Chapter 2

What 'Ethics' in the *Tractatus* is *Not*

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> If someone believes himself to have discovered the solution to the
> problem of life … then in order to refute himself he need only
> reflect that there was a time when this 'solution' had not been
> discovered; but it must have been possible to live then too…. And
> that is the position in which we find ourselves in logic. If there
> comes to seem to be a 'solution' to logical (philosophical) problems,
> we should need only to caution ourselves that there was a time when
> they had not been solved (and even at that time people must have
> been able to live and think).
>
> <div align="right">Wittgenstein[1]</div>

I: Ethics and Logic

Why does philosophy matter? Different conceptions of philosophy yield very
different answers to this question. On one prevalent understanding of why
philosophy matters, our ability to lead successful lives depends upon our being able
to deploy the right sort of *theory* about how to live and think. Thus it is not
uncommon for moral philosophers to understand their task to be one of seeking to
furnish a theory whose application will enable us to solve fundamental ethical
dilemmas; and it is not uncommon for philosophers of logic to understand their task
to be one of seeking to furnish a theory whose application will enable us to solve
fundamental intellectual problems. Such an understanding can easily lead to a very
particular conception of why philosophy matters – and thus, in the cases of the
moral philosopher or the philosopher of logic, to particular conceptions of the
relation between the respective activities of these types of philosopher and our
everyday struggles to live well and think clearly. The conception in question is one
according to which the efforts of the philosophical theorist have an essential role to
play in furnishing the non-philosopher with *answers* to the intellectual and/or
existential questions that trouble him. On this understanding of what philosophy can
and should seek to deliver, the application of these theories not only enables us to
solve these problems, but it comes to look as if, as long as we remain without an
adequate theory of the subject matter in question, our efforts to come to terms with
the relevant sorts of problem will necessarily fall short of the mark. Thus it can
come to seem as if our everyday struggles to live well and think clearly depend in
some way upon the felicitous prosecution of the business of philosophical
theorizing – as if these struggles are able to achieve full fruition only if the labours
of the philosophical theorist are graced with the right sort of success.

  It is no part of my present concern to challenge such a conception of how

philosophy matters. My present concern is only to observe that, if what one is trying to do is understand Wittgenstein's writings, one needs to see that this was *not* Wittgenstein's conception of how philosophy matters, and that one will make little progress in reading him, if one fails to appreciate how deeply opposed his own conception is to this one. As the epigraph to this paper makes evident, Wittgenstein took there to be a significant parallel between ethics and logic, and between the sorts of confusions philosophers tend to fall into when they take themselves to have discovered the aforementioned sorts of 'solution' to the problems of each. With regard to both of these sorts of 'problem', the author of the *Tractatus* seeks to show that 'the solution of the problem … is seen in the vanishing of the problem'.[2] An interest in exploring a parallel of this kind with respect to these two sorts of 'problem' already characterizes Wittgenstein's earliest writings; and some appreciation of how the parallel is supposed to work would appear to be crucial to an understanding of the remarks that speak of 'the ethical' towards the conclusion of the *Tractatus*.[3]

Indeed, despite the considerable convulsions it undergoes, some such idea as the following seems to remain in place throughout the several stages of Wittgenstein's philosophical development: as logic (or later: grammar) pervades all our thinking, so, too, ethics pervades all our living, and each impinges on the other, so that, just as forms of logical and philosophical unclarity (and dishonesty) are sources of ethical blindness (and evasion), so, too, forms of ethical unclarity (and dishonesty) are sources of logical and philosophical blindness (and evasion); hence a willingness to subject one's thinking to certain forms of logical clarification is a condition of winning one's way to clarity in one's relation to oneself and one's life, and a willingness to subject one's self and one's life to certain forms of ethical scrutiny is a condition of winning one's way to clarity in one's relation to the logical and philosophical problems that genuinely trouble one.[4]

What I have just allowed myself to call an 'idea' (that seems to remain in place throughout the several stages of Wittgenstein's philosophical development) is perhaps more aptly characterized as a *schema* for an idea, since Wittgenstein's own conception of just how this 'idea' ought to be understood – how this schema ought to be filled in – undergoes considerable evolution from its first inchoate form in the early *Notebooks*, to its first realization in the *Tractatus*, to its partial reconception in 'The Lecture on Ethics', and then on to its elusive subsequent re-emergences in his later writings.

The not inconsiderable differences in his own understanding of these matters at different stages in his philosophical career tend to pale, however, in comparison with the divergent ways in which various commentators (even when discussing only a single phase of Wittgenstein's philosophical development; say, the *Tractatus*) have tried to spell out wherein the parallel between ethics and logic is supposed to consist. Nevertheless, these divergences notwithstanding, there are some common tendencies that are to be discerned within much that is written about Wittgenstein's 'views' on this topic. Two of these will concern us particularly here. The first of these is the tendency to assume that Wittgenstein himself subscribes to (what I will call) *the departmental conception* of logic and of ethics respectively (or *departmentalism* for short) – that is, to the idea that the terms 'logic' and 'ethics', as they occur in his writings, are to be understood as naming self-standing 'departments' or 'areas' of philosophy, each characterized by its own proprietary

subject matter. This is a tendency that one finds equally in the writings of many who think that Wittgenstein's 'remarks on ethics' are crucial to an understanding of the rest of his philosophy and in those of many who think that an understanding of these remarks is utterly irrelevant to an understanding of anything worthwhile that he accomplished in philosophy. A striking instance of the tendency in question can be found in the following exchange between Edward Kanterian and Peter Hacker:

EK: So do you think that his ethical struggle is of essential importance for our understanding of Wittgenstein as a philosopher?

PH: No, I don't. I think that Wittgenstein, as a human being, was intensely, passionately, concerned with moral questions, with how one should live, and with how he himself ought to live. But moral philosophy was a minor concern that preoccupied him only during one short phase of his philosophical career. Remember that he worked for seven long years on the *Tractatus*. Only for a few months out of those seven years was he concerned with ethical questions. During that phase, in 1916, the ethical involvement is indeed deep and sincere. But to pretend that this is the main theme of the book seems to me to be wrong. It is true that when he returned from the war he told von Ficker that the book consists of two parts, the one he wrote and the one that he didn't write – namely on absolute value – and that the second is the more important. I do not doubt his sincerity, but I am inclined to question his judgement about his own achievement. The main achievement of the *Tractatus* consists in its insights into the nature of logic and its criticisms of Frege and Russell – not in its remarks on ethics. After the *Tractatus* he wrote only one short piece on ethics, the 1929 lecture – which is not very good. The idea that moral philosophy was at the centre of his philosophical concerns seems to me nonsense. His later work was focused on four great themes: philosophy of logic and language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of psychology, and metaphilosophical concerns about the nature of philosophy itself. Moral philosophy was of no interest to him and he wrote nothing on the subject.[5]

The question here is whether his ethical struggle is of essential importance for our understanding of Wittgenstein as a philosopher. The reply assumes that any answer in the affirmative must reflect a willingness to accord a particular separable 'area' of philosophy – 'moral philosophy' – pride of place among those 'areas' of philosophy 'on' which Wittgenstein 'worked' as a philosopher. Many commentators on Wittgenstein's work will want to disagree with Hacker's conclusion here. But often their attempts to do so take a form that leaves in place the fundamental underlying assumption of Hacker's answer. Thus such commentators often find themselves embroiled in an attempt to tell a story that spells out wherein Wittgenstein's 'moral philosophy' consists (a story that usually draws upon the moral thought of some other thinker or thinkers whom one knows Wittgenstein admired – Tolstoy, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Kraus, and so on – to make up for the absence of overt moral-philosophical details of the requisite sort in Wittgenstein's own writings).

As long as the relevant conception of what it is to 'work' 'on' 'ethics' remains in place, there is some reason to sympathize with Hacker's conclusion. Hacker says, 'after the *Tractatus* he wrote only one short piece on ethics, the 1929 lecture'. But it is difficult to rest happy with this conclusion. There are, after all, scattered everywhere throughout Wittgenstein's writings, numerous fervent remarks that bear witness to an ethical struggle accompanying the philosophical one. If one wants to hold to the sort of line that Hacker takes here, then one will be forced to conclude that the mode of accompaniment in question must be one of mere temporal coincidence,[6] and that these apparently pressing ethical concerns are primarily of biographical rather than of philosophical importance to an understanding of Wittgenstein.[7] Though one can sympathize with what leads Hacker to such a conclusion (given what appears to him to be the only alternative option – to take Wittgenstein to be concerned with advancing a 'moral philosophy'), it is difficult for a sensitive reader of Wittgenstein not to feel that something has gone badly wrong here. For not only are there the numerous aforementioned remarks that testify to an ethical struggle, but many of them also plainly attest that Wittgenstein himself takes the relation between that struggle and the philosophical one waged throughout his writings to be an internal, and not merely an external, one – thus suggesting that there is a reason why such remarks recurrently crop up in the midst of sequences of remarks (that someone like Hacker would be happy to count as being) on ('merely' or 'strictly') logical or philosophical topics.[8] Hacker does not 'doubt [Wittgenstein's] sincerity' with regard to the importance he attaches to the ethical aspect of his work, but is 'inclined to question his judgement about his own achievement'. Many of those who are unable to go along with this dismissive posture, wishing to extend Wittgenstein the full benefit of the doubt here (on the grounds that he is not likely to have misunderstood himself so completely on such a fundamental point), while differing with Hacker's conclusion, continue to share his main premise. They thereby saddle themselves with the apparent obligation of having to say (if their aim is to show that he does have 'a moral philosophy' after all) what it is that Wittgenstein would have written, if only he could have written the ethical part of the book that he (thought he) had to leave unwritten.

The first thing to notice is that the reigning assumption here about how philosophy is best conceived (as thus divided up into discrete 'areas' of inquiry) that fuels this debate (about whether Wittgenstein has a moral philosophy) is quite foreign to Wittgenstein's own conception of philosophy,[9] as is, more particularly, the assumed conception of that particular department of philosophy that Hacker here refers to as 'moral philosophy', seeking thereby to refer to a separate philosophical discipline with its own specialized subject matter.[10] Such assumptions about how to cut philosophy at the joints admittedly underlie much of how philosophy is currently taught, written, published, and otherwise institutionalized. But that is simply one measure of how foreign Wittgenstein's thinking is to contemporary philosophy. As long as these assumptions remain in force, then one will, of course, be further inclined to assume that whatever the ethical point of Wittgenstein's early book is supposed to be, it must be the exclusive business of (what Hacker calls) 'its remarks on ethics' to enable that point to achieve expression, thereby assuming that the ethical concerns of the work come into play only where bits of overtly ethical vocabulary figure on the page. This is precisely as sound as assuming that the

logical concerns of the work come into play only where bits of overtly logical vocabulary figure on the page.[11] And if one works with a thus restricted understanding of Wittgenstein's conception of the ethical, while continuing to cede wide scope to his conception of the logical, then there remains no possibility of ever properly coming to terms with the parallel touched on at the outset of this chapter. And then many of Wittgenstein's remarks about the significance of his own work – remarks that appear to insist upon that significance having an ethical dimension – are bound to remain very puzzling.

In this chapter, I will try to defend the following claim: one can make sense of the various remarks in Wittgenstein's corpus which touch upon the ethical (such as those in the letter to von Ficker which Hacker cites) only if one comes to appreciate that ethical and logical concerns equally pervade the whole of a work such as the *Tractatus*, from its first line to its last (neither of which, incidentally, contains any logical or ethical vocabulary, on any conventional contemporary understanding of how to delineate the subject matter of either ethics or logic). If this is right, then it is, in a sense, quite true to say of Wittgenstein (as Hacker says of him) that 'moral philosophy was of no interest to him and he wrote nothing on the subject'. But this merely shows that he had no use for a certain prevalent understanding of how philosophical reflection bears on the ethical life; it does not entail that he thought there was no internal relation between his ethical and philosophical struggles. Once such assumptions about how and when the ethical must come onto the scene are no longer in place, we are no longer obliged to question Wittgenstein's own understanding (as reflected, for example, in his remarks to von Ficker) of the ethical import of his work. We are free to assume not only that he meant what he said (regarding the ethical dimension of his philosophical efforts), but also that we might do well to try to understand what he thereby meant, if we ever wish to come fully to grips with his own understanding of what he sought to accomplish in philosophy and, in particular, of *how* he thought it is to be accomplished. This requires, among other things, coming to grips with the sort of (ethical) demand that he thought that any (honest) pursuit of the philosophical quest for (logical) clarity (necessarily) placed upon the individual philosophizing subject.[12]

II: The Ethical Point of the *Tractatus*

In what follows, in seeking further to explore how departmentalism and related interpretative assumptions about what *must* be at issue when Wittgenstein addresses himself to the 'ethical' obstruct our approach to Wittgenstein's early work, I will be taking my lead from Piergiorgio Donatelli's challenging chapter 'The Problem of 'The Higher' in Wittgenstein's Tractatus'.[13] This chapter is one of the most searching meditations I know of regarding how the parallel between logic and ethics, especially as it figures in Wittgenstein's early work, ought to be unpacked,[14] and I will be able to do it only very scant justice here. Donatelli's topic is perhaps best put in the form of a guiding question: What does Wittgenstein mean when he says in his letter to von Ficker (in the same letter that Hacker cites) that the *Tractatus* has an ethical point?[15] Or more generally: In what sense is the *Tractatus* an ethical work? The topic of the present chapter may seem to be considerably more narrow than this.

It is one that is bound to seem merely preliminary to an exploration of this comparatively more fascinating topic: namely, how one ought *not* to fill in the schema mentioned above. This restriction of topic will, no doubt, strike some as an evasion. A subsidiary aim of this chapter is to bring out how such an approach to Wittgenstein's teaching, by working through what is confused in certain ways of thinking (for example, regarding how ethics and logic are to be conceived) is integral to his own conception of how clarity about philosophical matters (for example, regarding what ethics and logic are) *is* achieved.[16]

So, although I will here be exploring certain suggestions of Donatelli's, I shall mostly confine myself to a discussion of his suggestions concerning how we ought *not* to answer his guiding question.[17] Along the way, I shall discuss some of Donatelli's reasons for rejecting certain answers to this question and therewith for rejecting certain received readings of the *Tractatus* that go with them. But, before I do this, it will help, first, to make explicit some of the exegetical background assumptions that Donatelli and I share about how to approach the book as a whole.

One way to begin to see how questions about how to approach the book as a whole matter to the question of how to construe the ethical point of the work is to go back for a moment to Wittgenstein's letter (which Hacker cites above) to the publisher Ludwig von Ficker. It is a dense and fascinating document about which there is much to say. I will do no more than scratch its surface here, by simply registering how awkwardly what Wittgenstein says in that letter fits with the departmental conception of what it means to 'work on moral philosophy'. Wittgenstein not only says in that letter that the point of the work is an ethical one, but he makes it clear that it would be a mistake to think that any such point is contained in the book in virtue of its containing something like a body of 'ethical remarks' that sets forth its 'ethical views'. Wittgenstein says that he had considered including in the Preface to the book a sentence that he will now write out for von Ficker, in the hope that it might help him to appreciate the very particular way in which the book seeks to address the sort of concern that animates those authors whom he knows von Ficker admires (and sometimes publishes). He continues:

> My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that 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 the 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*, I have managed in my book to put everything firmly into place by being silent about it.[18]

We have here Wittgenstein's comment about the ethical part of the book to which Hacker alludes above. Notice that one need not – as Hacker invites us to – construe this as saying that the most important part of the book is the part about ethics and the less important part is the part about logic. (This is, no doubt, part of what Hacker means to question, in questioning Wittgenstein's judgement above. Seeing what is questionable in this does not require – as Hacker suggests – that we must reverse the terms thus prioritized and conclude that the important part of the book is the part about logic rather than the part about ethics.) It is possible to read the letter in such a way that what it says about the book's ethical point admits of there being

something parallel to say about its logical point. Such a reading is, however, not available as long as one assumes that there must be some strong asymmetry between Wittgenstein's logical and ethical teachings of such a sort that the latter lies 'outside' what is contained within the frame of the book in a way the former does not. Wittgenstein's point here has to do with *der ethische Sinn* ('the ethical significance') of the work. But, if one is inclined to take the parallel between logic and ethics seriously, then one will be inclined to think that it matters that nothing he says here precludes one from reading the letter as saying something along the following lines: the important part of the book lies not in what is contained in what it *says* (either in those bits that purport to be about logic or in those that purport to be about ethics), but rather in its achievement of a certain sort of silence – and thus in the *absence* of what it says (about both logic and ethics).

More immediately to the point, Wittgenstein does not say here that the most important part of the book is the part contained in its 'ethical remarks'. On the contrary, he here, in effect, says that his book has nothing ethical in it. It is very hard to take him at his word on this point. To understand the character of this work's engagement with ethics requires that we come to understand how such an *absence* of ethics in the book could have an ethical point.[19] For, as he says, the book is silent about ethics. What can we learn from a silence? It is natural to think the answer to this question is: Nothing – and therefore to think that Wittgenstein doesn't really quite mean what he says here. And, indeed, it has proven devilishly hard for Wittgenstein's commentators to take him at his word on this point. The tendency among commentators is to try to figure out what the work is saying, after all, about ethics. Only, in order to respect the letter of what Wittgenstein says, they will add: 'But it says it *indirectly* rather than directly'. Or: 'It communicates it by *attempting* to say what it cannot say, thereby allowing us to grasp what it wants to say, if only it could.' Thus the tendency is to construe the absence of what is said as the result of the author's running up against an obstacle that *prevents* him from being able to express what he wants to be able to express. We here come to the second, no less fateful, exegetical tendency with regard to Wittgenstein's early thought that Donatelli and I both wish to call into question. It turns on (what I will henceforth call) an *irresolute construal of the ethical* in the *Tractatus* (or *irresolution* for short). We will look at what it involves more closely in a moment.

Suffice it to say for now that Donatelli and I each wish to suggest that this is not the only available option for understanding how the author of this book might be seeking to clarify the character of the ethical through being silent about it – and thus for understanding how a reader might be helped to attain clarity about the ethical precisely by coming to appreciate what is *not* in the book. This essay, accordingly, is about what is not in the *Tractatus*. It seeks to trace some of the contours of this absence, in the hope that a sharper characterization of it may clear the way for an alternative option for understanding the role it is supposed to play in a reader's eventually coming to understand the author of the work. In this connection, it is worth noting which remarks Wittgenstein mentions, when he seeks to single out those parts of the book that most immediately express its ethical point. For he goes on, in his letter to von Ficker, to say that he should read the Preface and the Conclusion, because 'they contain the most direct expression of the point of the book'.[20] We shall, accordingly, in the next part of this chapter, briefly look at some

options for how to understand the Preface and the concluding sections, in preparation for asking how these might be connected to the ethical point of the book.

Before we take up these difficult matters, it is worth pausing now over one thing Wittgenstein says in the Preface – since it would seem to bear directly on the issue of departmentalism. He says there that the book is not a *Lehrbuch*. This suggests that what one is to learn from his book is not a *Lehre*, a (philosophical or logical or ethical) doctrine. It suggests further that in order for the reader to be able to learn anything (philosophical or logical or ethical) from the book, the reader will first have to learn to overcome or transform her desire to be provided with such a doctrine. As we read on, we will see that there are grounds for also taking it that it is a central aim of the book to enable just such a transformation of its reader. This would mean that reaping the ethical teaching of the book would consist not in one's having learnt something from *what it says* about matters (about which one thinks one wants to learn), but rather in one's having allowed the work to transform one's conception of what it is that one really wants (from a book about philosophy or logic or ethics) – where this, in turn, requires a transformation of one's self. If so, then the ethical point of the book will lie not in what it wants to get you to believe (that you don't already believe), but in what it wants to get you to do (that you are inclined not to do) and thus in how it wants to enable you to change.[21] And, if this is right, then one comes to see the ethical point of the book – not by coming to grasp the unsayable things it abortively attempts to say, but rather – only by allowing oneself, and one's relation to one's desires, to be transformed through the character of one's engagement with the work.

III: Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely

Opposed to an *irresolute construal of the ethical* is (what I will call) a *resolute* approach to the *Tractatus*.[22] There are two interrelated general features that suffice to make a reading of that work 'resolute', in the sense of that term that I am concerned with here. The first is that it does not take those propositions of the *Tractatus* about which Wittgenstein said, at §6.54, that they are to be recognized as 'nonsensical' to convey ineffable insights.[23] The second feature is a rejection of the idea that what such recognition requires on the part of a reader of the *Tractatus* is the application of a theory that has been advanced in the body of the work – a theory that specifies the conditions under which a sentence makes sense and the conditions under which it does not. (Notice: both of these features of a resolute reading say something about how the book ought *not* to be read, thereby still leaving much undetermined about how the book ought to be read.[24]) Taken together, these features rule out two central interrelated features of a (standard) 'irresolute reading'. For, according to such a reading:

1 it is among the main aims of the book to advance a theory of sense that sets forth the conditions on what can and what cannot make sense; and
2 the sentences that attempt to express the truths comprising this theory (supposedly advanced in the body of the book) run foul of these very conditions

but are no less 'true' for all that, comprising thereby a body of sentences that say nothing but nonetheless succeed in gesturing at a corresponding body of ineffable truths with which each of these sentences can be correlated.

The two exegetical tendencies mentioned above – departmentalism and irresolution – tend mutually to exacerbate one another. If one assumes an irresolute construal of the ethical, then one is saddled with the idea there must be 'something' which the nonsensical sentences of the work (which violate the strictures on meaningful discourse laid down by the supposed theory adumbrated in the work) are 'trying' to say. This, in turn, naturally leads one to the idea that there are extraordinary forms of subject matter that the logical structure of our language debars us from speaking of and which can only be gestured at through such, strictly speaking, logically illegitimate forms of language. And this, in turn, leads one to suppose that if 'ethics cannot be expressed' (§6.421), this must be because 'the ethical' constitutes just such a case of a special independent subject matter that thus transcends the bounds of logic. Conversely, if one begins by assuming the departmental conception, and with it the idea of a separable ethical subject matter, then one is easily inclined further to suppose that, if 'ethics cannot be expressed', despite the persistence of this substantial ethical subject matter (that ought to constitute the topic of ethical propositions), then this can only be because the ethical must somehow lie 'beyond' that which can be expressed. This, in turn, leads one to picture 'the expressible' as a limited sphere with an 'inside' and an 'outside'. This fuels the thought that the point of the supposed theory of sense adumbrated in the work must be to demarcate the limits of this sphere, in order to mark off and highlight this independently persisting ethical sphere, pictured now as lying outside these limits. So, beginning with departmentalism, one is led to irresolution: having, with one hand, let go of the idea that there are propositions that can express the ethical (thereby respecting the letter of the *Tractatus*[25]), one quickly grabs back on, with the other, to the idea of a body of quasi-propositions that 'attempt' to express those truths which ethical proposition would express, if only they could.

Such a construal of the ethical presupposes the idea of a special sort of ethical nonsense that differs from ordinary nonsense in virtue of its possessing distinctive logical characteristics or powers – in particular, the power to gesture at that which cannot be said. So it is worth highlighting the following point: it is a corollary of the second of the two aforementioned features of a resolute reading that it be committed to rejecting the idea that the *Tractatus* holds that there are two logically distinct kinds of nonsense: the garden-variety kind (cases of which we are able to identify prior to our initiation into the teachings of the *Tractatus*) and a logically more sophisticated kind (the nonsensicality of which is due to its logically internally flawed character). Resolute readings are committed to rejecting not only various previously fashionable accounts of the details of Wittgenstein's putative theory of why the sentences of philosophers are afflicted with a special sort of nonsensicality, but also any subsequent account that attributes to the author of the *Tractatus* an indefeasible commitment to a theory of this sort. From the vantage of a resolute reader, it makes little difference whether the account given of the supposed theory be one that rests on an appeal to verifiability, bipolarity, logical syntax, or some other putative respect in which 'philosophical propositions' are to be identified as

nonsensical because of having been put together in some special kind of logically or conceptually illegitimate manner. All such accounts will qualify equally as instances of an irresolute reading, if they are committed to ascribing to the *Tractatus* a theory which its author must endorse and rely upon (if he is to be able to prosecute his programme of philosophical critique) and yet which he must also regard as nonsense (if he thinks through the commitments of his own theory).

This has consequences for how we are to understand the famous penultimate paragraph of the *Tractatus*:

> My propositions serve as *elucidations* in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as *nonsensical*, when he has used them – as steps – to climb out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)[26]

This passage tells a reader of the work what he must 'eventually recognize' in order to understand its author. No understanding of the *Tractatus* is possible apart from an understanding of what this passage asks of its reader – apart, that is, from an understanding of what the authorial strategy of the work as a whole is. We are told that the author's propositions serve as elucidations by *our* – that is, the reader – coming to *recognize* them as nonsensical. But how can the recognition that a proposition is *nonsense* ever elucidate – ever shed light on – anything? It is natural to think that the only way to answer this question is to suppose that the author of the work has a distinctive conception of nonsense – one which carves out a privileged space for a special class of nonsensical sentences: sentences that have the capacity to convey sorts of truth that neither perfectly meaningful nor merely nonsensical sentences are able to express.

This is what the *Tractatus* has to say about what is distinctive about its own conception of nonsense:

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

(§5.4733)

What matters for our immediate concern is the presence of the word 'only' in this passage. Wittgenstein in this passage contrasts a formulation of Frege's[27] with one of his own. At first blush, it is hard to see how they differ. The critical difference between Frege's formulation and the one which the *Tractatus* endorses is that the former implicitly distinguishes between those propositions that are legitimately constructed and those that are not, while the latter rejects the idea that there is such a thing as a logically illegitimately constructed proposition: 'Every *possible* proposition is legitimately constructed.' The 'only' indicates that there is only one way for a proposition to fail to have a meaning where one might have thought that there were two. What does it mean to reject the idea that there could be logically illegitimately constructed propositions? Or, to put the same question differently: what does early Wittgenstein mean, when he says (in §5.4732) 'We cannot give a sign the wrong sense'?

Donatelli's answer to this question is indebted to several papers by Cora Diamond and by me – papers that he cites in his third footnote (p. 33 above). In one of those papers,[28] I argue that Wittgenstein saw a tension in Frege's thought between two different conceptions of nonsense, which I call the *substantial conception* and the *austere conception* respectively. The substantial conception distinguishes between two different kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense and substantial nonsense. Mere nonsense is simply unintelligible – it expresses no thought. Substantial nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way – it expresses a logically incoherent thought. According to the substantial conception, these two kinds of nonsense are logically distinct: the former is mere gibberish, whereas the latter involves (what commentators on the *Tractatus* are fond of calling) a 'violation of logical syntax'.[29] The austere conception, on the other hand, holds that mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is. The *Tractatus* is standardly read as championing the substantial conception. This is, I argue, to mistake the bait for the hook – to mistake the target of the work for its doctrine. On the reading of the *Tractatus* I sketch in that paper, the *Tractatus* is to be seen as resolving the tension in Frege's thought between these two conceptions of nonsense in favour of the austere view.[30] (The presence of the word 'only' in the above passage marks Wittgenstein's rejection of the substantial conception.) The strategy of the *Tractatus* is to short-circuit Frege's view from within, by bringing these two halves of Frege's thought into immediate proximity with each other.

I also point out in that paper that the substantial conception of nonsense represents the common ground between two otherwise apparently opposed interpretations – which I call the positivist and ineffability interpretations – of the *Tractatus*. This tiny patch of common ground can seem insignificant in comparison with the vehemence with which proponents of the ineffability interpretation lament the obtuseness of the positivist interpretation (epitomized by its failure to allow for the possibility of illuminating nonsense) and the equal vehemence with which positivist interpreters reject the mysticism of the ineffability interpretation (epitomized by its hankering after ineffable forms of insight[31]). In seeking to emphasize their differences from one another, proponents of these two interpretations tend to articulate the details of the substantial conception in apparently distinct ways. I therefore distinguish between two (apparently distinct) variants of the substantial conception. I term these the *positivist variant* and the *ineffability variant* (after the readings of the *Tractatus* in which they respectively figure).[32] According to the former variant, violations of logical syntax are a kind of *linguistic* phenomenon: identifying a violation of logical syntax is a matter of isolating a certain kind of (logically ill-formed) linguistic string. According to the latter variant, a violation of logical syntax is a kind of phenomenon that can only transpire in the medium of thought and necessarily eludes the medium of language. Though proponents of the ineffability variant hold that language is powerless to express such thoughts, they nonetheless deem language an indispensable tool for 'conveying' such thoughts. They hold that language can 'hint' at what it cannot say.

It is natural to think that an interpretation of the *Tractatus* founded on the positivist variant (in taking the book to advance a theory of sense that sets forth the conditions on what can and what cannot make sense) subscribes to only one of the two aforementioned features of an 'irresolute reading', whereas one founded on the

ineffability variant (in also taking it that the truths comprising this theory are ineffable) subscribes to both. But I try to show in that paper that the distinction between these two variants is an inherently unstable one.[33] Any attempt clearly to articulate the positivist variant will lead to its collapse either into the ineffability variant or into the austere conception. I argue that, contrary to interpretations founded on either of these variants, the *Tractatus* does not subscribe to any variant of the substantial conception – and thus that the aim of the work is not to show us that certain sequences of words possess an intrinsically flawed sense by persuading us of the truth of some theoretical (though perhaps unsayable) doctrine about where to locate 'the limits of sense'.

   This also has consequences for how one reads the Preface to the book and, in particular, what the author there says about two different ways of seeking to draw limits to what can be said: from the outside and from the inside. A resolute reader will take the author here to be offering some indication of what one will go on to find in the book: namely, an attempt to exhibit (from within the sayable) what can be said through a demonstration of how a certain sort of attempt to draw the limit (from without) fails.[34] Any theory which seeks to draw 'a limit to thinking' commits itself to being 'able to think both sides of the limit' and hence to being 'able to think what cannot be thought'. The Tractarian attack on substantial nonsense – on the idea that we can discern the determinately unthinkable thoughts certain pieces of nonsense are trying to say – is an attack on the coherence of any project which thus seeks to mark the bounds of sense. The *Tractatus* seeks to bring its reader to the point where he can recognize sentences within the body of the work as nonsensical, not by means of a theory which legislates certain sentences out of the realm of sense, but rather by bringing more clearly into view for the reader the life with language he already leads – by harnessing the capacities for distinguishing sense from nonsense implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language which the reader already possesses. As the Preface says: 'The limit … can only be drawn *in language* and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.' The 'simply' here is a consequence of the 'only' in §5.4733. That is to say: once we go 'outside' of language what we end up with are forms of words that are nonsense in (what this work aims to show is) the only way anything can be nonsense. Just as, according to the *Tractatus*, each propositional symbol – that is, each *sinnvoller Satz* – shows its sense (§4.022), so the *Tractatus* shows what it shows (that is, what it is to make sense) by *letting language show itself* – through allowing our 'sentences themselves to become clear' (through *das Klarwerden von Sätzen*, §4.112). According to resolute readers, the work seeks to do this, not by instructing us in how to identify determinate cases of nonsense, but by enabling us to see more clearly what it is we do with language when we succeed in achieving determinate forms of sense and what it is we fall short of doing when we fail to achieve such forms of sense, yet fall into the illusion that we are making (at least a kind of) sense.

   It is easy to fail to see how radical a break such a reading seeks to make with the standard (irresolute) sort of reading.[35] Standard readings of the *Tractatus* have at their heart the idea that Wittgenstein intended, in the *Tractatus*, to put forward a metaphysical conception of language and thought in relation to the possibilities of the world; and their commitment to this idea leads them to a particular understanding of what must be at issue when Wittgenstein declares the sentences in

the body of the book to be nonsensical. The *Tractatus* is committed, at one and the same time, as such readers see it, to putting forward a metaphysical view and to putting certain logical obstacles in the way of the possibility of expressing this view. These logical obstacles are the product of substantial doctrines about language, set forth in the book, from which conclusions about the nonsensicality of certain sentence-constructions can be drawn. This makes of 'nonsense' a quasi-technical term. It is supposed that a special – unusually restrictive – sense is conferred on this term when it is deployed within the context of the particular linguistic doctrines propounded by the *Tractatus*. This then allows one to resolve the central puzzle of the book by saying that, although these sentences are technically 'nonsense' (in the sense that they are nonsense if judged by the lights of the *Tractatus*'s own restrictive theory of sense), that doesn't mean they are *really* nonsense (if that is supposed to mean that we are unable to grasp what it is that they are trying – though, technically, failing – to say).[36] A crucial assumption in play here is that, in order to show something to be nonsense, a theory of sense must be in play. To come to see that a resolute reading is so much as possible, one must first come to see that this assumption is not obligatory – that the activity of clarification that the author of the *Tractatus* seeks to practise is not meant to rest upon any special metaphysical doctrines,[37] and, in particular, that it does not presuppose any special conception of nonsense.

Resolute readers therefore hold that 'nonsense' is not a *terminus technicus* for the author of the *Tractatus*. In the process of Tractarian philosophical clarification, the use (or lack thereof) that we are making of a sentence (or group of sentences) is something that is meant to become more open to view as the process itself unfolds. Moreover, the judgement here that something is nonsense (that is, that no use has been made of the sentence), if such a judgement proves forthcoming, is to be passed on the sentence by the would-be user of it himself. The role of the would-be practitioner of the method of clarification is not to pass such verdicts on the utterances of others, but rather to enable would-be users of such sentences to attain the requisite state of *self*-understanding themselves – one in which the illusions of sense to which they are subject dissolve from within. On any given occasion of its practice, therefore, the method of clarification is directed in the first instance not at a sentence, but at an actual or imagined person who finds himself drawn to call upon the sentence in question (and others like it) in the process of seeking to give expression to his thoughts. And the failure of sense therefore resides not in the sentence itself (any sentence can be given a use), but in the would-be user's failure to confer sense upon it. So the target of clarification is not a body of sentences, such as those that the *Tractatus* itself contains, but rather particular illusions of sense that such sentences can engender. Only in so far as the sentences of the work succeed in conjuring up in the reader himself the illusions which the work seeks to treat is there anything for the work to treat. The work must therefore first engender sample experiences of such illusions in its reader before it can practise its method of clarification upon him. The sequence of illusions that the work thus seeks to engender in its reader comprise the rungs of the ladder that a reader of the work must first climb before he can come to be in the position of being able to throw it away.

The process of clarification in question here does not draw on logical capacities for distinguishing grades of sense any more sophisticated or severe than those

already in play in our ordinary capacity to think and speak.[38] It already belongs to this capacity that we are able to recognize that certain sentence-constructions do not employ the signs that occur in them in any of the ways that we had previously learned to employ these signs. If we are able to take such a sentence not to be meaningless, despite its employing familiar words in an (apparently) unprecedented manner, that will always only be because we are eventually able to cotton on to the new use. If, on the other hand, we find that we are unable to do so, then we do not yet understand the sentence; and as long as we are unable to arrive at, or be given, some explanation of how the signs occurring in the sentence are meant to symbolize in the present puzzling context, we may suspect that what we really have to deal with here is a bit of nonsense. This suspicion, however, need not rest on any theory. If the linguistic string in question is meaningless, it is not because there are some conditions that the sentence violates, conditions that can only be secured with the aid of a theory of the conditions under which a sentence is meaningful. Of course, the suspicion of meaninglessness may turn out to be unfounded: the person uttering the sentence may succeed in making clear the relevant use of the signs in question. But if no such use comes into view, an 'austere' view of nonsense holds simply that the sentence is nonsensical through its containing a meaningless word or words, not through its having conferred upon a sign an impermissible sense.[39] Resolute readers therefore hold that the author of the *Tractatus* does not take the procedure of clarification employed in that work (at least as he then conceived it) to depend on anything more than the logical capacities that are part of our everyday capacities for speaking and thinking. By drawing on these capacities, we can come to recognize that the sentences of the book fail to say anything, and that the very questions that we are initially inclined to take the book to be addressing are themselves not questions at all.

Donatelli summarizes the situation as follows:

> The *Tractatus* says in section 6.54 that he who has climbed up the book's sentences has to recognize them as nonsensical. If they were taken to be meaningful, then there would be no philosophy in them. Yet what philosophy consists in disappears in mere nonsense – and if you hold on to it it is not philosophy but just confusion. (p. 23 above)

He arrives at this way of putting the matter, I take it, partly by reading section §6.54 together with §4.112. In §4.112 of the *Tractatus*, we are told that a work of philosophy 'consists essentially of elucidations'. 'Philosophy' here means: philosophy as practised by the author of the *Tractatus*. The notion of elucidation is tied in §4.112 to the idea of philosophy being a certain kind of *activity*:

> Philosophy is not a theory [*Lehre*] but an activity.
> A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.
>
> (§4.112)

The word '*Lehre*' – which Ogden translates as 'theory' – is rendered as 'body of doctrine' by Pears and McGuinness. Wittgenstein amplifies the remark in the Preface that we examined above (about how the work is not a *Lehrbuch*) by saying here that the work of philosophy, as he pursues it, does not consist in putting forward a

doctrine but rather in offering elucidations. §6.54 tells us that his sentences serve as elucidations by our coming to recognize them as nonsense. And, if we work through the body of the work, we come to see that, from a logical point of view, there is – as he says in §5.4733 – only one way for something to be nonsense: for it to be simply nonsense. So, if we put this all together we arrive at the following: in order for this work to succeed in the activity which it declares to be that of philosophy, what it initially appears to offer – a body of doctrine – must dissolve on us; we must see that the work says nothing, that what it consists in is (from a logical point of view) silence. The doctrines that the work appears to offer are to be recognized as illusions of doctrine – and this holds no more and no less for the apparent ethical as for the apparent logical and/or metaphysical doctrines of the work.

The assumption underlying Tractarian elucidation is that the only way to free oneself from such illusions is to fully enter into them and explore them from the inside. This assumption – one which underlies both Wittgenstein's early and later work – is nicely summarized in the following remark (from a 1931 manuscript of Wittgenstein's):

> In philosophy we are deceived by an illusion. But this – an illusion – is also something, and I must at some time place it completely and clearly before my eyes, before I can say it is only an illusion.[40]

The illusion that the *Tractatus* seeks to explode, above all, is that we can run up against the limits of language. The book starts with a warning about a certain kind of enterprise – one of attempting to draw a limit to thought. In the body of the text, we are offered (what appears to be) a doctrine about 'the limits of thought'. With the aid of this doctrine, we imagine ourselves to be able both to draw these limits and to see beyond them. We imagine ourselves able to do what the Preface warns we will fall into imagining ourselves able to do (once we imagine ourselves able to draw a limit to thought): we imagine ourselves able 'to think both sides of the limit' (and hence 'able to think what cannot be thought').[41] The aim of the work is to show us that beyond 'the limits of language' lies – not some form of extra-logical (for example ethical) ineffable truth, but rather – (as the Preface cautions) *einfach Unsinn*.[42] At the conclusion of the book, we are told that the author's elucidations have succeeded only if we recognize what we find in the body of the text to be nonsense. In §6.54, Wittgenstein does not ask his reader here to 'grasp' the 'thoughts' which his nonsensical propositions seek to convey. He does not call upon the reader to understand his sentences, but rather to understand *him*, namely the author and the kind of activity in which he is engaged – one of elucidation. He tells us in §6.54 how these sentences serve as elucidations: by enabling us to recognize them *as* nonsense.[43] One does not reach the end by arriving at the last page, but by arriving at a certain point in an activity – the point when the elucidation has served its purpose: when the illusion of sense is exploded from within. The sign that we have understood the author of the work is that we can throw the ladder we have climbed up away. That is to say, we have finished the work, and the work is finished with us, when we are able to *throw* the sentences in the body of the work – sentences about 'the limits of language' and the unsayable extra-logical (for example ethical) things that lie beyond them – *away*.

IV: Ethics and Resolution

Commitment to a resolute reading introduces two interrelated constraints on any effort to understand the place of the ethical in the *Tractatus*; and these suffice to place any such reading at odds with most of what has been written about ethics in the *Tractatus*. The first is that such a reading may not take those propositions of the *Tractatus* that appear to say something about the ethical to succeed in conveying insight by giving voice to ineffable truths. The second feature is a rejection of the idea that the 'ethical sentences' of the work (that is, those that involve overtly ethical vocabulary) are ones that the reader is to come to recognize as nonsensical through applying a theory that has been advanced in the body of the work – a theory that specifies the conditions under which these sentences can and cannot make sense – such that it turns out that, by the lights of this theory, ethical sentences are nonsensical. (Notice: both of these features of a resolute reading say something about how such 'ethical sentences' of the work *ought* not to be treated, thereby still leaving much undetermined about how they ought to be taken up.) Taken together, these features rule out two central interrelated features of an irresolute construal of the ethical in the work, according to which

1   it is among the main aims of the book to advance a theory of sense that makes room for the ethical by drawing limits to sense, and drawing them in such a way that that which the ethical sentences of the work attempt to express necessarily falls on the far side of those limits, and
2   that that which these sentences attempt to express, though nonsensical, is no less 'true' for all that, issuing in a body of 'ethical sentences' that succeed in gesturing at a corresponding body of ineffable 'ethical truths' with which each of these sentences can be correlated.

As against this, Donatelli's paper explores possibilities for understanding what it might mean to say that Wittgenstein's early work has an ethical point which is consistent with a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*. Along the way, Donatelli (drawing upon §6.432) does say some things about early Wittgenstein that most other commentators on early Wittgenstein would also be happy to say – such as that 'Wittgenstein is interested, in the *Tractatus*, in drawing a contrast between how things are in the world and their significance from the point of view of the higher' (p. 11 above) – but, even at those junctures at which he says such apparently uncontroversial things, he is further from the received interpretations of early Wittgenstein than might, at first, be evident. What Donatelli wants us, in the end, to see himself as doing (and wants us to see Wittgenstein as doing) with such ways of talking (ways of talking, for example, about 'the point of view of the higher') is not what other commentators mostly seem to take themselves to be doing when they call upon such ways of talking. (For example, we are not here being asked to 'grasp' the 'truth' of 'propositions' that 'express' 'the point of view of the higher'.) Similarly, Donatelli appears to be saying something with which every commentator ought to agree when he writes: 'In order to follow what Wittgenstein wants to say when he writes that the higher is nothing that we can express, we need to attend to what Wittgenstein says sense and nonsense are' (p. 11 above). But what makes the task of

'attending' here both difficult and different for Donatelli is his commitment to a resolute understanding of 'what Wittgenstein's says what sense and nonsense are'.

Donatelli brings out how two of the standard ways of understanding early Wittgenstein's logical doctrines – the positivist interpretation and the ineffability interpretation – have their counterparts in two equally standard readings of early Wittgenstein's ethical doctrines, and how here, too, for all their alleged differences, each of these two readings, again, bears the stamp of the other, missing Wittgenstein's point in parallel ways.[44] Each of these readings, Donatelli says, seeks 'to give a content to ethical talk by tracing it to certain independently specifiable features of language' (p. 11). This then leaves both readings with the following problem: if ethical talk has a kind of content, after all, then why is it nonsensical? Both readings give the same form of answer: because it has a funny kind of content. (The second feature of irresolute readings comes into play here: some fairly restrictive theory of what does and does not make sense must be in force, in order to underwrite the claim that propositions possessing this (funny) sort of content are, despite their being in this respect contentful, to be declared nonsensical.) In both cases, room is made for an additional kind of content by distinguishing between two different kinds of content – in the one case, by distinguishing between cognitive and emotive content; in the other, by distinguishing between effable and ineffable content. These two understandings of the character of ethical utterances have traditionally been taken to be profoundly opposed to one another by commentators on early Wittgenstein; Donatelli seeks to bring out the manner in which they resemble one another. What Donatelli says about the positivist/emotivist reading can be adapted to bring out the common feature of both readings: both 'align side by side' meaningful discourse and a kind of discourse which has 'an extra-logical ingredient added onto it' (p. 12). The two readings differ only to the extent that their understanding of the nature of the funniness of the extra-logical ingredient differs. That is, both the positivist and ineffability interpretations of early Wittgenstein on the ethical fail to take the step Donatelli says we need to take: 'We need instead to take seriously Wittgenstein's statement that there is *nothing* in a proposition that can express the higher.'

Donatelli nicely brings out how Carnap's attempt, in particular, to articulate an (emotivist) ethical position which mimics the letter of much of what Wittgenstein says (while entirely missing its spirit) unwittingly results in a position that is unstable in just the way that the *Tractatus* seeks to show us that its own propositions are. (He brings out, therefore, how Carnap fails to see how the position that he defends, and ascribes to Wittgenstein, parallels one of the rungs of the ladder which we, as readers of the *Tractatus*, are to climb up to, beyond, and then throw away.) The positivist reading holds that ethical discourse has a kind of content but not cognitive content, only emotive content. According to it, an ethical 'statement' seeks only to have certain causal effects on your emotions and behaviour; it does not actually say anything and so, in that sense, is nonsense; yet it still *expresses* something. How close to the teaching of the *Tractatus* is this? As Donatelli shows, Carnap appears to follow the *Tractatus* closely with regard to what he is *not* willing to say about ethics. Carnap, for example, does not say (with ineffability interpreters) that *there is* (something which is properly described as) 'the problem of life'. Rather Carnap says there is no problem, but only something that seems to be a problem; and then he goes on almost to say (almost echoing §6.521) that the solution of the

problem lies in the vanishing of the problem. Thus, as Donatelli says, Carnap can appear to be remaining faithful to the *Tractatus* (apparently following the lead of §§6.4–6.42) when he writes:

> Either empirical criteria are indicated for the use of 'good' and 'beautiful' and the rest of the predicates that are employed in the normative sciences, or they are not. In the first case, a statement containing such a predicate turns into a factual judgement, but not a value judgement; in the second case, it becomes a pseudo-statement. It is altogether impossible to make a statement that expresses a value judgement'.[45]

Carnap, however, goes on to give a positive account of what ethical pseudo-propositions are. He interpolates a story about what sort of property it is that ethical forms of nonsense possess that makes them specifically *ethical* nonsense (rather than mere nonsense that happens to have certain causal effects): they are 'expressions of the general attitude of a person towards life', they are 'the quasi-poetic expression of man's emotional relationship to his environment'.[46] But now we need to ask, as Donatelli does: 'What is meant here by the *expression* of an emotional attitude?' How is this notion of 'expression' to be understood?

Donatelli shows that, when seeking to answer this question, a dilemma faces the positivist interpreter of early Wittgenstein on ethics which parallels the dilemma, sketched above, facing the positivist interpretation of the *Tractatus* on logic. As I claimed above, the positivist variant of the substantial conception is an intrinsically unstable position: any attempt clearly to articulate the positivist variant will lead to its collapse either into the ineffability variant or into the austere conception. Donatelli argues that the emotivist reading of Wittgenstein on ethics involves a similarly unstable position: any attempt clearly to articulate an emotivist interpretation of the ethical teaching of the *Tractatus* will lead to its collapse either into the ineffability interpretation of Wittgenstein on ethics or into an austere interpretation of the sort of nonsense that ethical nonsense is. Donatelli outlines the dilemma facing the emotivist here as follows:

> If there is no cognitive content connected to such an attitude then it can only be captured as a psychological fact of some sort, comprising the experiences one has, feelings, movements of the body, facial expressions, and so on … Carnap … wants to say that the metaphysician's stance represents in a confused way what could be achieved without confusion if the metaphysician did not express herself through a descriptive-like language. But if such language *is* devoid of sense, as Carnap says it is, there is really nothing wrong with the metaphysician. There is nothing there [in the metaphysician's words] as there is nothing (in Carnap's view) in the poet's words. How should we be able to account for this difference? … The problem is that Carnap wants to give a representation of what the metaphysician is trying to do, but how can he if he says, following the *Tractatus*, that there is merely nonsense there? But then the alternative is to hang on to some ineffable notion of content – an option which is explicitly rejected by Carnap but which appears nonetheless to be the explanation of his attempt to give a characterization of the metaphysician's position. (pp. 22–3)

Donatelli here puts his finger on a waffle that runs throughout Carnap's essay concerning the character of the content that attaches to ethical utterances. Carnap

tells us that psychological content cannot be captured in (what Carnap calls) 'theoretical discourse'; and such is alleged to be the only sort of discourse which is both meaningful and contentful. Now, sometimes it looks as if what is objectionable about metaphysics, by Carnap's lights, is that it furnishes statements that pretend to have theoretical content when what they possess is actually a different sort of content (we might call it 'non-theoretical content'); other times it looks as if what is objectionable about metaphysics, by Carnap's lights, is that it furnishes statements that pretend to have content when, in reality, they are utterly devoid of content.[47] Does the expression 'psychological content' stand for something which belongs to the same genus as theoretical content? (Are they both species of 'content' in a univocal sense of 'content'?) Or is the expression 'psychological content' merely a way of signalling that what is at issue here is a simulacrum of content? If so, then it is not a sort of content any more than (as Frege puts it) stage thunder is a sort of thunder.[48]

If the emotivist seizes the first horn of this dilemma, and admits that there is a kind of content which attaches to ethical utterances themselves, then he would seem merely to be agreeing with the fundamental premise of the view ascribed to the *Tractatus* by an ineffability interpreter. That is, both this sort of emotivist (that is, one who concedes that ethical utterances possess a substantial content) and the ineffability theorist agree: there is a kind of content which cannot be captured by meaningful discourse, but nonetheless can be communicated by other means; and the statements of metaphysics, even though they are nonsense, possess this content and convey it, even though they cannot, strictly speaking, 'say' what it is that they thus convey. The emotivist may prefer to label the content thus communicated 'emotive meaning' or 'psychological content'; the ineffability theorist may prefer to call it 'inexpressible truth' or 'metaphysical insight'; but without any further account of the differences in the sort of content these labels stand for, the difference between the emotivist's and the ineffability theorist's positions threatens to dissolve into a difference in terminology. If the emotivist seizes the austere horn of the dilemma – as Carnap, in his essay, sometimes seems to want to do – and admits that, taken by itself, an ethical utterance has no content (and thus that what is objectionable about the statements of metaphysics is that they masquerade as if they had content when they do not), then he deprives himself of the requisite foothold to make out that – even though it lacks theoretical content – an ethical utterance nonetheless possesses sufficient semantic structure to 'express' a determinate psychological attitude. (What is needed here to make this work is a story about how this bit of nonsense is able to express this rather than that attitude; and it is neither clear that Carnap's account has the resources to fund such a story nor that any account that did would be at all compatible with his strategy for banishing metaphysical nonsense.) If the emotivist goes the latter route, in the end, he will be forced to concede that, if it is, from a logical point of view, nothing more than mere nonsense, then such an utterance does not, in itself, possess any 'content' in any sense that is pertinent to clarifying the nature of its ethical character, and thus has not been shown to express anything ethical. If he wants to go this route, then it looks as if the only resources available to the emotivist, in accounting for what he wants to be able to call the 'psychological content' of such an utterance, will have to be spelled out (not in terms of intrinsic properties of the utterance itself, but) exclusively in terms of the character of the

causal transaction between the speaker and the hearer of the utterance. This will lead the emotivist to the conclusion that there is no determining what psychological attitude an 'ethical' utterance 'expresses' apart from tracing the psychological effects it happens, as a matter of psychological fact, to have on its audience – and these are as likely to be manifestations of indifference, boredom or irritation as they are to be forms of behaviour that permit us to conclude (as Carnap does in the closing pages of his essay) that 'Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is the expression of a certain general attitute towards life' (let alone being able to conclude anything about *which* attitude this attitude is).

Among the many problems with trying to elaborate this variant of emotivism into a reading of the *Tractatus*, there is one worth singling out: what, according to such an emotivist reading of the book, is 'the ethical point' of the *Tractatus* supposed to be? And, whatever it is supposed to be, how are we to avoid the conclusion that the work is, by its own ethical lights, a miserable failure? For readers of the book hardly seem to be affected by the book in any uniform way. No matter which emotive effect we stipulate to be the one the work is supposed to have, isn't it by now clear that it generally fails to have that effect? If in order to grasp the ethical point of the book one needed to struggle to achieve – as this variant of the positivist reading denies – some sort of understanding of the method of the work as a whole, the fact that one has not yet succeeded in understanding what is going on would still leave one with room for hope; after all, if one continues to work through the passages of the work, perhaps 'eventually' understanding may dawn. But if we are not supposed to do anything but make ourselves available *qua* recipients of a causal transaction – a transaction that is supposed to transpire when we subject ourselves to the sentences of the book – then what room for hope is left, if the pertinent sort of transaction fails to transpire? Although, in its penultimate section, the book does not call upon its reader to understand its *sentences*, it does call upon him/her to understand its *author*; and that would seem to require more of a reader than merely discovering that placing herself in the vicinity of its traffic in nonsense can have certain causal effects on her.

This is one consideration that has helped lead commentators to conclude that the aim of the book must be to communicate an *insight* to (and not merely to have an *effect* on) the reader, but to do so by extraordinary – rather than ordinary – means, because the insight in question resists ordinary means of communication. So far, so good. The ineffability interpretation, however, takes what is extraordinary about the insight the book seeks to impart to have to do with the ineffable character of the truths which it seeks to express. As a reading of what the book has to teach about ethics, it therefore concludes that Wittgenstein holds that ethical discourse has an unsayable content. Such discourse is nonsense because it says nothing; but there is still something that it is able to 'show' or 'convey' without saying.[49] Proponents of this reading face a problem which is the complement of the one faced by positivist interpreters of the book: in order to give some substance to the idea that something ethical is 'shown' or 'conveyed' (that is, that there is an ethical content here, somewhere in the general neighbourhood of the nonsensical words) these commentators invariably at some point, often with surprisingly little compunction, just begin chattering away about the ethical insights that can only be 'shown' but not said: thereby coming out and telling us what the (putatively) unsayable ethical content of a given ethical utterance is – hence doing the very thing that they say

can't be done. Perhaps we aren't supposed to 'understand' what their words (appear to) 'say' – any more than we are to 'understand' Wittgenstein's words – rather we are only to grasp what their words 'show'? But then we are simply moving in a circle here. In order to break out of this circle, we need some sort of story about how traffic in *these* nonsensical forms of words takes us beyond 'saying' to some other potentially efficacious mode of imparting understanding.

Before turning to the specifics, such as they are, of the standard irresolute story about how a specifically ethical variety of 'showing' or 'conveying' is supposed to work, it will help first to consider the general outline to which any such story is supposed to conform. Most readings of early Wittgenstein take their point of departure from the idea that early Wittgenstein believes that there are 'features of reality' that cannot be said but can be 'shown'. Here, for example, is Peter Geach:

> Wittgenstein holds that *various features of reality* come out … in our language, but we cannot use this language to say, assert, that reality has these features: if we try to frame propositions ascribing these features to reality, then it will be possible to show that strictly speaking these are not propositions, only sentence-like structures which violate the principles of logical syntax and are thus devoid of any sense, true or false. All the same, these nonsensical … structures may be useful; they may serve to *convey* from speaker to hearer *an insight* that cannot be put into proper propositions [my emphases].[50]

The sort of 'insight' Geach has in mind here – which may be conveyed, even though it cannot be put into 'proper propositions' – has to do with *logical* features of reality. According to this reading of the *Tractatus*, these features of reality can be made manifest by language because they correspond to features of language: they are reflected in the mirror of the logical structure of language. The relevant features of language taken together comprise the logical form of language. According to the standard reading of the *Tractatus*, we cannot express 'it' – the logical form of language – in language; but we can gesture at it. We can gesture at it through a strategic employment of nonsense. Such employments of nonsense 'show' the logical features of reality by helping to make manifest

(i)   that we end up speaking nonsense when we try to say something about one of these logical features of reality,
(ii)   that, when we try to say something about one of these logical features of reality, it is the logical structure of language itself which makes it impossible for us to say that which we want to say,
(iii)   that, in each case, to grasp how it is that the nature of language itself thus stands in the way of saying what we want to say – when we want to say something about a particular logical feature of reality (when, for example, we want to say what an object is) – *is* to grasp what it is for something to be characterized by that logical feature (for example, what it is for something to be an object).

The point is thus not merely to *expose* what we end up saying (when we employ such a term) as nonsense, but rather to teach us how *self-consciously* to cultivate such ways of speaking (in order to allow us to attain insight into the nature of the

logical form of reality). The point of cultivating such ways of speaking is to enable us to recognize *why* it is that we end up with nonsense when we try to say such things. The attainment of such recognition constitutes the sign that we have grasped an elucidation of the meaning of a term (such as 'object') that purports to denote a logically fundamental feature of reality.

Most commentators who have taken up the topic of the place of ethics in the *Tractatus* have attempted to extend the interpretative schema outlined in the previous paragraph to include *non-logical* features of reality. In particular, they argue – or more commonly, they simply assert – that among the class of features which can be 'shown' or 'conveyed' but not said, for early Wittgenstein, are ethical features of reality.[51] Most commentators have taken the 'ethical remarks' to rest on a claim about the internal logical character of 'ethical propositions'. They take it that these forms of words generically resemble those forms of elucidatory nonsense that make logical features of reality manifest in the following respect: ethical 'propositions', too, involve some sort of violation of the conditions of the possibility of what can be said. The sort of violation in question here is thus (either implicitly or explicitly) taken to parallel, at least in some generic way, the sort of violation which occurs when we attempt to say something about the logical structure of reality. And thus it is the particular sort of flawed structure which these so-called 'ethical propositions' have (and which other sorts of propositions presumably do not have) which furnishes the ground of their classification as 'ethical'. The implicit assumption here – to be found in most of the secondary literature on this matter – is that it is *an internal feature of propositions themselves* (that is, a feature they can be said to possess or lack independent of their occurrence in any particular context of use) which allows them to be classified as specifically 'ethical' forms of nonsense.

It is worth pointing out that (although almost everything ever written on early Wittgenstein on ethics presupposes the aforementioned schema for understanding of what makes a proposition 'ethical' for him) no one, to my knowledge, has ever begun to spell out how such a view, applied to ethics, is really supposed to work (that is, how the above schema is supposed to be filled in). With regard to the topic of early Wittgenstein on logic, some commentators have at least attempted to spell out what it would mean to say of a 'proposition' (for example, 'A is an object') that in trying to say something about a logical feature of reality (for example, what it is to be an object) – even though that which the 'proposition' is trying to say cannot be said – through the manner in which it fails to say it, the proposition's failure manages to 'show' something about the relevant logical aspect of reality (for example, what an object is).[52] So such commentators at least have some sort of story about how an attempt to say something about the logical structure of reality succeeds in conveying insight through the determinate manner in which it logically misfires. (As a story about what the logical doctrines of the *Tractatus* are, I don't think it is a good story. But at least it is a story.) What most commentators on early Wittgenstein on ethics do is to wave at such discussions about early Wittgenstein on logic and then say, essentially: 'and it works the same way for ethics, too'. But they do not tell us how to transpose the story about 'logic' onto 'ethics'. In other words, no one, to my knowledge, has yet furnished even the beginning of an outline of what it would mean to say of a proposition (such as 'A is good') that it tries to say something about an ethical feature of reality (for example, about what it is for

something to be good) which cannot be said but which – through the determinate manner in which it fails to say it – nonetheless, manages to 'show' or 'convey' something determinately ethical. That is, no one ever says anything about the determinate manner in which 'ethical propositions' logically – or should it be 'ethically'? – misfire. We are just told that they do – that they are nonsense, and that the special way in which they are nonsense is able to convey a special sort of insight. But apart from a story about the determinate way in which they fall short of their goal, it is hard to see how the claim is to be cashed that there is something determinate which is the 'it' which is 'shown' or 'conveyed' by such substantially nonsensical forms of ethical talk.

A resolute reading of early Wittgenstein rejects the idea that the point of the early work is to recommend the doctrine that there are 'features of reality' which can be 'shown' but not said. In doing so, it opens up the possibility of an entirely different way of trying to understand what the parallel is supposed to be between logic and ethics. It allows for a reading according to which Wittgenstein aims to show that neither logical nor ethical 'propositions' are what they are in virtue of their capacity to stand in a certain sort of relation to (logical or ethical) features of reality – be it a relation of saying something about those features of reality, or be it a relation of trying but failing to say something about those features of reality. What would make an utterance 'ethical', for early Wittgenstein, if not the relation it stands in to ethical features of reality? Donatelli writes: 'what makes [an utterance] ethical does not reside in any of its internal features but our own ethical use of such language' (p. 11).[53] And this prepares the way for his claim:

> this means that [according to early Wittgenstein] what *has* ethical significance for us, the fact that things may appear morally interesting or disturbing, is not something that we have to look for *in* the proposition or *beside* the proposition – as most interpretations have done in very different ways – but in our involvement with a proposition.

Donatelli then immediately goes on to develop the consequences of this way of understanding Wittgenstein: 'The point may also be expressed by saying that anything [I take this to mean: any form of words] can become ethically active for us' (p. 25). Later on in the chapter, Donatelli puts the point even more dramatically: 'there is a sense in which we can say that the sign for the ethical is any sign.' This allows for a completely different way of understanding the location of the ethical in Wittgenstein's early work.

Most commentators take the 'ethical' parts of Wittgenstein's work to be the parts of his work where he talks 'about' ethics. It is clear to them which parts of the *Tractatus* are to be classified as parts which contain 'ethical propositions': the parts which say things about 'good', 'evil', 'the will', 'happiness', 'the meaning of life', and so on. How do we know those are the ethical parts of the book? Well, presumably because the words 'good', 'evil', 'the will', 'happiness', 'the meaning of life' occur in those parts of the book. But we might ask: if ethics 'cannot be expressed' then how can we tell that these are the parts of the book that are 'about' ethics? The answer implicit in most of the commentary goes like this: Well, it is true that 'it' – the ethical – cannot be expressed, but we can still tell which parts of the book are the parts that are *trying* to express 'it': they are the parts of the book that

contain ethical vocabulary (such as 'good', 'evil', 'the will', 'happiness', 'the meaning of life'); these parts of the book are trying to talk 'about' ethics. They, of course, fail to talk about ethics, but the manner of their failure illuminates what the ethical is. But what is it about their manner of failure (to say something) that draws the ethical into view? How do we know that the subject matter they aim to illuminate is of an ethical nature? Indeed, how do we know *what* these sections are aiming at, if we cannot understand what they say? And here we are immediately thrown back upon the previous answer: we know that they are aiming at the ethical because they contain ethical vocabulary – such as 'good', 'evil', 'the will', 'happiness', 'the meaning of life'. And, as we have already seen, in the absence of a story about how the employment of this particular set of vocabulary 'illuminates' what the ethical is, we are just moving in a circle here.

The underlying assumption here, which one finds in most readings of the *Tractatus*, but is seldom made explicit, is the following: if one is to succeed in so much as failing to say something about ethics in the relevantly illuminating way (in the way that 'shows' that which cannot be said), then one must be sure to employ the right vocabulary – that is, the vocabulary that would say something about ethical features of reality if only it could. So there is the bit where these commentators presuppose a model of saying to explain what ethical 'showing' is, and then there is the bit where they take it back. The first bit allows one to understand how the sections of the book that are supposed to be 'about' ethics manage to make contact with their subject matter: they make contact with the topic of ethics by employing items of vocabulary that 'relate' to ethical features of reality. (This first bit is usually left only implicit, thereby helping to disguise just how awkward the transition to the second bit ought to appear.) In the second bit, we are told that the manner in which the propositions which employ 'ethical' vocabulary achieve the sort of 'relation' they have to ethical features of reality is *not* by saying anything about them, so *not* by referring to ethical features of reality (that is, *not* in the way in which the predicates of an ordinary empirical proposition relate to reality – by describing it). But this only tells us how ethical utterances do *not* relate to reality. But then how do the ethical utterances 'relate' to their subject matter? Once these commentators have kissed off the claim that such utterances say something about the topics they purport to engage (by employing vocabulary which purports to refer to the relevant features of reality), they owe us a reason why we ought to conclude that the subject matter to which these utterances do relate – in whatever way they do relate – is properly classified as an 'ethical' one?

V: Ethics and the *Grundgedanke* of the *Tractatus*

An irresolute construal of the ethical, of the kind sketched in the previous paragraph, fails to come to terms with Wittgenstein's thought about ethics. While pretending to repudiate it, this reading continues to cleave to the idea that what makes something an ethical utterance is a function of what it is 'about'. The *Tractatus* tells us (in §4.0312) that its *Grundgedanke* ('its fundamental thought') is that the logical constants (the signs for logical operations, such as 'not', 'or', and 'and') do not represent – they do not stand for features of reality (or anything else).

What makes this the *Grundgedanke* of the book is not merely that it enables us to understand something about the nature of the logical constants, but that the logical constants furnish a relatively perspicuous example of how this deeply rooted philosophical assumption about how language works must be mistaken. The assumption is that language always works in the same way – that each sign gets its meaning by 'standing' for something – and that a (logical) classification of the different kinds of possible symbols presupposes an (ontological) classification of the different kinds of possible features of reality.[54]

At §6 in the book, Wittgenstein gives us the general form of proposition. The sections of the book that speak of ethics are numerically subordinated to §6. Why? We can sharpen this question by asking the following: why are those sections grouped together with the other topics that are treated in the 6s? In the sections subsequent to §6, Wittgenstein explores a series of kinds of 'proposition' whose use is of a radically different sort than that of ordinary meaningful propositions. None of the kinds of 'proposition' within this series partake of the general form of proposition.[55] The first kind to be discussed in this series, starting in §6.1, is logical 'propositions'. The goal of §§6.1ff is to get us to see the very different sort of connection to reality these propositions have from ordinary empirical propositions – that is, ones which say what is the case. (Thus one of the misunderstandings concerning the nature of logical propositions that the book is concerned to head off is that logical propositions are – as Frege and early Russell thought – generalizations over everything.[56]) In the subsequent sections, the *Tractatus* explores other uses of language which resemble logical 'propositions' – and, correlatively, differ from ordinary empirical propositions – in not representing states of affairs. In the 6.2s, the discussion turns to mathematical 'propositions' (mathematics is 'a method of logic' which involves 'working with equations')[57]; in the 6.3s, it turns to the fundamental principles of physics (which give the fundamental form of possible descriptions of the world); in the 6.4s, to ethical 'propositions'; finally, in the 6.5s we move from ethical to philosophical 'propositions', and thus, eventually, to the sentences of the work itself which, if the reader comes to understand the author, can be understood to have both an ethical and a philosophical point. The discussion of 'ethical propositions' in the 6.4s therefore figures as the concluding portion of an extended exploration of the different varieties of forms of words whose use does not depend on a capacity to represent. The 6.4s are thus part of a broader attack on the deeply rooted assumption that, for each sort of proposition, propositions of such-and-such sort have their point in telling us something about such-and-such features of reality – logical propositions by telling us about logical features of reality, mathematical propositions by telling us about mathematical features of reality, the fundamental laws of physics by telling us about the fundamental physical features of reality, ethical propositions by telling us about ethical features of reality, and philosophical propositions by telling us something about metaphysical features of reality.

The logical constants, Wittgenstein thinks, furnish a relatively perspicuous example of how the deeply rooted assumption must be mistaken, because it is relatively easy to see how it might be possible for a language lacking a special word for one of the logical constants (for example, one which has no distinct sign for negation) nonetheless to possess the resources requisite for the expression of that

logical operation.[58] The point here can be formulated in the idiom of the *Tractatus*
as follows: one way of freeing oneself from the deeply rooted assumption is to
appreciate how not every method of symbolizing requires for its expression a
distinct sign through which it is expressed. This way of putting the point
presupposes the *Tractatus*'s distinction between sign and symbol:

> Every part of a proposition which characterizes its sense I call an expression (a symbol).
>   (The proposition itself is an expression.)
>   Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one
> another is an expression …
>   An expression presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur. It is the
> common characteristic mark of a class of propositions … (§§3.31–3.311)
>   An expression has meaning only in a proposition … (§3.314)
>   The sign is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the senses. (§3.32)
>   Two different symbols can therefore have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign)
> in common – they then signify in different ways. (§3.321)
>   It can never indicate the common characteristic of two objects that we symbolize them
> with the same signs but by different *methods of symbolizing*. For the sign is arbitrary.
>   We could therefore equally well choose two different signs [to symbolize the two
> different objects] and where then would remain that which the signs shared in common?
>   (§3.322)

The sign, Wittgenstein says, 'is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the
senses'. The symbol is a logical unit, it expresses something which propositions –
as opposed to propositional signs – have in common.[59] Wittgenstein goes on to
remark:

> In the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two
> different ways – and therefore belongs to two different symbols – or that two words, which
> signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition …
>   (In the proposition 'Green is green' – where the first word is a proper name and the last
> an adjective – these words have not merely different meanings but they are *different
> symbols*.)
>   (§3.323)

It is worth elaborating how Wittgenstein's example in the second of these two
paragraphs illustrates the point of the first. The propositional sign 'Green is green'
can be naturally taken as symbolizing in any of three different ways[60] – and hence
can be understood as an expression for any one of three different thoughts:

(a) Mr Green is green Gg
(b) Mr Green is Mr Green $g = g$
(c) The colour green is the colour green $(x) (Gx \equiv Gx)$

One way of noticing how the same sign symbolizes differently in each of these three
cases is to focus on the word 'is'. In each of the propositions expressing each of
these three different thoughts, the sign 'is' symbolizes a different logical relation. In
(a), the sign 'is' symbolizes the copula (a relation between a concept and an object);
in (b), we have the 'is' of identity (a relation between objects); in (c), we have the

'is' of co-extensionality (a relation between concepts). In the ordinary language version of (a) – 'where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective' – 'green' can be seen to be not merely ambiguous with respect to its meaning (the way 'bank' is in 'The bank is on the left bank'), but ambiguous with respect to its logical type: 'these words have not merely different meanings but they are *different symbols*'. In the rendition of (b) into logical notation, we might think of the sign '=' as corresponding to the sign 'is' in the ordinary language version of (b); that is, we might think of these two signs ('=', 'is') as symbolizing the same relation (the relation of identity). But in the rendition of (a) into logical notation, there is no candidate for a sign that corresponds to 'is' – there is here nothing that is *the* sign that symbolizes the copula. The *Tractatus* draws many morals from this. Here are three of them:

1   a method of symbolizing is not simply a matter of a sign *naming* an item of a particular logical category,
2   a symbol is expressed not simply through a sign but through *a mode of arrangement* of signs,
3   it is not the case that each method of symbolizing requires the employment of a distinct sign to express the method of symbolizing – a method of symbolizing can be expressed through a mode of arrangement of signs (such as the method of symbolizing the copula in modern logical notation).

The *Tractatus* distinguishes between kinds of symbol in part by distinguishing degrees of 'dispensibility' of signs for different kinds of symbol. The degree of the 'dispensibility' of a sign depends on how easy it is to express the symbolic function of the sign while making the sign itself (as the *Tractatus* puts it) 'disappear'. The signs for logical constants – or, as the later sections of the *Tractatus* prefer to call them, the signs for logical operations [*logische Operationszeichen*] – count for the *Tractatus* only in a very degenerate sense as symbols. The *Tractatus* says that a symbol characterizes everything essential to their *Sinn* that propositions can have in common (§3.31), and that the occurrence of a logical operation does not characterize the *Sinn* of a proposition (§§4.0621, 5.25). The failure of *Operationszeichen* to characterize the *Sinn* of a proposition is connected with their being dispensable in a yet more radical sense than other potentially dispensable signs (such as signs denoting relations). §5.4611 puts *Operationszeichen* in a box with punctuation marks. Such signs can *easily* be made to 'vanish' [*verschwinden*] (§§5.254, 5.441). Their function can be taken over by (something which is undisguisedly akin to) punctuation. The negation sign is Wittgenstein's favourite candidate for replacement in this connection. It could, for example, be replaced by a convention governing the manner in which (negated) propositions are written (for example, in boldface). This, he thinks, makes particularly vivid that there are cases in which a sign's capacity to symbolize does not turn in any way, as the deeply rooted assumption would have us believe, on its capacity to function as an expression which picks out a feature of reality.

One must break with the deeply rooted assumption about how language works touched on above in order to see that what allows a proposition to have the character of a logical proposition is not its involving a certain kind of vocabulary (such as the

word 'not'). One could have a sequence of symbols that would count as a 'logical proposition' for Wittgenstein, even though it contained no logical vocabulary. Moreover, in a language which does have distinct signs for each of the logical constants, most propositional symbols that do involve such vocabulary – that, for example, do involve the negation sign – are not on that ground properly classified as logical, as opposed to non-logical, propositions. What gives a form of words the character of (what the *Tractatus* calls) a 'logical proposition' is not the occurrence in it of particular words (which stand for logical features of reality), but something about its *form*: its being determinable from the form of the 'proposition' alone that it is *sinnlos* – that it says nothing about reality.[61] What makes a 'proposition' a so-called 'logical proposition', for early Wittgenstein, is therefore not its *content* – its 'having to do with logical matters'. Logic does not pertain to an independent subject matter. (Logic pervades all of our thought and action.)

As we have seen, it is central to the teaching of the *Tractatus* that any bit of vocabulary that is a sign for a logical operation is dispensable: such signs can be eliminated – or, as the *Tractatus* puts it, can be made to 'vanish' (§§5.254, 5.441) – without loss of content to the sentences from which they are eliminated. We therefore cannot use the presence or absence of such vocabulary as a guide to identifying those propositions that partake of the logical. To do so would be, to say the least, severely to underestimate the reach of logic: any possible expression of a thought is caught up in a logical nexus. The difficulty here is to see that it is similarly central to Wittgenstein's thought that any bit of vocabulary that is the sign for something 'ethical' is equally dispensable, and thus one will similarly underestimate the scope of the ethical in early Wittgenstein's thinking, as well as similarly mistaking its nature, if one looks for it by attempting to look towards a region of reality that is supposed to be the 'something' that a bit of ethical vocabulary attempts to pick out.[62]

VI: Letting the Ethical Show Itself

That one cannot, for (early or later) Wittgenstein, take the presence or absence of ethical vocabulary as a guide to locating the presence of ethical thinking becomes apparent if one considers the works of poetry and literature (not to mention the Grimm's fairy tales and Hollywood Westerns) which Wittgenstein particularly admired as expressions of ethical thought. A story of Tolstoy's such as 'How Much Land Does a Man Need?' (a story Wittgenstein held in particularly high esteem) contains virtually no overtly ethical vocabulary; whereas it is precisely those of Tolstoy's literary works which actively indulge in (what Hacker would have no trouble identifying as) 'ethical remarks' that Wittgenstein most deplored. Thus, for example, in a letter to Malcolm, Wittgenstein mentions, in particular, his admiration for Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad*, saying that Tolstoy impresses him far more in a work such as this, when he turns his back to the reader and just tells a story, as opposed to when he turns towards his reader and preaches at him, as, for example, in his novel *Resurrection*. Equally pertinent, and contemporaneous with the *Tractatus*, are Wittgenstein's remarks to Engelmann about Ludwig Uhland's poem *Graf Eberhards Weissdorn*. About this poem, Wittgenstein says, 'If only you do not try

to utter the unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – contained in what is uttered'.[63] The suggestion with respect to each of these works is that the ethical is contained in what is uttered without itself ever being *that* which is said – without ever being *what* is uttered. In each case, the suggestion is that if we do try to pry it loose from the setting in which it has its life and grab hold of the ethical all by itself (independently of how it figures in such non-overtly ethical utterances), then it gets lost.

There is, here again, a parallel between the cases of ethics and logic, as well as a parallel difficulty about how to avoid an irresolute construal of each. What is difficult, with respect to each case, might be put as follows: to take the distinction between saying and showing deeply enough. And this means: not to take it that (where the ethical or the logical manifests itself) there is something such that *that* is *what* is shown, thus construing showing on the model of saying. Those who favour an irresolute construal of 'showing' (whether it be with regard to a case in which it is the ethical, the logical, or both, that is 'shown') have difficulty seeing how there could be any room left for anything properly termed 'a distinction between saying and showing', if an irresolute understanding of what such a distinction comes to is discarded; they assume that the only possible understanding of it takes it to be a matter of revealing an ineffable content. One is, however, not obliged to discard *showing* (as an internal feature of propositions that make sense), in order to discard this particular notion of 'showing' (as a feature of propositions which are nonsensical), where the latter notion is funded by a supposed theory involving our access to a special realm, the denizens of which are officially unsayable and unthinkable, but nonetheless somehow communicable and graspable. Discarding the latter notion commits one only to the following:

1   drawing the distinction between saying and showing in such a way that it applies only to propositional symbols (that is, that which is *sinnvoll* or *sinnlos*) and never to propositional signs (that is, that which is *unsinnig*), and
2   drawing it in such a way that showing ceases to require an irresolute waffle between wanting to claim that the content of that which is shown cannot be said (because that's what Wittgenstein says) and wanting to *hint* at what the content in question *is* (in ways that, in effect, turn it into a kind of quasi-sayable quasi-content).

To fail to take the distinction deeply enough here means: to construe the 'showing' side of the distinction as a kind of 'conveying' of a quasi-propositional content that we can at least attempt to say (though 'strictly speaking' we are unable to say it). To take the distinction deeply enough means: no longer being tempted to construe 'showing' on the model of a funny kind of saying.[64]

One way of beginning to see what a resolute construal of the ethical in the *Tractatus* might amount to is to note how the remark from the Preface about how 'the limit … can only be drawn in *language*' is echoed in the remark to Engelmann about Uhland's poem (regarding how the unutterable is 'contained in what is uttered' in the poem itself) and, more strikingly still, in the remark about the *Tractatus* to von Ficker (about how 'my book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical *from the inside*'). These remarks suggest that what is said in the Preface

about attempts to draw limits to thought ought to carry over to an understanding of
how the book as a whole seeks to bring the ethical into view: any attempt to draw a
limit to ethical thinking from a perspective that is ostensibly able both to encompass
the sphere of such thinking and able to see beyond its limits would commit itself to
being 'able to think both sides of the limit' and hence to being 'able to think' ethical
thoughts that 'cannot be thought'. The Tractarian attack on substantial nonsense –
on the idea that we can discern determinately unthinkable thoughts – therefore
constitutes no less of an attack on any project that thus attempts to delimit the sphere
of *ethical* thinking than it does on any attempt thus to delimit the sphere of *logical*
thinking. In either case: 'The limit … can only be drawn *in language* and what lies
on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.' Hence any candidate for an
ethical truth that is unutterable because it is in this sense *uncontainable* in what can
be uttered will be simply nonsense. If in its teaching about the ethical, as in its
teaching about the logical, the *Tractatus* seeks to draw the limit *in language* – rather
than via a theory which attempts to look at language from sideways on and legislate
which sentences fall on one side or the other of the limit – then here, as before, it
will be able to do so only by bringing more clearly into view for the reader the forms
of (ethical) expression present in the life he already leads, harnessing the capacities
for achieving forms of sense implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language
which he already possesses. Just as the *Tractatus* shows what it shows about logic
(that is, what it is to make sense) by *letting the logic of our language show itself* –
through allowing our 'sentences themselves to become clear' (§4.112) – so, too, it
shows what it does about ethics by letting the ethical show itself.

Here we stand at the beginning of the widely ramifying parallel between logic
and ethics which so interests early Wittgenstein.[65] The aspect of it that was in the
foreground of discussion in the preceding section of this chapter – the tip of the
iceberg, as it were – was the following: what makes a sequence of signs an 'ethical
proposition', for early Wittgenstein, is not its involving certain vocabulary – say, the
words 'good' and 'evil' – which pick out ethical features of reality, but its being
caught up in a particular sort of nexus of use. (Thus to understand what makes the
employment of a propositional sign ethical for Wittgenstein – early and late –
requires understanding what is constitutive of a particular sort of nexus of use.[66])
Thus one could have a sequence of signs that would count as having an 'ethical
point' for Wittgenstein, even though it contained no distinctively ethical vocabulary.
Moreover, a proposition's involving specialized ethical vocabulary does not suffice
as a ground for classifying it as an ethical proposition. What makes an employment
of language-like structures ethical, for early Wittgenstein, is not the sort of content
it is able to convey – one 'having to do with ethical matters'. Ethics does not pertain
to an independent subject matter. (Ethics pervades all of our thought and action.)

Wherein does the rest of the parallel consist? That can only be seen by working
through the whole of the rest of the book. The tendency among many commentators
– a tendency that finds striking expression in the remarks by Hacker with which we
began – is to suppose that most of the book is irrelevant to an understanding of the
ethical point of the work. But this is mistaken. By the time we reach the remark in
the *Tractatus* where we are told that 'the solution of the problem of life is seen in
the vanishing of the problem' (§6.521), if we have closely followed what has come
before, then we ought at least to recognize that it continues a theme that runs

throughout the treatment of logical and logico-philosophical topics of the previous pages. Here are a few selected moments (others could have easily been selected instead) in which that theme surfaces: 'Herewith Russell's paradox vanishes' (§3.333), 'The rules of logical syntax must follow of themselves' (§3.334), '[I]t is not to be wondered at that the deepest problems are really no problems' (§4.003), 'Laws of inference … which are to justify inferences … would be superfluous' (§5.132), 'Here it becomes clear that there are no such things as 'logical objects' or 'logical constants'. … Apparent logical constants [can be seen to] vanish' (§§5.4, 5.441), 'Logic must take care of itself' (§5.473), '[A]pparent propositions like 'a = a' … cannot be written in a proper notation … Therewith all the problems connected with such apparent propositions vanish' (§§5.534–5)' 'The theory of classes is altogether superfluous in mathematics'(§6.031), 'There can *never* be surprises in logic' (§6.1251), 'In logic process and result are equivalent' (§6.1261), 'Logic is not a theory' (§6.13), and so on.

The recurrence of the theme of the vanishing of problems (and the forms of language in which those problems lodge) is one of a number of indications of the manner in which the problems of logic and ethics have a parallel character. If we want to take the parallel seriously, and if we have followed what has come before, it looks as if we ought to be able to supplement such remarks about the logical as the foregoing with further characterisitically parallel elucidatory remarks about the ethical – remarks that might, for example, run as follows: 'Rules of ethical behavior must follow of themselves', 'It is not to be wondered at that the deepest problems are really *no* problems', 'Principles of morality which are to justify our actions would be superfluous',[67] 'Here it becomes clear that there are no such things as [specifically] "ethical concepts" or "ethical states of affairs"; apparent cases of such [can be seen to] vanish', 'Ethics must take care of itself', '[A]pparent ethical propositions cannot be written in a proper notation; therewith all the problems connected with such apparent propositions vanish', 'There can *never* be surprises in ethics', 'In ethics process and result are equivalent', 'Ethics is not a theory', and so on.

If there is a parallel of this sort between logic and ethics in the book, then sections such as the above – §§3.333–4, §5.132, §§5.4–5.441, §§5.472–3, §§5.534–5, §§6.1251–6.1261, §6.13 – and many others, before, after, and in between these, all have an essential bearing on the ethical teaching of the work. If so, there is no shortcut to understanding the ethical teaching of the book that circumvents those sections. There is no access to its ethical teaching apart from ascending the whole of the ladder formed by all of the numbered propositions of the work. There can be no specialists in 'Wittgensteinian ethics'.

VII: Ethics and Elucidation

Once one begins to see how there might be such a parallel between logic and ethics, it begins to become possible to see how the following two things might both be true:

1   If the *Tractatus* can be said to contain propositions with an ethical point, then such propositions are not confined to the parts of the book commonly thought to be 'ethical parts' of the book.

2   The propositions of the book that contain words such as 'ethics', 'ethical', 'good', 'evil', and so on, are in the same boat as the rest of the propositions in the body of the work that serve as elucidations – they belong to the set of propositions that we are asked, at the end of the book, to throw away.[68]

In going on now to say a bit about (1) and (2), I take myself to be exploring what, according to Donatelli, 'connects ethics with the goal of the *Tractatus* as a whole', and thus what Donatelli means when he writes: 'Being able to draw this contrast [between the ethical and the non-ethical], to pick out the ethical, is connected to the same idea of self-understanding which the *Tractatus* aims to bring its reader. The difficulty in being clear about what this contrast marks is the same kind of difficulty that one finds in being clear about the distinction between sense and nonsense' (p. 12).

One of the implications of a resolute reading of the *Tractatus* for an understanding of the ethical dimension of the work is that it requires that it be the *Tractatus* as a whole which is properly said to have an ethical point; and thus, insofar as, on this reading, the individual sections of the book can be said to have such a point, then the sections (allegedly) 'about' logic are, no less than the ones (allegedly) 'about' ethics, ones that can be said to have such a point. (Indeed, it has been the burden of the two previous sections of this chapter to indicate a few of the many ways in which the so-called 'logical' sections of the book bear on an understanding of its ethical point.) The categories of the logical and the ethical do not mutually exclude one another here, as they will inevitably seem to if we take 'logic' and 'ethics' to name distinct kinds of subject matter. What makes a proposition ethical (we might try saying) is its 'point' (not its subject matter); and what gives it a specifically ethical 'point' is that … and now what are we to say? We can try to go on and say things like: … that it seeks 'to express', 'to give voice to', 'a way of living in', 'a way of looking at', 'an attitude towards', 'the world', or that it seeks to change our ways of 'looking at', or 'living in', 'the world', and thus also that it seeks to bring out what is confused in our present 'ways of living in', 'ways of looking at', or 'attitudes towards', 'life' or 'the world'. I have put scare quotes around some of the sequences of signs in the foregoing in order to highlight that these ways of talking – 'point', 'express', 'a way of looking at', 'life', 'the world' – in this context, are themselves, for Wittgenstein, aspiring to function as instances of ethical ways of talking. Thus, when we call upon such forms of words we are failing to offer explanations of the ethical in terms that presuppose no prior understanding of what we are putatively attempting to explicate in calling upon them. (There is no way to break out of this circle for early Wittgenstein: to explain what an ethical utterance's 'point' is through an utterance that has nothing ethical about it.) Notice: 'life', 'world' and 'looking' are not as such – taken by themselves, apart from such contexts of use – bits of language that it makes sense to classify as bits of specifically 'ethical' vocabulary. What makes such ways of talking, in certain contexts, ethical ways of talking, for early (and for later) Wittgenstein, is not that they involve these particular bits of vocabulary (or any others). In the language games in which each of these ways of talking have their original homes – when one talks, for example, about the 'point' of a remark, or about changing one's 'attitude towards' something – what one says, in employing these bits of vocabulary, need not express anything ethical. And, correlatively, what gives the *Tractatus* its ethical

point is not to be traced to the fact that it happens to traffic in these – or any other – specific items of vocabulary. It is the *Tractatus* as a whole that aims to change us in certain ways.

There is a genuine parallel here between the way in which the book as a whole seeks to elucidate the character of the logical and the way in which the book as a whole seeks to elucidate the character of the ethical. But, as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, these elucidations will not take the form of initiating us into ('logical' or 'ethical') truths to which we were previously not privy. Through seeing what is confused in our philosophical thought 'about' logic, we come to see more clearly what logic is. And we come to see this, as we have seen, in large part through reflecting on the life with language we already lead: by harnessing the capacities for distinguishing – and for uncovering the failure to distinguish – sense from nonsense implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language each of us already exercises. Through seeing what is confused in our philosophical thought 'about' ethics, we come to see more clearly what ethics is. And we come to see this, again, in part, through reflecting on the life we already lead: by harnessing the capacities for ethical reflection implicit in the capacity for the conduct – and for the criticism of the conduct – of life each of us already exercises.[69] It is only through thus understanding the work as a whole in relation to our lives with language – that is, by understanding the author of the work in the way we are called upon to in the penultimate section of that work – that the relevant change can be wrought in us. It is the possibility of the sentences of the work's being caught up in the nexus of this peculiar sort of engagement between author and reader at which the work as a whole aims that constitutes the possibility of its propositions eventually coming to be recognized by a reader of the work as ones which have '*ein Ethischer Sinn*'.

The so-called 'ethical parts' of the *Tractatus* will only appear to a reader of the work to be the parts of the work which are more directly 'about' ethics than other parts of the work, if the reader brings both a particular conception of ethics and a particular conception of how language works to his reading of the book. And, moreover, these two conceptions (of ethics and of language) depend upon one another. The work as a whole seeks to clarify how they depend upon one another and thereby to expose them as jointly based on a common confusion. So the only sense in which the so-called 'ethical remarks' are more directly 'about' ethics than the rest of the book is that a reader's attaining an understanding of the author here – that is, attaining a recognition of these sentences as nonsense – requires abandoning his attachment to a philosophically loaded conception of what ethics is and therewith a philosophically loaded conception of how a certain employment of language can succeed in drawing the ethical into view. It is important to distinguish here between the sort of thing that a reader who is interested in Wittgenstein's 'ethics' will begin the work expecting to find in it (that is, a philosophical theory of what ethics is, that explains the peculiar sort of content that ethical propositions have) and what there is in the way of ethics to be found in the work. If we use scare quotes to mark the first of these two ways of employing the word 'ethics', then we can say: what makes a proposition ethical, for Wittgenstein, is not its being (or better: appearing to be) about 'ethics' – any more than what makes a proposition logical is its being (or better: appearing to be) about 'logic'. Again: neither logic nor ethics, for early Wittgenstein, names a domain of inquiry with its own proprietary

sphere. (We might say: ethics, like logic, is to be found everywhere and nowhere.) And, armed with this distinction between 'ethics' and ethics, we can now also say: only certain parts of the *Tractatus* are directly concerned with (offering an elucidation of) 'ethics', but all parts are equally ethical. And, if what is ethical in it can come into view only by coming into view as an internal aspect of the whole of the work, then this means: for some readers, no matter how much time they spend on it, no part of it may ever appear to contain anything ethical. We may distinguish here, paraphrasing §6.43, between the happy and the unhappy reader. For the former (for the reader for whom its ethical point comes into view), the book 'must thereby become quite another' than the book it is for the latter (for the reader for whom it does not). 'It must, so to speak, wax or wane as a whole.'[70]

And now we can also say: it is a necessary condition of understanding the ethical point of the book that one discover that its ethical point is not to be found in anything that the 'ethical' propositions in it purport to say. And one can only come to appreciate why this should be so by first working one's way through the preceding propositions (which treat of what it is to say something, and what it is to fail to say something) – that is, by coming first to recognize how the preceding propositions function as elucidations – by coming to understand the book as a whole in the way in which we, as readers of the book, are asked, at the end of the book, to understand it.

Donatelli does a nice job of bringing out how most readings of the *Tractatus* on ethics make it seem as if its teaching in this 'area' could be severed from its context in the work as a whole. What most readings have to say about the place of ethics in the *Tractatus* makes it seem as if you don't need to climb up the previous rungs of the ladder – as if you don't need to work through the elucidatory dialectic of the work as a whole – in order to arrive at an understanding of the work's ethical point. And, indeed, as Donatelli points out (in connection with Janik and Toulmin's reading), some commentators actually seem to go so far as to suggest that you might get a firmer understanding of the ethical point of the *Tractatus* if you skip the sections preceding the so-called 'ethical remarks' and instead travel to the concluding sections of the book via a scholarly detour through some passages from, say, Tolstoy or Kierkegaard – passages whose point can be understood without first having to ascend the rungs of the *Tractatus*. These passages from other works are taken by such commentators to 'show' just what the corresponding passages in the *Tractatus*, considered in isolation from their function as rungs along the Tractarian ladder, can be discovered as wanting to 'show'.[71] You can't leap straight up to the penultimate rung of the ladder in this way: you have to climb, via the previous rungs, up to it.[72] And this upper 'ethical' segment of the ladder, too, is to be thrown away. The ladder can only lead you to the point at which it aims to enable you to arrive – the point at which you are in a position to throw it away – once you have climbed not only to penultimate sections that purport to say something about the ethical, but beyond them, to the point where you no longer occupy a position in which you (imagine you) require the support of the ladder to see the world aright.

The difficulty of understanding the ethical point of the *Tractatus* is therefore inseparable from the difficulty of understanding the book as a whole, and thus that of working through the many parts of the book which this chapter has made no effort to work through. That is one of several reasons why this chapter can only be about what ethics in the *Tractatus* is not.[73]

Notes

1. *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 4. I have amended the translation.
2. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.521. The explicit topic of this remark is the vanishing of 'the problem of life'. But, as we shall see, it continues a theme that runs throughout the treatment of logical and logico-philosophical topics of the previous remarks in the work. [All subsequent unspecified references to a section number are to the *Tractatus*. Quotations from the *Tractatus* will be drawn from either the Pears and McGuinness translation (London: Routledge, 1981) or the Ogden translation (also London: Routledge, 1981), or some emendation or combination thereof.]
3. I do not mean to be assuming here (as many commentators do) that there are no significant developments in Wittgenstein's philosophy (in particular, with respect to logic, ethics, or the nature of the parallel between logic and ethics) between the pre-Tractarian writings and the *Tractatus* itself. It is important to distinguish between the early 'Early Wittgenstein' and the later 'Early Wittgenstein'. For a discussion of this issue that has bearing on the questions discussed here, see Michael Kremer's 'Contextualism and Holism in the Early Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Topics* (1997) Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 87–120.
4. I explore certain aspects of this topic in my 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy', in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. John Whittaker (NY: Macmillan, 2003).
5. Peter Hacker, 'Interview with Edward Kantorian', *Information-Philosophie* (November–December 2001), §26. This interview is also posted on the web at: http://www.information-philosophie.de/philosophie/kanterian.html.
6. So that when Russell asks Wittgenstein in 1912, 'Are you thinking about logic, or about your sins', and Wittgenstein answers 'Both' [*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (London: Unwin, 1975), p. 330], Hacker presumably will have to interpret this as a report on Wittgenstein's part of such a moment of temporally coinciding logical and ethical concerns. We can see here how Hacker's claim that 'though [Wittgenstein] worked for seven long years on the *Tractatus*, it was only for a few months out of those seven years was he concerned with ethical questions' requires that one be able to draw a reasonably sharp distinction in the case of someone like Wittgenstein between when he was 'concerned with ethical questions' *qua* philosopher ('working on ethics') and when merely *qua* human being (who in his extra-curricular life happened to be intensely, passionately, concerned with moral questions). Such a sharp line presupposes an adherence (on the part of the individual through whose life the line is being drawn) to a certain conception of philosophy (something that might more accurately be termed 'professional philosophy') – one that Wittgenstein himself was repelled by. It is difficult to overestimate here the gulf between Wittgenstein's own sensibility and that of Hacker. As long as such a distinction remains in force, there is little chance of making sense of remarks of Wittgenstein's such as 'If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself … he will remain superficial in his writing' (quoted by Rush Rhees in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, (ed. R. Rhees [Totowa, NJ: Roman and Littlefield, 1981], p. 193), 'Working in philosophy … is really more a working on oneself' (*Culture and Value*, p. 16; originally from *The Big Typescript*, see *Philosophical Occasions* [eds James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, Indianapolis, IN: 1993], p. 161), and the many others like them scattered throughout his writings – remarks that challenge any absolute distinction between (professional) work in philosophy and (ethical) work on oneself.
7. For a discussion of the assumptions underlying the supposed availability of the 'rather than' here, see my 'Philosophy and Biography', in *Wittgenstein: Biography and Philosophy*, ed. James Klagge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

8. I discuss a number of such passages in the papers mentioned in notes 4 and 7.
9. Juliet Floyd argues that even Wittgenstein's contributions to (what is called his) 'philosophy of mathematics' are poorly understood if approached exclusively in accordance with such a departmental conception of the purview of their targets and topics. See her 'Wittgenstein, Mathematics and Philosophy' (in *The New Wittgenstein*, eds Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 232–51).
10. On this point, see Stanley Cavell's 'Declining Decline' (in *This New Yet Unapproachable America* [Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989]), especially p. 40.
11. As we shall see later on in this chapter, it is central to the teaching of the *Tractatus* that any bit of vocabulary that is a sign for a logical operation is dispensable: such signs can be eliminated – or, as the *Tractatus* puts it, can be made to 'vanish' (§§5.254, 5.441) – without loss of content to the sentences from which they are eliminated. It shall be argued, later on in this chapter, that this is equally the case with regard to early Wittgenstein's view of ethical vocabulary.
12. The words 'logical', 'necessarily', 'ethical' and 'honest' are placed in parenthesis here to signal that they are instances of the sort of dispensable vocabulary mentioned in the previous note. The character of this (ethical) demand is the topic of the chapter cited in note 4.
13. In this volume, pp. 11–32. All subsequent unspecified references to a page number are to this chapter.
14. There are only two other equally valuable treatments of this topic that I know of: Cora Diamond's 'Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of the *Tractatus*' (in R. Heinrich and H. Vetter, eds, *Bilder der Philosophie* [Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1991], pp. 55–90; reprinted in *The New Wittgenstein*, eds Alice Crary and Rupert Read [London: Routledge, 2000], pp. 149–73), and Michael Kremer's 'The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense' (*Nous* 35 (2001), pp. 39–73). The common ground in approach to Wittgenstein on ethics to be found in these two papers and in Donatelli's and my own work ought not to be identified with the caricature thereof that figures in the following exchange between Edward Kanterian and Peter Hacker:

EK: The New Wittgensteinians claim that the real issues Wittgenstein was always concerned with were ethics and therapy, the non-argumentative struggle against the will to engage in philosophy. They accuse the traditional interpreters of ignoring this engagement which underlies his texts and philosophy. Was sin, rather than logic Wittgenstein's primordial concern?

PH: No, I think that idea is deeply misleading. Let's look first at the *Tractatus*. One of the tasks of the *Tractatus* was to address the conception of logic that was to be found in the works of Wittgenstein's predecessors, in particular in Frege and Russell. … A very considerable part of the *Tractatus* is concerned with deep criticism of these conceptions of logic. The *Tractatus* set the nature of logic in a completely new light. This was a great achievement. It was not mere therapy; it provided a much needed clarification of the nature of logic and logical truth – something that had puzzled philosophers since the days of Plato. It was not a preoccupation with sin and redemption. And it was argumentative through and through – the Fregean and Russellian conceptions of logic were refuted with powerful arguments. In addition, the *Tractatus* attempted to give a wholly original account of the relation between thought, language and reality, and, associated with this, a particular solution to fundamental problems about intentionality. This account, although mistaken, as Wittgenstein later came to realize, is deep. To dress this up, as the new American interpreters do, as merely a piece of

> Kierkegaardian irony seems to me to be a grotesque distortion of great philosophy. … I can see no value whatsoever in the interpretation that the new American Wittgensteinians are offering. Nothing, in my opinion, speaks for it, and all the evidence speaks against it.
>
> ('Interview with Edward Kantorian', §21)

This is hardly the place for a proper rebuttal of these remarks (let alone those that precede and follow them in this remarkable interview). But the following three observations may (evidently) be of use to some:

1   What the approach in question assumes is not that ethics (or sin) was Wittgenstein's primary concern in the *Tractatus* and that logic was merely secondary – though it certainly does not assume the opposite either. What it does not assume, above all, is the restricted picture of opposed options for interpretation in play here: the picture of 'Logic' and 'Ethics' as naming two utterly unrelated bodies of subject matter, each of which is independently available for philosophical reflection, either of which might be accorded priority over the other. (Note: In the phrase 'of primary concern in the *Tractatus*', the qualifier 'in the *Tractatus*' matters, since there is a sense in which it is grammatically constitutive of what it is to be concerned *qua* existing individual with sin that one take what one is thus occupied with to be of 'primordial concern'. As Kierkegaard might have said, if one takes having committed a sin to be roughly as serious a matter of concern as, say, losing $10,000, then that shows that it is not sin that one is concerned with.) Indeed, it is just such a departmentalized picture of logic and of ethics that the work seeks to overcome. To understand the parallel between logic and ethics touched on at the outset of this chapter requires seeing how this picture simultaneously breaks down with respect to each for Wittgenstein.

2   Once this picture no longer controls one's conception of the options, one is no longer obliged to regard (as Hacker does) the thought that the work seeks 'to clarify the nature of logic and logical truth' to be in any way in competition with the thought that the work seeks to offer a form of 'therapy' – that is, a form of work on the self that can eventuate in a transformation of the self.

3   Hence the thought that the procedure of the book is 'ironic' (though, incidentally, this is not quite how I use the word 'ironic' in connection with this topic in my previous writings) – if that means it involves a self-conscious enactment of certain confusions (in order to expose them as confusions) – is not in competition with the thought that it seeks to practise a form of clarification, nor with the thought that such a process of clarification may, along the way, draw upon patterns of logical argument. (This, incidentally, applies equally to Kierkegaard's employment of (something that is less inaptly called) 'Kierkegaardian irony'.) But it does mean that one will misconstrue the character of the *Tractatus*'s method of clarification if one takes it to be *merely* argumentative – that is, if one takes the form of insight that it most seeks to convey to be identical with something that can be represented as the concluding (effable or ineffable) line in a sequence of argumentative steps.

15. In a letter to the editor of *Der Brenner*, Ludwig von Ficker, Wittgenstein writes: 'The book's point is an ethical one': L. Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, ed. G.H. von Wright (Otto Müller: Salzburg, 1969), p. 35. An English translation of this letter is quoted in full, on pp. 15–16 of G.H. von Wright's 'Historical Introduction: the origin of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*' (in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Prototractatus* (ed. B.F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg and G.H. von Wright [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971], pp. 1–34). A translation of the whole Wittgenstein-Ficker correspondence is

available in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C.G. Luckhardt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 82–98. All subsequent references to Wittgenstein's correspondence with von Ficker are to this letter. It is the same letter as the one to which Hacker refers above (in §26 of the 'Interview with Edward Kantorian').

16. That we will find this unsatisfying is something that the author of the *Tractatus* himself anticipates. He knows that we will pick up his book wanting in the end to be told *what* ethics and/or logic (really) *is*. This is therefore perhaps a fitting moment to note that the continuation of §6.521 (that begins by saying that solution to the problem of life is to be seen in the vanishing of the problem) goes on to suggest that those to whom 'the sense of life becomes clear' cannot then say 'wherein this sense consists' and, indeed, that this silence on their part is itself a sign of things having become clear to them.

17. The first four sections of Donatelli's paper are the ones primarily concerned with canvassing and rejecting various received answers to this question. So I shall confine my comments to this part of his paper.

18. *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, p. 35.

19. Cora Diamond has, in this connection, suggested that the *Tractatus* has an ethical point in something like the way in which the work imagined in §5.631 (*The World as I Found It*) has its philosophical point. The point of each has something to do with that which is absent from the pages of the book in question, and that absence in each acquires significance only for a reader who is able to turn that absence (of anything – philosophical or ethical – of the sort that she imagines she wants) into something that can transform her understanding of what it is that she wants. In the one case, the book is a text that contains no philosophy and yet has a philosophical point; in the other, it is a text that contains no ethics and yet has an ethical point. But, in each case, the point can be grasped only by someone who herself makes of it something from which philosophy or ethics can be learned. Diamond puts the point as follows:

> One has not only to understand what is absent in it, but also to turn that absence into something that can transform one's conception of one's philosophical difficulties. The book doesn't 'teach' one philosophy, in the sense that it has no teachings on offer; and so long as one restricts oneself to looking for teachings, one will be unable to learn anything philosophical from it.
>
> ('Introduction' to 'Having a Rough Story What Moral Philosophy Is', in *The Literary Wittgenstein*, eds Wolfgang Huemer and John Gibson [Routledge: London, 2004], p. 128)

20. *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker*, p. 35.

21. I am here paraphrasing a remark of Wittgenstein's ('I don't try to make you *believe* something you *don't* believe, but to make you *do* something you won't do') reported by Rush Rhees in his essay ''The Philosophy of Wittgenstein'' (in *Discussions of Wittgenstein* [London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970], p. 43).

22. The characterization of such a reading as 'resolute' is first due to Thomas Ricketts and first used in print by Warren Goldfarb in his 'Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22 (1997), pp. 57–73, at p. 64; compare also p. 73, note 10.

23. When I speak here of 'propositions', I am translating Wittgenstein's '*Sätze*'. The term '*Satz*' in the *Tractatus* floats between meaning (1) a propositional symbol (as, for example, in '§§3.3ff and '§§4ff) and (2) a propositional sign (as, for example, in '§§5.473ff and §6.54). It is important to the method of the *Tractatus* that the recognition that certain apparent cases of (1) are merely cases of (2) be a recognition that the reader achieve on his own. Consequently, at certain junctures, the method of the *Tractatus* requires that the reference of '*Satz*' remain provisionally neutral as between (1) and (2). Many of my uses of the terms 'proposition' and 'sentence' will be correspondingly neutral.

24. So to characterize a reading as 'resolute' is to say that it adheres to a certain *programme* for reading the book. Conformity to the basic features of such a reading leaves undetermined exactly how a great deal of the book works in detail. To be a resolute reader is to be committed at most to this programmatic conception of the lines along which those details are to be worked out, but it does not deliver a general recipe for reading the book – a recipe that one could apply to the various parts of the book in anything like a straightforward or mechanical way. A resolute reading does not aim to provide a skeleton key for unlocking the secrets of the book in a manner that would transform the ladder into an elevator; so that one just has to push a button (say, one labelled 'austere nonsense') and one will immediately be caused to ascend to Tractarian heights, without ever having to do any ladder-climbing on one's own.

25. '[T]here can be no ethical propositions' (§6.42).

26. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.54; my emphases.

27. For Frege's own formulation, see *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, translated by Montgomery Furth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), §32.

28. The paper of mine that Donatelli draws upon most in this connection is 'The Method of the Tractatus'. In what follows, I briefly rehearse some things I discuss at far greater length in that paper.

29. In the entry entitled 'Nonsense' in *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; pp. 259–60), Hans-Johann Glock is helpfully explicit in attributing the substantial conception of nonsense to the *Tractatus*. A spirited defence of it (in the guise of a disavowal!) can be found in P.M.S. Hacker's 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians' (*The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 210 (January 2003), pp. 1–24).

30. In claiming that the *Tractatus* is to be seen as resolving a tension in Frege's thought (between these two different conceptions of nonsense), I touch on interpretative questions about how Frege is to be read. I mean to take sides on this question only in so far as it bears on the claim that Wittgenstein can be fruitfully read as having read Frege in certain ways. I do not wish to deny that Frege can be fruitfully read as adhering to either one of these two conceptions of nonsense, and as having faced up to the implications of such a commitment. (Peter Geach, in the article cited below, reads Frege as an adherent of the position that there are certain truths that can be 'shown' but cannot be said. Cora Diamond, in chapters 2 and 4 of *The Realistic Spirit* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991], cited in Donetelli's third footnote, reads Frege as having already anticipated the conception of nonsense which I attribute here to the *Tractatus*.)

31. The positivist interpretation is all for showing that some sentences are nonsensical, but it wants no truck with the idea of philosophically illuminating nonsense. It wants to hold on to the substantial conception of nonsense (the idea that metaphysical nonsense arises through violations of logical syntax), while eschewing the idea that there are things that can be 'shown' but not said.

32. I distinguish between these two variants because proponents of the substantial conception tend to present themselves as *prima facie* distinct in this respect. I go on to claim that these variants cannot in the end be clearly distinguished from one another in the manner that I am here pretending that they can be.

33. My self-defeating exposition of the alleged distinction between the two variants of the substantial conception mirrors, albeit in a highly summary fashion, the first half of the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus*. Half of the central point of the *Tractatus*, on my reading, is to show that once one has bought into the substantial conception, one has implicitly committed oneself to a conception on which there are ineffable thoughts – thoughts which we can gesture at (with the aid of nonsensical language) but cannot express in language. (A central part of the interest of Frege's work for Wittgenstein, as

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he read him, is that Frege recognized and drew this consequence.) The second half of the point of the work is to show that the way to escape this consequence is to abandon the substantial conception of nonsense altogether (not, according to Wittgenstein, an easy thing to do). My exposition of the alleged distinction between the substantial and austere conceptions of nonsense aims to mirror, in equally summary fashion, this second (and largely unnoticed) half of the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus*.

34. Though it will only be *after* she has struggled with the sentences with which she is presented in the body of the book that a reader will be in a position to understand how these remarks in the Preface are properly to be applied to what she goes on to find in the book.

35. This paragraph and the next two draw in part upon material from James Conant and Cora Diamond, 'On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely' (in *The Lasting Significance of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, edited by Max Köbel and Bernhard Weiss [London: Routledge, 2004]) where these points are developed at greater length.

36. Thus, for example, elsewhere in the interview with Peter Hacker, we find the following:

EK: So are the propositions of the Tractatus really nonsense? All of them?

PH: Well, by the standards of the book itself, they are nonsense. That is, they are not pictures of possible states of affairs that could be otherwise. They do not have a sense that consists in the agreement or disagreement of the propositions with possibilities of the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs. You must remember that the concept of sense in the Tractatus is a highly technical one – so, for example, mathematical equations such as '25 x 25 = 625' are also nonsense, for they surely do not describe possible states of affairs that might have been otherwise. However, if you mean: are they really nonsense, and did Wittgenstein later think they are nonsense – the answer is surely No.
　　　　(Peter Hacker, 'Interview with Edward Kanterian', *Information-Philosophie*
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(November–December 2001), §23)

Since Hacker here cites the *Tractatus*'s discussion of mathematical propositions as support for the claim that the *Tractatus* must be employing a 'highly technical concept of sense', it is worth pausing for a moment to consider what might be going on here. If one were simply to go by what he says here, Hacker might appear to be relying upon the following conditional: if a sentence does not describe a possible state of affairs, then it is nonsense. But even if one prescinds from the question whether Wittgenstein thinks one can apply any notion such as 'describing a state of affairs' as an independently employable criterion of what is *sinnvoll* (a matter about which Hacker and I would disagree), it would still be uncharitable to ascribe an endorsement of this particular conditional to Hacker, since there is more than one way in which a sentence can fall short of being *sinnvoll* for the *Tractatus*. Moreover, as we shall see, this would leave no room for the immediately subsequent treatment of other topics in the 6s (not to mention the prior treatment in §§4.46ff of the propositions of logic as *sinnlos*). But then what is Hacker relying upon here? Though the *Tractatus* never says that mathematical propositions are nonsense (*Unsinn*), it does say they are pseudo-propositions (§6.2). It is possible that Hacker is relying on this remark here. I will take up below the issue of whether this remark licenses his conclusion.

37. This is not to say that it does not rest upon any metaphysical doctrines. This is a point on which there has been much misunderstanding in some of the literature criticizing resolute readings. A resolute reader takes it that Wittgenstein's aim, in writing the *Tractatus*, was to bring metaphysics (effable and ineffable) to an end, and thus takes it

that the method of clarification he thereby sought to practise, to achieve that end, was therefore to be one that was itself free of all metaphysical commitments. This, however, does not preclude such a reader from finding metaphysical commitments in the work. But he will take it that such as are to be found (and which Wittgenstein in his later writings sought to criticize) in that work – and there are many – must be of such a sort that early Wittgenstein, at the time of writing the *Tractatus*, would not have taken them to be metaphysical. Rather, he would have regarded them as pertaining to matters that become clear through the process of clarifying propositions, and, in particular, through the adoption and application of a perspicuous notation – a notation that enables one to avoid 'the fundamental confusions' ('of which the whole of philosophy is full'; §3.324) by furnishing *an absolutely clear way of expressing thoughts*. The following remark nicely sums up his later view of his earlier situation with regard to these commitments:

> We now have a theory, a … theory … of the proposition; of language, but it does not present itself to us as a theory. For it is the characteristic thing about such a theory that it looks at a special clearly intuitive case and says: '*That* shews how things are in every case; this case is the exemplar of *all* cases.' – 'Of course! It has to be like that', we say, and are satisfied. We have arrived at a form of expression that *strikes us as obvious*. But it is as if we had now seen something lying *beneath* the surface.
>
> (Zettel, §444)

This passage points to a profound discontinuity in thinking that is folded within a fundamental continuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy. The fundamental continuity in question lies in Wittgenstein's seeking, early and late, to find a way to do philosophy that does not consist in putting forward philosophical theses, and yet which (through the practice of methods of clarification that he, early and late, sought in his writing to exemplify) would genuinely enable his reader to pass from a state of philosophical perplexity to a state of complete clarity in which the philosophical problems completely disappear. The fundamental discontinuity in question lies in his later thinking that there was an entire metaphysics of language embodied in his earlier method of clarification, thereby illustrating that the most crucial moments in the philosophical conjuring trick are the ones that are apt to strike one as most innocent; so that it turns out to be much more difficult to avoid laying down requirements in philosophy than his earlier self had ever imagined. Of course, if one assumes that the *only* way to account for the profound changes in Wittgenstein's thought is in terms of his having intended to put forward a metaphysical theory or a theory of meaning or both in his earlier thought, and his having given up the theory or theories later, then one will take resolute readers to be committed to insisting that the continuities in Wittgenstein's thinking are more important than the discontinuities. But the idea that that is the only way to understand the profound changes in Wittgenstein's thought should in any case be rejected. Not only are resolute readers, as such, not precluded from taking there to be profound discontinuities between Wittgenstein's early and later thought, but, on the contrary, if later Wittgenstein viewed his early work as an exemplary illustration of how, in philosophy, one can take oneself to have resolutely eschewed all metaphysical commitments while still remaining knee-deep in them, then a resolute reading may help us to attain a better understanding of why later Wittgenstein took his early work to be the expression of the metaphysical spirit in philosophy *par excellence*.

38. To say this is not to deny that early Wittgenstein thought that a logically perspicuous notation has a privileged role to play in the activity of philosophical clarification. It is only to deny that he shares a prevalent conception of what translation into such a notation can accomplish. On this point, see 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', pp. 414–18.

39. Compare *Tractatus*, §§5.473–5.4733.
40. *Manuscript 110* of Wittgenstein's *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, p. 239 (quoted by David Stern in *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. 194). When the aim of a work is 'to place an illusion before one's eyes', the task of offering an exegesis of the work becomes a delicate one. Much of what proponents of the ineffability interpretation write often amounts to little more than a paraphrase of things Wittgenstein himself (apparently) says in the *Tractatus*. How can a commentator who furnishes us with a seemingly faithful paraphrase of Wittgenstein's own words be leading himself or his readers astray as to the point of the passage in question? Well, it depends on the sort of use to which one wants to put such a paraphrase. It depends on whether the paraphrase is adduced as a transitional remark (whose sense is subsequently to be queried) or as an *explanation* of the meaning of the passage. What is it to exemplify an understanding of the point of those passages from the *Tractatus* which the reader is to recognize as *Unsinn*? To think that one can faithfully exhibit an understanding of those passages of the *Tractatus* which are to be recognized by the reader as *Unsinn* by offering (what one takes to be) a faithful paraphrase of them is to fail (to do what §6.54 calls upon the reader to do: namely) to understand the author of the book and the character of the project of elucidation in which he is engaged. This is beautifully illustrated by Donatelli in his discussion, in Part IV of his paper, of passages from Carnap that appear to be almost faultless paraphrases of passages from the *Tractatus*.
41. 'The book will, therefore, draw a limit … not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).' (*Tractatus*, Preface)
42. 'The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be *simply* nonsense' [my emphasis] (Ibid.).
43. Commentators fail to notice that what Wittgenstein says in §6.54 is not: '*all* of my sentences are nonsensical' (thus giving rise to the self-defeating problematic Geach has nicely dubbed *Ludwig's Self-mate*). Rather §6.54 characterizes the way in which *those* of his propositions that serve as elucidations elucidate. He says: 'my sentences serve as elucidations in the following way: he who understands me recognizes them as nonsensical'. The aim of the passage is (*not* to propose a single all-encompassing category into which the diverse sorts of propositions which comprise the work are all to be shoehorned, but rather) to explicate how those passages of the work that succeed in bearing its elucidatory burden are meant to work their medicine on the reader.
44. Many an encyclopedia article, scholarly footnote, introductory chapter (or other form of textbook summary) about emotivist theories of ethics will identify the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* as one of the originators of emotivism. Yet what I here, and subsequently, refer to as 'the positivist reading of the *Tractatus* on ethics' has never actually, to my knowledge, been elaborated in any serious detail as a *reading* of the *Tractatus*. That is to say, it is, for the most part, not a doctrine that serious scholars of Wittgenstein have attributed to the *Tractatus* (or, for that matter, to any of Wittgenstein's other writings). Rather, it is a view that a number of philosophers – most notably, Schlick, Carnap and Ayer – deeply influenced by the *Tractatus* took to be either Wittgenstein's own view of ethics or the view of ethics they thought one ought to hold if one were persuaded of the truth of other doctrines of the *Tractatus*; and it is largely through their writings that the myth has originated that such a view is to be found somewhere in the pages of the *Tractatus* itself.
45. R. Carnap, 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language' (1932), trans. A. Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (New York: Free Press, 1959), pp. 60–81: see p. 77.

46. R. Carnap, 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language', p. 78.
47. It parallels a waffle in Carnap's essay concerning the *logical* character of metaphysical nonsense. In the third paragraph of his essay, Carnap writes:

> In saying that the so-called statements [*Sätze*] of metaphysics are *meaningless*, we intend this word in its strictest sense.… In the strict sense … a sequence of words [*Wortreihe*] is *meaningless* if it does not, within a specified language, constitute a statement [*gar keinen Satz bildet*]. It may happen that such a sequence of words looks like a statement [*Satz*] at first glance; in that case we call it a *pseudo-statement* [*Scheinsatz*]. Our thesis, now, is that logical analysis reveals the alleged statements [*Sätze*] of metaphysics to be pseudo-statements [*Scheinsätze*].
>
> (p. 61)

There are two possible readings of this passage. I will call them the *weaker reading* and the *stronger reading*, respectively. In the quotation above, I have presented the text of Arthur Pap's translation of this passage. Pap's translation, on the whole, encourages the weaker reading. Thus translated, the passage might appear to claim that the problem with metaphysical propositions is that, given what they mean, they fail to *assert* anything – they fall short of being *statements*. This would suggest that the class of ('sequences of words' properly classified as) 'propositions' is wider than that of 'statements'. We see what the parts of the metaphysician's statement mean, but they do not add up to a coherent whole and *therefore* fail to state anything. Some propositions have what it takes to be a statement, some do not; metaphysical propositions are of this latter sort. Carnap's original German would seem, however, to invite a stronger reading. Carnap (in the original German) appears to wish to claim that the so-called 'propositions' [*Sätze*] of metaphysics are not even propositions; they are only apparent propositions [*Scheinsätze*] – mere strings of words masquerading as propositions. When Carnap says that they are meaningless, he 'intend[s] this word in its strictest sense'; and the import of this would appear to be that, in the strict sense, only 'a sequence of words' [*Wortreihe*] can be *meaningless* – not a proposition. A sequence of words is meaningless, if, within some specified language, it fails so much as to form a proposition [*gar keinen Satz bildet*]. On the stronger reading, metaphysics appears to consist of propositions, but they are only apparent propositions; and an apparent proposition is not a kind of proposition at all. This waffle runs throughout the entire argument of Carnap's essay. The syntax of a language, for Carnap, specifies which combinations of words are admissible and which are not. The syntax of natural languages allow, Carnap thinks, for the formation of (what I called above) substantial nonsense – sequences of words which are meaningless because of the incompatible meanings of the words involved. In the case of such nonsense, the meaninglessness of the combination is to be traced to what Carnap calls 'a violation of *logical* syntax' or, alternatively, '*logically* counter-syntactic formation'. Such formations can be demonstrated to be *irremediably* flawed as vehicles for the expression of thought. Now how is this to be understood? This, too, admits of a weaker and a stronger reading. On the weaker reading, there are certain kinds of thought – logically incoherent thoughts – that cannot be expressed in a proper logical syntax. These thoughts have a logical structure, but the sort of structure that they have renders them incapable of being either true or false. They therefore belong to a logically defective species of thought. On the stronger reading, there are no logically incoherent thoughts – a logically incoherent 'thought' is not a kind of thought at all. Only that which can be represented in a proper logical syntax can be thought. What we (are tempted to) refer to as 'a logically incoherent thought' is really a form of words that gives merely apparent expression to a thought. Neither the weaker nor the stronger

reading taken by itself can suffice as a reading of Carnap's essay. Carnap wants to be able – needs to be able – to have it both ways. For further discussion of this point, see my 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*', in *Wittgenstein in America*, edited by Timothy McCarthy and Peter Winch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

48. Fege, *Posthumous Writings* (trans. P. Long and R. White (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979)), p. 130.

49. I am using the word 'show' here *not* in the sense which the *Tractatus* itself reserves for this term (which is not applicable to nonsense), but rather (as it is often used by proponents of the ineffability interpretation) to refer to the activity of 'hinting' or 'gesturing' at ineffable truths by means of nonsense. Some ineffability interpreters thus scrupulously avoid the term 'show' in this context and employ some locution such as 'convey' instead. (Hence when criticizing both sorts of commentators, I speak of 'showing' or 'conveying'.) Whenever I employ the word 'show' in this way, I will place it in scare quotes to indicate that I am here adopting the idiom of many of the commentators with whose work I wish to take issue. But I hereby invite confusion in two ways; so let me just say for now: that, in adopting this idiom, I do not take myself to be making any contact with the (actual) Tractarian notion of *zeigen*, and that any commentator who holds that the sentences of the *Tractatus* aspire to hint or gesture at ineffable truths counts, by my lights, as a proponent of the ineffability interpretation, even if they (unlike most proponents of the ineffability interpretation) are textually scrupulous enough carefully to refrain from ever employing the term 'showing' to designate the activity of so hinting or gesturing. It is worth noting how straightforwardly unfaithful to the text most ineffability interpreters are. Where most commentators on the *Tractatus* discern only one distinction, one needs to see that there are two different distinctions at work. The first distinction is drawn *within* the body of meaningful propositions. (Thus, according to this first sense, only meaningful propositions can *show*.) The second distinction marks off, from various ways of employing language, a particular way of employing (apparently meaningful) sentence-like structures – an employment which 'takes as its object' (what Wittgenstein calls in a letter to Ogden) 'philosophic matters'. (Thus, according to this second sense of 'show', nonsense can show.) The first of these distinctions is (at least terminologically) the more familiar and notorious of the two: it is (the one which gets called in the *Tractatus*) the distinction between saying and showing (or more precisely, in Tractarian jargon, the distinction between what a proposition says and what it shows). The second distinction, as it is actually developed within the work, is relatively neglected. It is a distinction between two different kinds of use of language: uses, in which a proposition states what is the case (or, in Tractarian jargon, represents a state of affairs) and elucidatory uses, in which an apparently fact-stating use of language (one which offers an appearance of representing a state of affairs) is revealed to be only apparently such. Contrary to the assumption implicit in most of the secondary literature on the book, the *Tractatus* itself scrupulously marks this distinction (between what I misleadingly refer to here as two senses of 'show') by reserving *zeigen* to refer only to the first notion and using *erläutern* to refer to the second. (Both of these notions are, in turn, to be distinguished from the confused hybrid notion of 'showing' which figures in some versions of the ineffability interpretation.) When such ineffability interpreters talk of what nonsense 'shows', they are not, contrary to what they suppose, employing a member of the pair of terms which figure in the Tractarian distinction between saying and showing.

50. 'Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein', op. cit., p. 54.

51. It is worth noting that Geach himself, who is one of most lucid exponents of this account of how nonsense is supposed to be able to convey insights into logical features of reality,

admits to having no idea at all how to extend such an account to include ethical insights and thereby salvage the parallel between logic and ethics to which Wittgenstein appears to attach such importance.

52. See, for example, Peter Hacker's explanation of why 'A is or is not an *object* cannot be said' in *Insight and Illusion*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1986), p. 21.

53. Donatelli is here breaking with an oft-repeated account of the fundamental difference between the thought of the early and the later Wittgenstein: that early Wittgenstein held language can only be put to *one* kind of use, whereas later Wittgenstein demolished his earlier doctrine by pointing out that language has a multiplicity of kinds of use. That there is something wrong with this account is evident already from the fact that it leaves no room for an understanding of the sort of employment of language in which the book as a whole engages in its effort to offer elucidations. A way to put what is sound in the oft-repeated account would be to say: for early Wittgenstein, non-constative kinds of use of language (1) come in a very restricted variety of flavours (most notably, logical, elucidatory and ethical), and (2) are not, properly speaking, employments of *language per se*, but rather employments of *language-like* structures; whereas for later Wittgenstein, the category of non-constative kinds of use (1) subtends many more kinds of use than ever dreamed of in the philosophy of early Wittgenstein (expressive uses of language, performative uses of language, and so on) and (2) represents not a mutually exclusive alternative to the constative employment of language but rather a pervasive dimension of all language use. When Donatelli describes ethical employments of language as a kind of *use*, he is allowing himself to describe a feature of Wittgenstein's early philosophy in the idiom of his later philosophy (with its correspondingly less restrictive conception of what counts as 'language'). I will follow him in employing the term 'use' in this exegetically slightly anachronistic manner. It is anachronistic, in that, strictly speaking, only cases in which we can recognize the symbol in the sign count for early Wittgenstein as cases of *Gebrauch* (§3.326), only propositional symbols can express thoughts (§§3.3–3.322), and language is the totality of such symbols (see §§4–4.001). We can express the distinction at issue here (between kinds of use of language) in the idiom of Wittgenstein's early philosophy by distinguishing kinds of employment of linguistic *signs* (as opposed to symbols).

54. Here is how Donatelli puts the version of the assumption which figures in discussions concerning ethics: it is 'the idea that finding an object morally significant is like being aware of one of its properties, … that a response to the sense of things is like a response to certain features of things' (p. 14).

55. I have placed the word 'proposition' here and elsewhere in scare quotes to highlight that there is a question about how it is to be understood in contexts in which what is at issue is a form of words that does not partake of the general form of proposition. There is a difficult issue here about to what extent tautologies and contradictions, which form the topic of §§6.1ff, can be thought of, according to the *Tractatus*, as partaking of the general form of the proposition. There is nothing in the characterization of the general form of the proposition offered in §6 that would seem to exclude tautologies and contradictions; indeed, that section, taken in isolation, seems to say that they *are* propositions. But if one goes by the characterization of the general form of the proposition offered in §4.5 ('The general form of the proposition is: such and such is the case'), they would seem to be excluded. This conclusion is reinforced, if one attends to the sections that lead up to it. See, for example, §4.462 ('Tautology and contradiction are not pictures of the reality.'), §4.466 ('Tautology and contradiction are the limiting cases of the combinations of symbols, namely their dissolution.'), and §4.4661 ('Of course the signs are also combined with one another in the tautology and contradiction,

i.e., they stand in relations to one another, but these relations are meaningless, unessential to the *symbol*'). These sections all appear to insist that only those symbols that meet the weightier conception of a proposition adumbrated in sections such as §4.023 (a proposition is such that 'one only needs to say 'Yes' or 'No' to it to make it agree with reality … a proposition is the description of a fact') partake of the general form of the proposition. For further discussion of this issue, see Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, pp. 192–3, and Michael Kremer, 'Mathematics and Meaning in the *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Investigations* 25 (2002), pp. 272–303, especially, pp. 273–5.

56. According to a widely accepted reading of the *Tractatus*, the so-called 'propositions' of logic represent a set of *a priori* 'conditions on the possibility of thought' – a set of *requirements* laid down in advance on what can and cannot be said. Yet it is, in fact, just such a Fregean/Russellian conception of the 'substantiality' of logic which is under indictment in the *Tractatus* on the grounds that (i) the so-called 'truths of logic' are not only not *prior* to, but rather parasitic on ordinary garden-variety truths, (ii) logic therefore cannot be abstracted from language so as to form a body of *independently* thinkable or assertable truths, (iii) the 'propositions' of logic (because they are void of content [*inhaltsleer*]) cannot be construed as forming a body of *truths* at all (let alone, as Frege and early Russell would have it, a body of maximally general truths), and (iv) (because they say nothing) they cannot *require* anything and hence cannot be construed as 'laws of thought', so (v) there is no (Fregean/Russellian) *science* of logic. For more about (iii)–(v), see my 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought' (*Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 115–80).

57. I here briefly take up again, as promised, Hacker's attempt to enlist the *Tractatus*'s discussion of mathematical propositions as support for the claim that the *Tractatus* must be employing a 'highly technical concept of sense'. As noted earlier, though the *Tractatus* never says that mathematical propositions are nonsense (*Unsinn*), it does say they are pseudo-propositions. Hacker's claim above (that the *Tractatus*'s discussion of mathematical propositions lends support to the claim that the book employs a highly technical concept of sense) may rest on the suppressed premise that anything that counts as a 'pseudo-proposition' is *a fortiori*, for the *Tractatus*, an instance of *Unsinn*. The logical positivists adopted both of these bits of terminology from the *Tractatus* and tended to use them interchangeably. This has given rise to the widespread assumption that they are interchangeable for the author of the *Tractatus* as well; and this may be what misleads Hacker. The term 'pseudo-proposition' here translates Wittgenstein's '*Scheinsatz*' or apparent proposition – or more precisely still: apparent propositional symbol. A proposition, in this demanding sense of the term, is either true or false. An apparent proposition is one that merely appears to say something true or false. Though all cases of philosophical *Unsinn* are merely apparent propositions, for the *Tractatus*, not all apparent propositions are nonsense. It depends upon whether or not they fit in, in one or another of a variety of possible ways, into the *Tractatus*'s overall conception of the nexus of sense, in being aids of one or another sort to the activities of description-making and inference that constitute the logical space in which *sinnvolle* propositions have their life. Mathematical equations, in particular, can look as if they are meant to say something true or false, and their appearance is in this respect, by the lights of the *Tractatus*, misleading. But, when Wittgenstein refers to equations as 'pseudo-propositions', this should not be taken to imply that they are therefore nonsensical, but rather should be taken to refer to the kind of use they have; see §§6.2–6.211. For further discussion, see Michael Kremer, 'Mathematics and Meaning in the *Tractatus*', pp. 272–303.

58. This is not to say that a language that lacks a distinct sign for a particular logical operation has all of the expressive resources available to a language that does possess such a sign.

59. *Language* [*Sprache*] is Wittgenstein's term for the totality of such propositional symbols; and *logical space* is his term for the resulting overall network of inferential relations within which each of these propositional symbols has its life. §§4–4.001 build on the notion of *Satz qua propositional symbol* developed in §§3.31ff: 'The thought is the *sinnvolle Satz*. The totality of *Sätze* is the language.' *Language [Sprache]* here, and elsewhere in the *Tractatus*, refers to the totality of *possible* propositional symbols. It becomes trivially true, if one buys into all of the metaphysics packed into this idiom, that *there is only one language* – though there are, of course, countless alternative systems of signs which may differ widely from one another in their respective expressive powers (and thus in how much and which aspects of *die Sprache* they are each able to express). It can thus come to seem, as it did to early Wittgenstein, that therefore *there is a pre-existing stock of thoughts* which is utterly independent of any particular means of representing thought. It is a central task of Wittgenstein's later philosophy to bring out the latent metaphysical commitments in this region of his early thought. Purging his thought of these metaphysical commitments requires a correlative reconception of the character of all those forms of discourse (including ethical discourse) that, by the *Tractatus*'s lights, do not partake of the general form of the proposition.

60. The ensuing exposition of this example only really works if we assume all the letters of the sentence to be capitalized so that we have no orthographic clues as to when the expression 'GREEN' is being used as the proper name and when as a concept-expression.

61. In order to count as *sinnvoll*, a *Satz* has to be able to serve as a vehicle of *communication*: it has to make a *statement* about how things are – it has to *assert* what is the case [*der sinnvolle Satz sagt etwas aus*] (§6.1264). Such a *Satz* is characterized by both a form [*Form*] and a content [*Inhalt*] (§3.31). A *Satz* which is *sinnlos* possesses a (logical) form but no content. (*Unsinn*, on the other hand, possesses neither a form nor a content.) For a *Satz* to be contentful [*gehaltvoll*] – to bear on how things are – there has to be room for a distinction between what would make it true and what would make it false. Its truth is determined by (consulting) whether things are in accordance with what it asserts. A *Satz* which is *sinnlos* does not make a claim on reality; it has no bearing on how things are. There is no need to consult how things stand in order to determine its truth-value – mere 'inspection of the sign' is sufficient to determine its truth-value. The *Tractatus* therefore distinguishes between the broader genus of *Sätze* (*sinnlos or sinnvoll*) characterized by a logical form (that is, in which we can recognize the symbol in the sign) and the narrower genus of (genuine [*eigentliche*]) *Sätze*. The latter sort of *Satz* asserts 'This is how things stand' ('*Es verhält sich so und so*') and thus is characterized by 'the general form of a proposition' (cf. §4.5) – where this latter phrase should be understood to mean: 'the general form of a *genuine* proposition'. In saying that a 'proposition' of logic is *sinnlos*, the *Tractatus* is identifying it as belonging to a degenerate species (or 'limiting case', cf. §4.466) of the genus *proposition* – it has the logical form of a proposition without its being *gehaltvoll* (§6.111): 'the representational relations it subtends cancel one another out, so that it does not stand in any representational relation to reality' (§4.462). What logic is, for the *Tractatus*, is *internal to* what it is to say something; and hence which *Sätze* are merely logical *Sätze* only shows itself [*zeigt sich*] *in* language – that is, in the meaningful employment we already make of (what the *Tractatus* calls) 'our everyday language' [*unsere Umgangssprache*]. As we shall see, there is a partial parallel here with ethics.

62. For further discussion of this last point, see my 'On Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics', *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Autumn, 1996), pp. 195–222.

63. What bearing do Wittgenstein's remarks on literary works have on understanding a philosophical work such as the *Tractatus*? In this question, we encounter a different

form of departmentalism – one that turns, now, on a sharp separation between the philosophical and the literary. It is equally alien to Wittgenstein. In the same letter to von Ficker in which he speaks of the ethical point of the work, he also says: 'The work is strictly philosophical and at the same literary' (op. cit.). Frege was notably alarmed by the stress that Wittgenstein was prepared to lay on the 'literary' aspect of the work. In response to the stress placed thereon in the Preface to the *Tractatus*, Frege writes Wittgenstein: 'The pleasure one is to have in reading your book can therefore not have its ground in the … content, but only in the form. … In this way the book becomes really more of an artistic than a scientific [*wissenschaftliche*] achievement; that which is said in it takes second place to how it is said.' Frege intends this as an objection, but Wittgenstein would not have regarded it as one. For the opposition that Frege insists upon here is foreign to Wittgenstein's understanding of how form and content should relate to one another in a fully realized work of philosophy. Frege would have been more puzzled still if he had come upon the following remark of Wittgenstein's: '*Ich glaube meine Stellung zur Philosophie dadurch zusammengefaßt zu haben, indem ich sagte: Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten.*' ('I believe I summed up where I stand in relation to philosophy when I said: philosophy really ought only to be *composed* in the way in which a work of literature is'; *Culture and Value*, p. 28 [I have amended the translation]). For Wittgenstein's remarks about Tolstoy, see Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 96, 98). It is worth noting that Wittgenstein's admiration for Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad* antedates the composition of the *Tractatus*, as evidenced by the comments in his letter to Russell from the summer of 1912 (see *Cambridge Letters*, ed. Brian McGuinness and Georg Henrik von Wright [Oxford: Blackwell, 1995], p. 20). For his remarks about Uhland's *Graf Eberhards Weissdorn*, see Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein. With a Memoir* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 7. For strikingly parallel remarks about how philosophical work should be written, see Wittgenstein's comments on the Vienna Circle manifesto ('What the Vienna school has achieved, it ought to *show* not *say*') quoted by Brian McGuinness on p. 18 of *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979). Cora Diamond has this to say about the kind of connection there is between the works by Tolstoy and Uhland that Wittgenstein admired and the *Tractatus* itself:

> In both the Tolstoy story and the Uhland poem, the ethical is, as Wittgenstein saw it, in a sense contained in the work, but not by being spoken in it, not by being told. The ethical character of the story and that of the poem depend on the absence in them of the explicitly ethical. This, though, is complicated; one cannot say simply that Tolstoy keeps his ethical views unsaid. The Tsar, in *Hadji Murad*, is presented with his vices etched very sharply indeed; and Tolstoy has his usual comments on the fashionable exposure of breasts. What Tolstoy does not tell us is how to think about Hadji Murad himself, his life and his death, or how to make what we think of Hadji Murad alive in our own lives. And in that respect the story resembles Uhland's poem. While Graf Eberhard is described as faithful and good, what we see in the poem itself is rather only the role in his life of the hawthorn. How to make that a reflection of a life is not said; what it might be to take that to heart is not said. Wittgenstein's reading of the story and the poem can be seen to be connected with the way he wanted his book to be read. What links his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with those two works of literature is the kind of demand that Wittgenstein places on readers: that they respond to what is not there by making of the work something that can be significant in the spirit in which they meet what happens, what needs to be done, and what has to be suffered.
>
>   ('Introduction' to 'Having a Rough Story What Moral Philosophy Is', p. 130)

64. This paragraph, again, draws on material from James Conant and Cora Diamond, 'On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely', where the point is developed at greater length.

65. This parallel has its limits. There are such things for the *Tractatus* as distinctively 'logical propositions', but these are only *sinnlos* (though lacking in sense, they are a species – albeit a degenerate one – of propositional symbol); whereas the only candidates for distinctively 'ethical propositions' that figure in the book are strings of signs that are *unsinnig* (and thus not a species of propositional symbol at all). To say of a *Satz* (a propositional sign) that it is *Unsinn* is to say that it is a mere sign: no determinate method of symbolizing has yet been conferred on it. Whereas to say of it that it is *sinnlos* is to affirm that a method of symbolizing has been conferred on it, but that the method of symbolizing in question fails to yield a proper proposition. A *Satz* that is *sinnlos* is unlike a genuine proposition (and like *Unsinn*), in that it fails to express a thought (it does not restrict reality to a yes or no and hence does not represent a state of affairs): it says *nothing*. Yet it is like a genuine proposition (and unlike *Unsinn*), in that we are able to recognize the symbol in the sign and hence are able to express it in a *Begriffsschrift* – it forms, as the *Tractatus* puts it, 'part of the symbolism' (§4.4611). There are no ethical propositions, for the *Tractatus*, which thus parallel the propositions of logic, in standing apart from the body of propositions that can be true or false and yet themselves are part of the symbolism.

66. Similarly, in order to understand what makes the *Tractatus*'s employment of propositional signs 'philosophical' – in the sense of 'philosophy' in which the *Tractatus* as a whole seeks to practice philosophy – requires understanding what is constitutive of the sort of elucidatory nexus of use which the *Tractatus* as a whole seeks to put into place between a reader (who understands the author of this work) and the sentences of the work.

67. This facet of the parallel between ethics and logic – the problematic character of the search for principles that can serve as an ultimate foundation for either inference or action – forms a central topic of Michael Kremer's essay 'The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense', cited above.

68. This is a good place to say a further word about the word 'proposition' in contexts such as this. As noted above, the term '*Satz*' in the *Tractatus* floats back and forth between meaning (1) a propositional symbol (as, for example, in §§3.3ff and §§4ff) and (2) a propositional sign (as, for example, in §§5.473 and §6.54). Often, when Wittgenstein wants to be clear as to which he means, he employs the unambiguous vocabulary of 'propositional sign' and 'propositional symbol'. But often he leaves the matter intentionally indeterminate. The indeterminacy at issue here is not one that could, in every case, be remedied or eliminated, say, by a conscientious translator. To think that it could is to misunderstand the strategy of the work as a whole. As noted before, it is important to the method of the *Tractatus* that the recognition that certain apparent cases of (1) are merely cases of (2) be a recognition that the reader achieve on his own. This is connected to the point of §6.54: the reader only understands the author of this work, when the reader himself eventually comes to recognize those of the author's sentences to which he himself is attracted as nonsense. This involves forms of logical, philosophical and ethical work.

69. I explore this topic in 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors' (in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, edited by D.Z. Phillips [NY: St. Martins Press, 1996] and my 'Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense' (in *Pursuits of Reason*, edited by Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam [Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1992, pp. 195–224]).

70. It is no accident that this remark about the happy or unhappy man's relation to the world equally aptly characterizes the reader's relation to Wittgenstein's book. We might put the

reason why this is so like this: A world – or a book – with its ethical aspect subtracted from it will not be a world – or a book – with a hole in it. If there is nothing ethical 'in' the world or the book, the ethical can come into view only through a shift in the character of our relation to the whole.

71. Sometimes the conception of the short-cut which commentators imagine such extracurricular reading will contribute is even more disheartening than this: not only are these passages by other authors taken to afford an understanding of the ethical point of the *Tractatus*, but these authors are taken to be just saying the things which Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, refrained from saying.

72. As Donatelli says: 'This means that what counts as an ethical problem cannot be taken for granted in advance but will be shown as the result of an understanding of what the book has to say about language and logic.'

73. This chapter is pervasively indebted to conversations with Cora Diamond over many years about every aspect of the *Tractatus*. It is also indebted to comments by Michael Kremer on an earlier draft.

Voices in Discussion

D.Z. Phillips

A: The best way to capture the contrast between what lies in the world and what is higher is to conceive it as a contrast between sense and nonsense. The heart of this reading lies, I believe, in focusing on cases which we might want to call illusions or appearances of sense. They are cases, for example, of transitions from confusion to clarity: cases in which we see what it means to envisage a sense where there isn't any. If the *Tractatus* is concerned to make its reader go through its propositions and then in the end recognize them as nonsensical, then the *Tractatus* is itself an example of an appreciation of this phenomenon. In order to appreciate this phenomenon we need a grasp of meaningful discourse and also a capacity to entertain the illusion that we perceive a sense where there is only nonsense, that is where we see that it is a confusion on our part to perceive a sense. There are two ways in which this situation can be missed.

1 What I have called ineffability readings of the *Tractatus* suggest a notion of an ineffable content. Ineffability readers want to say that this showing consists in the perception of a somewhat hidden sense which lies behind nonsense. But then we can see that if we employ this notion of an ineffable content we lose entirely the capacity to describe this showing, this coming into view of the mystical, as a transition from confusion to clarity, as a phenomenon of that kind.
2 But then the situation can be missed as well if we suppose that the phenomenon can be seen as a merely psychological state of the mind, as positivist readings of this work have suggested. What seems important to remark in this respect is that from the point of view of a merely psychological description there is nothing there to be seen. To be self-aware in one's illusion of sense is precisely to see what it means to feel the inclination to respond to a sense where there isn't any. Now this can only be done from a point of view which is internal to the illusory appearance of sense, from a perspective which is internal to the power of this illusion. Now these two opposite temptations regarding Wittgenstein's distinction between sense and nonsense have a bearing also on the reading of the ethical teaching of the *Tractatus*. Ineffability readings characterize the showing of value or the higher as the appearance of something out there even though it is a very special something. So their model is after all that of property ascription in ordinary descriptive discourse.

It might be useful in this respect to compare Wittgenstein's position to that expounded by Moore in the *Principia Ethica*. Moore is also reacting against a

naturalistic view of ethics which equates a judgement of value with an ordinary factual judgement. The way Moore does this has some resemblance with Wittgenstein. Moore writes that intrinsic value is different from anything which can be said to exist. His idea is that the property of goodness is not revealed by investigating the nature of an object or a state of affairs. When we say that pleasure *is* good we are not identifying goodness with pleasure, nor are we placing goodness alongside pleasure among natural features of the world. What we do is that we predicate of some pleasurable state of affairs that it possesses, besides this property of being pleasant, such a non-natural property of goodness. But Wittgenstein, on the contrary, says that value affects the world in a way that *alters our way of taking in things*. He uses a number of notions, like the 'World as a whole', the 'thing seen with the whole world as background', the 'bearer of the ethical'. All these notions are brought in in order to reject the idea that seeing value in a thing is like predicating a property of that thing. He says that we have to think of a change in our *attitude* toward the thing, and he tries to make this notion clear, and the correspondent notion of the kind of change brought about by value, by using pictures that connect value to logic. A change in our attitude is like a change in the way the world comes to be expressive. He had already explained the sense in which the world is expressive in the discussion on solipsism, and this was by showing how logic pervades the world, how the sense that there is an external point of view is an illusion. So he uses those pictures in this new context in order to say that the change introduced by value is like a change in the mode of expressibility of things.

Now this change is an illusion. There is no other expression than what *expression* is. But it is also important to realize that ethics is constituted by this kind of illusion. It is marked by the illusion of being able to see the world as from a different perspective. So one's change in attitude is meant to be understood as a change in the way the world is my world, a change in the mode of expression of things. Yet, at the same time, it is necessary that this is an illusion and that we are conscious of this. If it were not an illusion, we would be saying that there is indeed such a different mode of expression. But then whatever that meant it would amount once again to holding some kind of ineffability thesis: the idea that there is after all a way to see things from a perspective which logic does not really allow but which can be reached in a peculiar way. And this again will confuse things, because if there is such a perspective then there just *is* one. However indirect as you like it to be, it would nevertheless be a perspective, a mode of expression, and then the idea of having this kind of contrast with ordinary modes of expression would be lost: it would again be a mode of expression among others. So one possibility to misunderstand Wittgenstein's point in the *Tractatus* is to take the attitude towards the world as a whole as one conceptual attitude among others: to take it as the expression of a possible mode of expressibility. A second possibility, embraced by positivist readers of the *Tractatus*, is to take such an attitude as merely nonsensical and allow only a naturalistic description of it, that is, a description from a point of view that does not place it within the space of expression.

This is what Carnap and emotivist readers have done, apparently following the indications of the *Tractatus*. Carnap does not say, with ineffability readers, that *there is* a problem of ethics. Carnap seems to be following the *Tractatus* very closely when he argues as follows: either ethical propositions are a kind of descriptive

proposition, and therefore they are not ethical, or they are not descriptive propositions, but then they are nonsensical. Carnap's conclusion is that what this nonsense can do is to serve as 'the *expression of the general attitude of a person towards life*'. He is very clear in distinguishing his notion of attitude from any ineffability reading of it. So if value and metaphysics are defined as what 'transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive science', then value does not have any meaning, and metaphysics is confusing in that it wants to have both: transcendence of the empirical and meaning which only belongs to the empirical. The difficulty we have with Carnap is a difficulty internal to the understanding of the *Tractatus*. Carnap is actually repeating the argument from the *Tractatus* when he writes that value lies either in the world, and so is not really value, or it lies outside the world, but then it is nonsense. But this difficulty must be recognized: it is the central problem of the book. It takes the general shape of how we come to command a clear view of the difference between sense and nonsense, and how this requires a transition between confusion and understanding which can only be accounted from the point of view internal to nonsense in its being confused for sense. The *Tractatus* says in section 6.54 that he who has climbed up the book's sentences has to recognize them as nonsensical. If they were meaningful then there would be no philosophy in them. What philosophy consists in disappears in mere nonsense – and if you hold on to it, it is not philosophy but just confusion. In the same way runs the argument in section 6.41: if value were something expressed by a proposition, there would be no value; but seeing it as value consists in the capacity to recognize our intending *that* as valuable as merely nonsensical. In the rest of the chapter I am interested in exploring some difficulties in applying this notion of ethics and the higher. The main difficulty lies in seeing whether we are appealing to differences and contrasts which draw their force from the conceptual context in which they are placed, or whether they can be appreciated as instances of our imagining that we are emptying words of their meaning, as we might put the matter. I use here some examples drawn from Cora Diamond's treatment of Chesterton and Iris Murdoch. In the chapter I say that a thought like that of Chesterton, of the world appearing to him as 'wild and startling', can actually lead to different sorts of clarifications.

1   We might want to say first of all how a sense of things as wild and startling cannot be accounted on the standard non-cognitivist model of a double contribution from description and evaluation. A criticism that Professor Diamond makes goes against this separation. She says that concepts figuring centrally in Chesterton's view of life are not applied via descriptive criteria to certain sorts of situations. What comes to be touched by the relevance of a moral concept, the features in the world on which a concept sheds its light, cannot be selected in advance or independently from the moral force of a concept. There is no neutral knowledge of reality onto which the moral significance of a concept is laid down.

   Now this criticism of the notion of a moral concept cannot be put on the side of the *Tractatus*. There is a sense in which the *Tractatus* brings into view this kind of criticism, as it shows what is misleading in the idea of there being two separate fixed contributions (one from the realm of facts and the other from the realm of values) which combine in a moral judgement. But insofar as this is a

criticism addressed at showing the nature of concepts, it cannot be the teaching of the *Tractatus*, which is directed instead at showing how moral uses of language require, as it were, that we intentionally empty our concepts of their meaning (that we imagine that we are doing that).

2   There is another criticism that is elaborated from Chesterton's view. When Professor Diamond writes that concepts, like Chesterton's notion of life, are not applied to situations through descriptive criteria, she is not just opposing description to evaluation, but she is also opposing description to other sorts of activities, to all those activities which constitute the life-with-such-concepts. So she wants to say that the way a moral concept changes the moral life of people does not just show in the way in which they react to things (criticism of non-cognitivism) or in the way they group things together under a concept (criticism of the descriptive stance) but in their entire life. So in a way *anything* can show a moral view of things.

   Diamond uses this example from Chesterton as part of an argument for what she calls the 'ubiquity of value'. But now our problem is to understand how this ubiquity of value connects to concept uses. It is here that I try to differentiate *two* sorts of answers.

2A *One* answer says that concepts *can* play this role, that concepts can influence our life in such a way. This ubiquity of moral vision can be explained by a use of concepts that ties them both to an entire host of activities *and* to our personal understanding and application of these activities into our life. So there are moral notions that can be understood only as shaping life entirely: it cannot be seen that they respond to special features, rather they are connected to the *reality* to which they respond in a different way.

2B We can try then to identify a different sense according to which the ubiquity of ethics can be accounted. In order to do this I go back to Chesterton and I suggest a comparison with Cavell. Chesterton presents a view of life according to which things are seen as if they were the product of magic. I mention then Stanley Cavell's treatment of the notion of the fantastic. Cavell discusses Freud's notion of the 'uncanny' and shows as well how this notion is connected to the experience of the fantastic. He writes that the experience of the fantastic depends upon a 'hesitation between the empirical and the supernatural'. If the hesitation is resolved in either direction, the fantastic disappears. So my suggestion is to think that, according to an *alternative* reading of Chesterton, such hesitation could be taken to be constitutive of the experience of magic in Chesterton's view. According to this line of reading, the sense in which the world is seen as 'wild and startling' is not expressive of a concept but of a hesitation in our intention of speech which shows an ambivalent attachment. We want to see things both as part of the natural world and as being cut off from such a world, seen in their own right. So what enables us to fix this special sense of things appearing as wild and startling is our capacity to entertain a sense which can be envisaged only as the imagined possibility of doing something which is in fact senseless: seeing things in a way that cuts off the context that allows us to identify those things as being *those* things (that cuts off the context that allows us to confer a meaning to those words).

B: I think A's paper is the most searching examination of ethics in the *Tractatus* that I have seen. What is Wittgenstein doing in the last sections of this book? To answer this question we need to see how the *Tractatus* works as a whole. What did he mean by saying that the whole book has an ethical point?

Let us examine some widespread exegetical assumptions that are made. People take sides on how 6.54 is to be understood: 'My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)' If Wittgenstein really wants to regard these propositions as nonsense, it might be asked how that can throw light on anything. How are we to determine what is and what is not nonsense?

We have to realize that Wittgenstein is opposing Frege's view of the distinction between sense and nonsense. According to Frege, there are two kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense (where what is said is unintelligible) and substantive nonsense, where the constituent parts of the proposition make sense, but they are being combined in an illegitimate way. The former kind of nonsense has no syntax, whereas the latter violates logical syntax.

On what Cora Diamond and I have called 'the austere view' of nonsense, there is no such thing as substantive nonsense. To read Wittgenstein's treatment of ethics in the *Tractatus* in this way is to mistake the target of Wittgenstein's criticism for its topic.

Those who see 'the ethical' as nonsense, and those who see it as 'ineffable', are vehemently opposed to each other, but they are as one in their view of what logic is and so cannot see the point of the ethical.

Turning to ethics specifically, one could ask: which part of the *Tractatus* is its ethical part? It is said that there are features of reality which cannot be said, but can only be shown, and among these we find ethics, with the additional characteristic that you can't talk about it. Are we to say that in the 'Lecture on Ethics' we are confronted with forms of words which are nonsensical? What does that mean? Are they supposed to have an internal structure which violates the syntax of logic?

A deals with the assumption that early Wittgenstein can only state 'what is the case' whereas the later Wittgenstein becomes concerned with 'use'. Wittgenstein is *already* concerned with use in the *Tractatus*. He is asking us to recognize that the ethical cannot be recognized simply by looking at the structure of sentences. How is that view supposed to work?

What most commentators say is that if we want to say 'a is good' is to say something about reality, why is it that the property 'goodness' is not found there?

What is an ethical use of language? *Any* form of words can become an ethical attitude. As A says, 'The sign for the ethical is *any* sign'.

In the *Tractatus* we have to distinguish those parts in which Wittgenstein talks about 'ethics' and which parts are ethical. It may be said that although ethics cannot be expressed, we can still locate which parts of the book deal with the ethical.

We need to give up this view. If the *Tractatus* is to contain what we call a language of ethics it is not confined to 'the ethical'. We must see the ethical point in the whole of the work. We must throw away the whole ladder; we can't take the top rung home.

So the treatment of the ethical is meant to be part of the same self-understanding

which comes about through the treatment of sense and nonsense. The *Tractatus as a whole* has an ethical point. But what makes it ethical is its point, not its subject matter. When Wittgenstein speaks of a way of looking at the world as a whole, such an expression is itself an instance of ethical ways of talking. And it is nonsense to express the ethical point in a proposition which is said to be nonsensical itself. What makes it ethics for early Wittgenstein is its point. In referring to 'seeing the world as a whole' he is pointing out that the ethical seeks to change us in certain ways.

People who think that only part of the *Tractatus* has to do with the ethical bring a certain conception of ethics to the work. So we must distinguish between 'ethics' and ethics without quotation marks.

What makes a proposition ethical is not 'ethics', any more than what makes a proposition language is 'logic'. Neither is a proper subject of discourse. So while parts of the *Tractatus* deal with 'ethics', all parts of the work are ethical. And you can only see this by working through his treatment of propositions. You can't by-pass this and leap up to the top of the ladder to 'ethics'. You must climb, but, in the end, the whole ladder is thrown away.

A: Some will say that the point of view B and I have advanced is guilty of bringing too much of the later Wittgenstein to bear on our reading of the *Tractatus*. But the notions of 'use' and 'elucidation' are already there, such that if you understand what he means by 'nonsense' you will not need the way of thinking that reveals any more. And he is trying to do the same for ethics there. The goal of the *Tractatus* is to bring out what the ethical dimension is like, what kind of point it has. And seeing what 'nonsense' amounts to here shows that.

C: Taking up the point that many feel you are importing later Wittgenstein into the *Tractatus*, you do owe some account of what 'development' could mean in his views on ethics. If he has already hit the nail on the head in the *Tractatus*, what can 'development' mean?

A: I think the answer is that, having shown where nonsense resides in the early work, later he is far more concerned to unearth the roots of the tendencies which make us want to embrace this nonsense. So his examples are far more varied and particular.

B: Also consider Rhees, whom A quotes when he says, 'What had kept ethics, i.e. absolute value, and the world of facts apart, had been his idea of the strict logical form of what can be said. When he saw the confusions in this, it was possible to look at the ways in which people do speak of 'good' and 'bad' in the course of their lives'.

One does not want to deny that there is metaphysical traffic in the *Tractatus*, for example, the desire to determine the general form of the proposition. Logic is given precedence as that which determines the kind of sense language can have, whereas later you have to look at the language games we do play to see the kind of sense they have.

D: You say that the *Tractatus* has an ethical point. Well, what is it? Surely not that philosophy is being done in a certain way? What if someone said that the point of the work is religious or aesthetic?

B: It really does look as though something's gone wrong. I say that something can only be shown, not said, and then I go on to tell you what that something is.

But then what we need is to see the connection between clarity and the ethical.

This struggle to get clear about things involves the will. One is not saying something simply about the force of an argument. The clarity brings about a change in oneself.

We want to be good people; but we end up saying something *about* it.

Wittgenstein is talking about an ethical point here, but not about religion. So the ethical, as a kind of passion for clarity, runs through the whole in a way in which the religious or aesthetic does not.

E: A makes use of Chesterton and Iris Murdoch in explicating the ethical. Reference is made to our attitudes, moral propensities, or 'responsiveness to life', but can we say anything about 'these things' apart from the mode of attention? If you can, haven't you slipped to what you want to avoid, namely, that kind of bifurcation of facts and values? You are attempting to say that ethics is an attitude to the world. But then what do you take 'the world' to be? Ethics is constitutive of how the world is for us.

A: I wanted to avoid the choice forced on me between descriptivist or non-cognitive views of moral values. I want to use Cora Diamond's useful notion of 'our life with concepts'. This life will show itself in your attitude to other people. So the concepts will be shown to have practical import and importance in everything we do. But the *Tractatus* does not do that. It is not its point. What you see there is that any sign can be an ethical sign.