture theory, which is insightful about a mathematical language such as Frege's *Begriffsschrift*, was mistaken in assuming that all language is written and to be read on that model. Perhaps what happened, then, is that, when Wittgenstein came to think that the *Bild* theory was mistaken, he came to see it (to interpret it) as mistaken about language: language, he came to think, can be used to picture but it also can be used to do a great variety of other things. And if language is everywhere the same, despite its various uses, then its underlying conceptions and understandings must also be the same[36]. Wittgenstein has, then, no reason to see those underlying conceptions and understandings as in any way questionable. They are simply given as the background to all we know and do not know, all we understand and do not understand. But the two orientations, mathematical and literary, that I have introduced here are not merely two uses of language, itself understood in one particular way; the two orientations involve (and reflect) two essentially different understandings of what language is in relation to thought and reality. They are not uses of language in the sense of

[35] My (2014) provides an account of some main themes in the history of western philosophy that aims to exemplify this point.

[36] Again, this thought may have been reinforced in Wittgenstein's thinking by the idea that logical form is inviolate, something about which we cannot in the nature of the case be mistaken.

concern to Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*, but essentially different conceptions of language, conceptions that are always already in play when we use language to do the myriad things we do with it. And if there are these two essentially different orientations to language, two different understandings of what language is in relation to thought and reality, then we need to question Wittgenstein's assumptions about the nature and role of philosophy.

§ 5. Conclusion

I have argued —though not, to be sure, as a mathematician might argue, by providing a self–standing text— that what is needed in thinking about Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is not a reading of a text at all, not an interpretation, but instead an account of what Wittgenstein is doing in and with that text, that only a person can do what is getting done in the *Tractatus*. This is most obvious in the case of Wittgenstein's silences: only a person can communicate by silence, by not producing any text. But it is equally true that only a person can say anything with (for example) the words 'my propositions are nonsensical', or words to that effect. And only a person can seek to show, and perhaps can succeed in showing, that no self-standing text can so much as address, let alone answer, our questions about the relation of thought, language, and the world. We need, then, to distinguish two different orientations one can take in reading (and writing) philosophical texts, and to recognize, in particular, that a reader such as Diamond reads *Tractatus* not as a self-standing text, like the text of a mathematical proof, but instead as Wittgenstein's attempt to bring the reader to a realization about self-standing texts, to a realization that no self-standing text could possibly reveal.

This, however, was only the first step in our negotiating the complexities of both the work and readings of it. We needed to see also that what had at first seemed to be simply an aspect of the logical insights of Frege and Russell (or at least what Wittgenstein throughout his life took to be their logical insights), came later to be seen as a mistaken accretion to those insights, a construction that in no way amounted to an insight. We needed to see, as even Diamond did not, that the *Bild* theory is not at first seen as a theory at all, that there is such a theory in *Tractatus* though only later is it recognized as a theory, as a false construction on (what to the end of his life Wittgenstein conceived as) a logical insight. Only on the basis of such an understanding, which relies in turn on the

conception we have outlined of the nature of our cognitive successes and failures, can we reconcile the fact that Wittgenstein endorses that theory in the *Tractatus* despite claiming that there are no theses or doctrines in philosophy, and later repudiates it as a false theory.

Read as a self–standing text that presents its own content as nonsense, *Tractatus* really does seem to be sheer nonsense. It is nonsense in just the way it would be nonsense to try to show, using a horse, that a horse is not a horse. (If it really is a horse, then there is no way it can serve to show that a horse is not a horse.) But the *Tractatus* is not nonsense. And it is not nonsense because it was not written as, nor meant to be read as, a self–standing text. It is, irreducibly, Wittgenstein's text, Wittgenstein's attempt to share with his readers his thoughts about how it is to be in the world, one of us, those who can, if we try, read with insight and understanding a text such as Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein uses a non–horse to show that a horse —more exactly, what at first appeared to be a horse— is not a horse.

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Reading *Tractatus*, Understanding Wittgenstein

At 6.54 of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical." A task is thereby set for the reader, that of learning to read the *Tractatus* so as to understand its author. Two ways of reading are of concern here, the

"ineffability" reading and the "resolute" reading, neither of which is without problems. The aim is to diagnose key confusions underlying these readings and to begin to outline a viable alternative.
Keywords: Cora Diamond · Ineffability Reading · Nonsense · Resolute Reading · *Tractatus* Wars.

Leyendo el *Tractatus*, Entendiendo a Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein escribe en 6.54 del *Tractatus*: «Mis proposiciones esclarecen porque quien me entiende las reconoce al final como absurdas». El lector es confrontado con esto a una tarea: aprender a leer el *Tractatus* de tal manera que entienda a su autor. Se trata aquí de dos maneras de lectura; la lectura de «inefabilidad» y la lectura «resoluta», ninguna de las dos siendo libre de problemas. El objetivo es diagnosticar confusiones claves en el fondo de estas lecturas y empezar a señalar una alternativa viable.
Palabras claves: Cora Diamond · Lectura de inefabilidad · Absurdidad · Lectura resoluta · Las guerras del *Tractatus*.

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