

# **The Mystical in Wittgenstein's Early Writings**

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## 9 Nonsense and Two Interpretations of the *Tractatus*

Russell states in his Introduction to the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein “manages to say a great deal about what cannot be said” (p. 22). Russell has in mind here the final two passages of the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein says that the propositions of his book serve as elucidations, that one who understands his thoughts in the text will recognize them as nonsense (6.54) at which point one will pass over what cannot be said in silence (7). Russell’s concern is that Wittgenstein uses silence as a loophole through the hierarchy of languages, that is, the theory of types we examined in Chapter 4. His second concern is that Wittgenstein takes whole subjects, ethics for example, and places them in a mystical and inexpressible region, yet is capable of expressing his ethical opinions. If Russell’s comments are correct, a second problem for Wittgenstein is that he appears to present a doctrine, while claiming at 4.112 that philosophy is not a doctrine. In the same passage, he states that philosophy is an activity. Wittgenstein intends to engage the reader in an activity that will bring him to the realization that philosophical propositions only add confusion to the problems of philosophy. However, by transcending the propositions that lure one into philosophical discourse, including the propositions of the text, one will come to see the world aright (6.54). In coming to see the world in this way we discover the meaning and significance of Wittgenstein’s claim that what cannot be spoken about must be passed over in silence (7).

In previous chapters we employed a working definition of nonsense in order to express by words what cannot be put into words. The basis of this definition was that while sense includes all propositions that correspond to reality, nonsense are those propositions that do not, such as metaphysical statements. However, if we define sense as what corresponds to reality, we have sense in terms of propositions (*Wirklichkeit*) and sense that cannot be expressed in words (*Realität*). In this chapter we shall work to achieve a sharper definition of these distinctions by considering the debate surrounding the meaning of 6.54 and 7 among Wittgenstein scholars. I shall argue that the nature of this discussion has fallen into two camps. On one hand there is a school of thought that takes a metaphysical interpretation of these passages. The proponents of this school feel that the passages on

nonsense suggest there is something that lies outside language. The two thinkers I shall consider who support this view are G. E. M. Anscombe and P. M. S. Hacker. Opposing the metaphysical view are Cora Diamond and James Conant who take the passages on nonsense literally. They reject the notion that there is any form of metaphysics present in the *Tractatus*. Although both views offer important insights into understanding Wittgenstein's thoughts in the *Tractatus*, the purpose of this chapter is to show that each provides an incomplete picture of Wittgenstein's views. In both camps there is the question of what can be taken away from the text. In other words, when the ladder has been climbed (6.54) is there something metaphysical to be seen, as the metaphysical interpretation would argue, or do we simply toss away the ladder to be left with meaningless nonsense? I shall reject both of these views. With regard to the question, "What can be taken away from the text?" it must be clear that we cannot take away a doctrine of any kind. The fact that Wittgenstein rejects the notion that philosophy contains doctrines undermines a metaphysical reading of the text, but I shall argue this does not mean that we are left with a meaningless vacuum. Rather, my position will be that the passages on the mystical do not support either view of the *Tractatus*. I shall conclude that the aim of the text, (to set limits to the expressions of thought, (Preface)) reaches its conclusion at 6.54 with the passage that states when the ladder has been climbed and the propositions of the text have been transcended one sees the world aright. I shall argue that when one sees the propositions of the text as nonsense and transcends them, one sees the world as a limited whole. This perception is the mystical (6.45).

The centre of debate in this chapter will be two points of interpretation. The first is whether there is something metaphysical outside either the world or language. The passages that suggest this view are found at 6.41 and 6.522. At 6.41 Wittgenstein states, "The sense of the world must lie outside the world" and at 6.522 he claims, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*." The second point of debate concerns the interpretation of Wittgenstein's use of the word "nonsense" as found at 6.54, "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical". At issue in these passages is whether there is something significant that lies outside what can be said. We begin with two accounts of a metaphysical interpretation of the *Tractatus*.

### G. E. M. ANSCOMBE'S METAPHYSICAL READING OF THE *TRACTATUS*

I shall take the use of the term "metaphysical reading" to mean that certain passages in the *Tractatus* are interpreted in such a way as to suggest that there exists a transcendental reality outside the world. Inherent in the

nature of this view is the belief in a two-worlds picture of reality; that is, there exists the world of propositions and facts and the world of the transcendental. Proponents of a metaphysical reading of the *Tractatus* cite 6.41 and 6.522 to support their claim. A literal reading of these passages seems to support their view. Let us begin with Anscombe and the passage at 6.41.

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value.

If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental.

What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental.

It must lie outside the world.

In *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (IWT, 170) G. E. M. Anscombe links the passage at 6.41 with 6.432, "God does not reveal himself in the world". Her point is that God is not in the world of accidental things. Following Wittgenstein's thoughts on the picture theory, she claims that if a proposition and its negation are both possible, that whatever is the case is accidental. She then asks, if what is the case is accidental, why does Wittgenstein mention the non-accidental (IWT, 171)? The answer to this question, she claims, lies with understanding what Wittgenstein says about the will. She believes that the most important remark he makes on this point is found at 6.4321: "The facts all contribute to setting the problem, not to its solution". Her argument is that facts do not contribute to the solution because they are concerned with "good and evil and the good or evil character of what is good or evil" (ibid.). The good and evil character of what is good or evil, she states, is non-accidental, and doing so links ethics to God. It is important to note the distinction she makes between good and evil and the good or evil character of good or evil because it indicates that a metaphysical interpretation lies behind her comment. That is, Anscombe sees good and evil acts separate from the nature of good and evil from which they are products. This separation implies a metaphysics that we find in her discussion on the transcendental, or "transcendentals" as she refers to them. Although she does not provide us with a definition of the transcendental, she includes logic, ethics, aesthetics and the mysticism. (IWT, 172–173).

Let us begin with Anscombe's use of the term "mysticism". In Wittgenstein's three references to the mystical in the *Tractatus* he never uses the term "mysticism". Anscombe's mistaken use of the word 'mysticism' in place of Wittgenstein's term 'the mystical' implies that he is referring to a body of beliefs held by mystics. Moreover, the use of the term 'mysticism' is not consistent with the text, especially at 4.112 where Wittgenstein

states that philosophy is not a doctrine. A second unusual term she uses is “transcendentals”. The plural form of transcendental implies that something exists outside language, owing to the fact that what exists outside can be counted. However, this is not the case. If we take what is referred to in the *Tractatus* as being outside language, there is nothing that can be said about it. It cannot be expressed in words, even to say that it is singular, plural or that it exists.

Anscombe's intention to draw a connection between the transcendental and logic is to show that the propositions of logic “shew something that pervades everything sayable and is itself unsayable” (IWT, 166). However, her confusing the statement that “Logic is transcendental” (6.13) with propositions of logic, which represent the scaffolding of the world (6.124), suggests she believes the *Tractatus* contains a doctrine. Contrary to Anscombe's view, logic is not a doctrine but a “mirror-image of the world” (6.13). Wittgenstein's point at 6.124 is that propositions of logic describe the limits of the world, which are mirrored in logic. Anscombe's suggestion that logic is transcendental suggests that logic has a metaphysical quality; that is, it shows something common to everything that is sayable.

We turn now to Anscombe's thoughts on the will and ethics. She states that Wittgenstein claims the subject of ethics is the will, which is independent of the world. Good and bad acts of the will, she adds, alter the limits of the world, not the facts. Wittgenstein stresses one cannot talk about the will as the subject of ethical attributes. However, Anscombe believes that this part of the *Tractatus* is clearly wrong (IWT, 171). She believes that actions can be predicated as either good or bad (IWT, 172). However, she misses Wittgenstein's point that the will is outside the world and language (6.373). The “I” that is the subject of the will is transcendental. It is outside and cannot be known as one knows the objects one confronts, including one's body and psychological self (NB, 80). Wittgenstein states that one cannot “speak about the will in so far as it is the subject of ethical attributes” (6.432). In the same vein one cannot talk about the transcendental. At 6.42 Wittgenstein states that the transcendental cannot be put into words. I think we must take this claim at face value; there is nothing that can be said about the transcendental, not even to say that it exists. At 6.53 we read that the correct method of philosophy is to say nothing but what can be said. These propositions tell us how the world is. They are the propositions of natural science. However, philosophy has nothing to do with natural science (ibid.). The passage at 6.53 continues to state that if anyone wanted to say anything metaphysical, that it should be shown to him that such propositions do not give a meaning to certain signs. That is, such signs fail to correspond to reality. Signs that try to say something about what cannot be said are what Wittgenstein refers to as nonsensical. We will now consider two interpretations of nonsense, beginning with P.M.S. Hacker's opinion that the references to nonsense refer to illuminating nonsense.

P. M. S. HACKER'S METAPHYSICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF THE *TRACTATUS*

While the claim at 6.41 does not support a metaphysical reading of the *Tractatus*, a literal reading of 6.522 (There are things that cannot be put into words that show themselves) presents a stronger claim for this view. This is Hacker's position in his essay "Was He Trying To Whistle It" (in Cary and Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein*, NW). In this essay he offers a two-worlds interpretation of the *Tractatus* in which one world is what cannot be put into words and the other is what shows itself. Hacker claims that the passage at 6.522 is "a leitmotif running through the whole of the *Tractatus*" (NW, 353). He cites Wittgenstein's Preface as the starting point for his two-worlds interpretation of the *Tractatus*: "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence". In addition to these opening remarks to the *Tractatus*, Hacker refers to the closing passage that states the following: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (7). His point is that the limits of language are such that there are things of which we can speak and a world of things of which we cannot speak. Corresponding to these two worlds are the truths of which we can speak and the "numerous truths that seemingly cannot be stated, but nevertheless are apparently asserted in the course of the *Tractatus*" (NW, 353). Hacker's arguments hinge on the fact that the *Tractatus* presents us with a two-worlds view of knowledge and reality. He understands this two-worlds view in terms of a harmony between representation and what is represented. He attributes a Leibnizian (pre-established harmony) strain of thought to Wittgenstein's notion of representation and what is represented (*ibid.*). However, I shall argue that this two-worlds view of the *Tractatus* is not consistent with Wittgenstein's views on what is outside the world. Moreover, Hacker neglects to mention that the passage at 6.522 states that what shows itself is the mystical. It is this mystical reading that I shall offer in place of Hacker's metaphysical interpretation.

METAPHYSICS AND NONSENSE

I shall consider three objections to Hacker's two-worlds view. First, what lies outside of language cannot be said to exist. Second, at 6.4312 Wittgenstein states that the solution to the riddle of life lies outside space and time. Third, at 6.44 Wittgenstein draws a distinction between "how the world is" and "that that is".

The objection I shall present to Hacker's metaphysical interpretation of the *Tractatus* stems from the Preface: "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what cannot be said and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence". Hacker draws from this passage that the "very nature of language" is such that there are things that cannot be stated or

described but are “in some sense shown by language” (NW, 353). From this interpretation he believes that the *Tractatus* contains truths that cannot be stated but are asserted throughout the book. In other words Hacker links “things” that cannot be said with “truths” found in the *Tractatus*. In Hacker’s view the *Tractatus* contains truths that are found in language and truths that cannot be said. While Hacker’s interpretation seems to be consistent with 6.522, he fails to acknowledge that the *Tractatus* does not contain truths. At 4.112 Wittgenstein states that philosophy is not a doctrine. In other words the book does not contain anything that can be said to hold true. Hacker is correct to say that the aim of the book is to say clearly what can be said and what cannot be said must be passed over in silence. However, we must take what cannot be said literally. The notion that there are truths that can be said and truths that cannot be said is a notion that exists in language. The distinction between what can and cannot be said is also a notion that exists only in language. The same applies to Hacker’s reference that there are things that cannot be said. The notion of a thing is a thing in language. From the viewpoint that nothing can be said, there are neither truths nor things. The discussion falls silent. However, for Hacker even the topic of nonsense does not fall silent, as we shall now consider.

## NONSENSE

The next point to be discussed from Hacker’s interpretation of the *Tractatus* is 6.54, in particular the question of nonsense. The entire passage reads as follows.

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).

Along with Hacker’s two-worlds view of the *Tractatus*, we find a similar distinction in his beliefs on the two types of nonsense he thinks can be found in the text. In *Insight and Illusion* (I&I) Hacker refers to the two types of nonsense as illuminating and misleading. The purpose of illuminating nonsense is to “guide the attentive hearer or reader to apprehend what is shown by other propositions which do not purport to be philosophical; moreover, it will intimate to those who grasp what is meant, its own illegitimacy” (I&I, 18). In contrast, misleading nonsense is the result of saying things that can only be shown (I&I, 19). Hacker stresses the first part of 6.54, where Wittgenstein states that his propositions serve as elucidations. He believes that although many of the propositions in the *Tractatus* are nonsense, they serve to elucidate the logical structure of language in order that one can see “the illegitimacy of the pseudo-propositions of

the *Tractatus*” (I&I, 30). Here Hacker points out that although illuminating nonsense says nothing about the world, it can reveal certain qualities of logic that cannot be shown otherwise. On the other hand, meaningless nonsense refers to propositions that do not say anything. In Hacker’s view, if we are not to see the *Tractatus* as a body of absurd or foolish statements, we must understand the propositions of the text in the sense of the former, illuminating nonsense. We now turn to the objection to Hacker’s views on illumination nonsense as found in Cora Diamond’s thoughts on Wittgenstein’s notion of nonsense.

## CORA DIAMOND

Cora Diamond refers to the notion of illuminating nonsense or some feature of reality that cannot be put into words as “chickening out” (*The Realistic Spirit*, RS, 181). Diamond argues that the passages in the *Tractatus* on nonsense should be read literally. She objects to Hacker by maintaining that we should take Wittgenstein at his word when he states that there is no deeper or dual meaning to nonsense; rather, it is nonsense and nothing else. She maintains that the meaning of the passage at 6.54 is unequivocal in stating that after one has thrown away the ladder there is no truth to be gained.

If you read the *Tractatus* this way, you think that, after the ladder is thrown away, you are left holding on to some truths about reality, while at the same time denying that you are actually *saying* anything about reality. (RS, 182)

Diamond emphasizes the word “saying” in this quotation to stress that the distinction between showing and saying does not say anything about what can only be shown. To read the *Tractatus* in the spirit of not chickening out is to abandon all attempts to “take seriously the language of ‘features of reality’” (RS, 181). Diamond argues that for Wittgenstein, philosophical talk is useful at times, but it is “in the end to be let go of and honestly taken to be real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to an ineffable truth” (ibid.). Diamond adds that a false notion of the “it” of metaphysics finds its way into the language when one wants to use syntactical structures in the form of “A is a such-and such”. Syntactical constructions of this kind falsely lead one to think in terms of two possibilities: “it is sayable, it is not sayable” (RS, 198). The dissolution of this contrast of expressions leaves one with the sentence structure “A is an object” meaning nothing at all. To grasp what one wants to say means that it shows itself in language. To show itself in this way “is to cease to think of it as an inexpressible content: that which you were trying to say” (ibid.).

Diamond rejects both the kind of thinking that we find in Hacker that sees nonsense in terms of meaningless and illuminating nonsense, and the positivist's interpretation of nonsense that imposes severe limitations on meaning. This positivist's view we find in Carnap who argues that all propositions are analytic, but what is not analytic cannot be asserted in a meaningful sentence ("The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language", in *Logical Positivism*, LP, 76–77). In Carnap's view, all statements that are included in what he refers to as the normative sciences, (ethics and aesthetics) must be based on empirical criteria. This means that there are no normative sciences for Carnap because such statements are not "factual judgments", but "value judgments", which contain predicates such as "good" or "beautiful". This latter group of judgements he refers to as "pseudo-statements" (LP, 77). In his opinion, what this leaves for philosophy is the method of logical analysis (*ibid.*). In a negative sense this method eliminates meaningless words and pseudo-statements. In a positive sense it lays the foundation "for factual science and for mathematics" (*ibid.*). Diamond's strategy around these two interpretations is to emphasize the passage at 6.54: "*anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical*" (*italics mine*). I have emphasized the phrase "anyone who understands me" to bring us to Diamond's point that in order to understand 6.53 and 6.54 we must see it in terms of the method of his book. This method, she argues, is to demand of the reader that he or she understand Wittgenstein: "You are to understand not the propositions but the author" (NW, 155). Diamond sees the *Tractatus* as a book that moves from a strictly correct method to an understanding of those who utter nonsense. She claims that to come to an understanding of nonsense the book demands the same pattern of movement from the reader (NW, 156). We are now forced to understand the author as opposed to understanding his words or thoughts. The key to this shift in philosophical perspective requires that we engage in a "kind of imaginative activity" that supposes that the readers exercise a capacity "to enter into taking sense for nonsense" (NW, 157). Diamond seems to have an imagination of particular use in mind, which she describes as follows.

If I could not as it were see your nonsense as sense, imaginatively let myself feel its attractiveness, I could not understand you. (NW, 158)

She feels one must enter into the illusion of the text by the imagination. Seeing the nonsense as an illusion, one sees the meaning of the book and perceives the world correctly. However, to enter into the text in this way means to see there is no definite metaphysical "it" in the form of a proposition to be gained. Her understanding of the *Tractatus* is that it frames propositions in such a way that when the reader enters the illusion he or she comes to an understanding of the propositions that attracted him or her into philosophy, and is shown that these problems of philosophy are nonsense. This

activity shows the way out from the original attraction to the propositions of philosophy. According to Diamond, self-understanding marks the point where one is no longer attracted by philosophy, “by their no longer coming out with unframed philosophical nonsense.” (NW, 160)

By providing us with a view of the *Tractatus* that is consistent with the aim of the book, to draw limits to the expressions of thought, Diamond successfully navigates around the positivist’s view that nonsense is simply meaningless statements and the metaphysical view of illuminating nonsense. By showing that the propositions in the text are nonsense, in a therapeutic way, she shows that Wittgenstein’s intention is to show the reader the way out from the language that attracted him or her to philosophy. With this strategy she meets Hacker’s objection to the positivist’s view of nonsense that asks why Wittgenstein would trouble himself to write a book that was merely without meaning. At the same time as she answers Hacker and other similar metaphysical readings to the text, she meets the positivist’s interpretation without falling into a metaphysical view of the text. Moreover, she remains consistent to the aim of the *Tractatus* by stating that in entering into the illusion, one discovers the limits of thought and how it allures one into the propositions of philosophy.

## OBJECTION TO DIAMOND’S VIEW

Despite the appeal of Diamond’s views in manoeuvring around the positivist and metaphysical readings of the notion of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, she fails to account for passages on the mystical. Moreover, connected to Wittgenstein’s thoughts on the mystical are the passages on the solipsistic self and realism that are not consistent with Diamond’s thoughts on entering into the illusion that is the world of the *Tractatus*. Both these points will be the subject of the following discussion.

While Diamond is correct in arguing that Wittgenstein seeks to set us free from our desire to seek an “it” in philosophical discourse, she fails to recognize that the aim is not merely to put an end to metaphysical discourse, but to view the world from the outside, *sub specie aeterni*. At 6.44 Wittgenstein states that the mystical is not *how* the world is, but *that* it is. Diamond’s account satisfies the first part. That is, through the elimination of the desire to seek the “it” in philosophical discourse, she shows that there is nothing outside the world. This applies to metaphysics, as she demonstrates, and it applies to the mystical. In terms of 6.44, it is consistent with Diamond’s view that the mystical is not *how* the world is. However, her account of the *Tractatus* does not consider “*that* the world is”. The importance of “*that* the world is” is found in light of 4.115: “[Philosophy] will signify what cannot be said, by presenting clearly what can be said”. To restate the objection to Diamond’s view I am suggesting in light of 4.115, while she succeeds in signifying what cannot be said, she does not

acknowledge what philosophy will signify when it has accomplished this. We find that what is signified when what can be said is clearly presented is what cannot be put into words. In light of our discussion in previous chapters, what cannot be put into words refers to “*that* the world is”. As we considered in the chapter on the eternal, the present was shown to be what cannot be expressed in words. Moreover, the discussions on the solipsistic self showed that what the solipsistic self means is correct, but it cannot be expressed in words; rather, it shows itself as my world. As we demonstrated in this discussion, the solipsistic self is co-ordinated with *Realität*, which also cannot be put into words. Finally, at 6.522 Wittgenstein states that the mystical is what cannot be put into words, but shows itself. The correlation between the present and *Realität* is that both are the immediate world that is, or to restate it in light of 6.44, that the world is, which is the mystical.

If we take Wittgenstein at his word at 6.54, we do not find the illusion that must be entered, as Diamond claims. Wittgenstein says that his propositions serve as elucidations. Following his claim from his Preface that the book deals with the problems of philosophy, we can say that his propositions are intended to shed light on those problems by showing that they disappear. At 6.41 we learn that the sense of the world lies outside the world; that is, there is no science of ethics. Not only are the answers we seek to philosophical problems outside the world, but “when the answers cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words” (6.5), because neither can be framed as a proposition. In terms of language, the problem does not exist (*ibid.*). Yet, Wittgenstein seems to be saying that there is an unspoken insight at his penultimate statement where he states that his propositions serve as elucidations to a question that cannot be put into words. Diamond believes that Wittgenstein’s statement “anyone who understands me” means one must enter into the world of nonsense. However, I argue that if we take this statement literally, he means that anyone who understands what I mean by these propositions will see that they are nonsensical. There is no need to introduce the notion of entering into a world of nonsense in order to understand Wittgenstein’s comments that his propositions are nonsensical. Rather, his comments on the propositions follow from the aim of the text to draw limits to the expressions of thought. That is, his propositions are nonsensical in that any attempt through the use of language to formulate the problems of philosophy or attempt to answer a malformed question will result in nonsense. Although both Hacker and Diamond agree on this point, I believe we need to understand it in light of Wittgenstein’s thoughts on philosophy. Philosophy, he states, is not a doctrine, but a method, because to formulate a problem or an answer in terms of language would give rise to a doctrine. The method is designed to limit propositions to only those that correspond to facts. As we discussed above, propositions have nothing to do with the solution to the problems of philosophy. Yet at 6.41 we find that the sense of the world lies outside the world. At issue here is that neither the question nor the answer can be put

into words (6.5). At 6.52 he tells us that even if all the problems that can be formulated into propositions (i.e. scientific questions) are answered, the problem of life remains. Here we find two errors in Diamond's thoughts.

First, if by entering into the illusion we are rid of the desire that brought us to philosophy and we realize that all philosophical propositions are non-sensical, we are still left with the problem of life. It is true that Wittgenstein states that the answer to the problem of life is that there is no question (6.52). However, he states that this solution "is seen in the vanishing of the problem" (6.521), because it cannot be put into words. That is, those that have discovered this sense of life in the vanishing of the problem find that they are "unable to say what constituted that sense" (ibid.). If the solution to the problem of life is the vanishing of the problem because neither the answer nor the question can be put into words, we must ask what else Wittgenstein means by what cannot be put into words. This brings us to our second point.

As we discussed throughout this project, what cannot be expressed in words is not limited to propositions that lack sense, (because they do not correspond to reality), but includes objects, the solipsistic self, *Realität*, the ethical and the mystical cannot be put into words. We shall now apply this knowledge to the problem of life. At 6.4312 Wittgenstein asks, "Is not this eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life?" The eternal life in this case refers to those who live in the present. His answer to the question about the riddle of life lies outside space and time. In the previous chapter on time we discovered that living in the present moment means to be outside time in terms of the temporal duration. He states at 6.4311 that living in the present is timelessness or eternity. As we discovered in the chapter on time, the present moment cannot be expressed in words. We could say that the present lies outside what can be said. However, in that present moment, and only in the present, the solipsistic self is co-ordinated with *Realität*. We see that the key parts to the solution to the problem of life (i.e., the present, the solipsistic self and *Realität*) cannot be expressed in words. As we have seen above, Diamond's account of the *Tractatus* offers many advantages in understanding the limits of language and the meaning of nonsense; however, she does not consider the application of this understanding towards the problem of life. We are reminded of a passage from the Preface where Wittgenstein states that the *Tractatus* contains "the final solution to the problem of philosophy". However, he follows this statement by claiming how little is achieved when the problems of philosophy are solved. So little is achieved because the problem of life remains. On this last issue (the problem of life), Diamond says nothing.

## JAMES CONANT

In a similar vein to Diamond's reading of 6.54, James Conant takes the passage on nonsense as a key to understanding the *Tractatus*. As with Diamond,

Conant's strategy for attacking the metaphysical readings of the text is to go inside nonsense to show the flaws in the metaphysical interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Conant also agrees with Diamond that the *Tractatus* does not leave us with anything to take away from understanding nonsense. Rather, he argues that the nonsense passages are intended to free one from the confusion that is inherent in all philosophical theories. Conant's attack on the metaphysical reading of the *Tractatus* focuses on the denial that behind the logical structure of language there are metaphysical truths waiting to be found. His second point of criticism is that the rules of logic cannot be broken while remaining meaningful. Conant's point is that running up to the limit of language does not imply that there is something beyond. His view of the passage on throwing away the ladder (6.54) is that the entire ladder, rungs and all, must be thrown away leaving one with very little of the text that is any use once Wittgenstein's intention has been grasped.

In his essay "Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein" the ladder that Conant sees that must be thrown away consists of five rungs. At the bottom one sees that there is something that must be, in other words the "it" of metaphysical discourse. Next, one understands that the "it" cannot be said; then, that it cannot be thought. In other words, these two steps (the second and third) together mean that the limits of my language mean the limits of my thoughts. The fourth rung is the realization that all along there was no "it" to be grasped. That is, one sees if it cannot be thought, it cannot be grasped. Finally, at the fifth rung one throws away the entire ladder. Throughout the first four steps on the ladder one is engaged in the practice of traditional philosophy, inferring conclusions from premises and so on. However, at the fifth step he who has understood the *Tractatus* looks "back upon his progress upwards and 'recognizes' that he has only been going through the motions of 'inferring' (apparent) 'conclusions' from (apparent) 'premises'" (NW, 196). Conant's answer to the question "What, then, is one left with once one has thrown away the ladder?" is "Nothing." ("Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder" TATL, 337) He follows this response with the passage at 7 of the *Tractatus*: "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent" (ibid.). In Conant's view the solution to the problem lies in the vanishing of the problem in the sense that philosophy is hopeless. In other words, the only thing that is lost by this approach is a house of cards. He states that nothing is really lost because "you are never deprived of anything that you never had or could have had" (ibid.). All that one loses is the confusion created by philosophical questions.

While Conant's focus is the problematic doctrine that "nonsense can make ineffable truths manifest", his other concern, unlike Diamond's, is the idea that we are left with nothing that must also be thrown away (TATL, 337). For his thoughts on this latter point we must turn to Wittgenstein's comments at 7. Conant's understanding of Wittgenstein's final passage on silence is shaped by his thoughts on 6.54. As with Diamond, Conant emphasizes the passage at 6.54: "anyone who understands me". Conant takes this

passage to mean that while the reader cannot understand Wittgenstein's propositions (given that they are nonsense), we can understand him, or at least the activity with which he is engaged. This activity Conant states is "one of showing that we suffer from the illusion of thinking we mean something when we mean nothing" (TATL, 344). In Conant's view the aim is to free the reader from well formed propositions that "resonate with an aura of sense" (ibid.). The *Tractatus* leaves us with a silence in which nothing has been said or can be said of what we imagined we could say about the world. In order to see this silence, one must see that the book aspires to say nothing. In Conant's view, in a similar vein to Diamond, the silence we find in the *Tractatus* is not the end of philosophical discourse; rather, it is a silence that comes as a result of the attempt to assert philosophical truths (ibid.). "It is therefore not a silence the work itself confers upon us, but rather one in which it discovers us" (ibid.). That is, the book attempts to show us that we are subject to attractions of this kind. In other words, it provides us with a mirror in which we see our own philosophical inclinations. Conant believes that the silence, which Wittgenstein speaks, does not contain hidden meanings. The function of nonsense in the *Tractatus* is to show that "another less self-evidently nonsensical piece of nonsense is nonsense" (TATL, 345). Thus, the steps in the ladder are constructed in such a way that it is an insight into the nonsense of the propositions below that prompts insight into each of the steps toward the top.

However, we learn in Conant's endnotes (102) to "Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and early Wittgenstein" that not all the sentences in the *Tractatus* are intended as nonsense. The sentences that he believes are intended as nonsense are those that elucidate. Referring to 4.112, he states that the *Tractatus* does not consist entirely of nonsense propositions. In Conant's words, he states that Wittgenstein does say: "A philosophical work consists *essentially* of elucidations" (NW, 216). However, Conant states that not every statement in the *Tractatus* needs to be considered as nonsense, because not every sentence serves as an elucidation (ibid.). In Conant's view some sentences serve as the framework within which the passages on elucidation work. Other sentences offer instructions about how the book should be read, while still others offer guidance about what is going on in a stretch of elucidations. Conant's position is that most of the statements he considers in his article are of the kind that "impart their instructions concerning the nature of the elucidatory aim and method of the work if recognized as *sinnvoll*" (i.e. meaningful) (ibid.). By suggesting that there exists a division between nonsense statements and meaningful statements, these passages seem to indicate that Conant contradicts his own criticism of the metaphysical interpretation of the text. Moreover, Conant appears to suggest that there is a doctrine that can be discovered through the passages that pertains to the framework. However, Conant denies that nonsense statements are intrinsically nonsense (*Unsinn*) or meaningful (*Sinn*) (ibid.). "There can be no fixed answer to the question

what kind of work a given remark with the text accomplishes" (ibid.). The level of sense each reader brings to the text will determine the meaning of a sentence. In other words, not only is there not an ineffable or absolute "it" philosophy hopes to reveal, but the passages one sees as nonsense or framework are not absolute, being defined according to the level where one finds one's self on the ladder. "What sort of foothold(s) a given remark provide(s) a given reader in her progress up the ladder thus depend(s) upon the sort(s) of aspects it presents to her, and that will depend on her" (NW, 217). Conant's suggestion here is similar to what we found in Diamond. The text serves as a guide into the world of nonsense and instructs one up the ladder until one reaches the top where, being free from the illusion of philosophical language, one throws the ladder away. The meaning one finds in the framework is not inherent, but only conveys its meaning concerning the aim of the book "if recognized as *sinnvoll*". In other words, if framework sentences are recognized as meaningful, the meaning of these sentences is found in their use as the framework.

Given this interpretation of the *Tractatus*, I think Conant's understanding of the text neglects the robust reading he intends to bring to it. Conant interprets 6.54 in terms of 4.112 where Wittgenstein states that a philosophical work consists of elucidations that aim at the logical clarification of thoughts. However, the other passage where Wittgenstein uses the term "elucidation" does not support Conant's views. At 3.263 Wittgenstein states, "Elucidations are propositions that contain primitive signs [names]". His point here is that names are simple and cannot be further broken down (3.26). The meaning of a name is shown through its application (3.262). In showing itself in a proposition, a name expresses its meaning. The use of the term "elucidation" at 3.263 suggests that the light that is shone on the meaning of a proposition occurs in the moment it shows itself. At 4.112 where Wittgenstein states that a philosophical work should consist of elucidations, I think he means the term "elucidations" in the sense of 3.623. That is, elucidations show their meaning without logic or steps. Wittgenstein attempts to show the reader the limits of the expressions of thought with propositions; however, when this is understood the limits of thought are seen as nonsensical. In other words, the end of the book inspires us to see that philosophical propositions, including the ones in the text, are senseless. The difference between the view that I am proposing and the one we find in Conant is as follows. Conant suggests that the text consists of propositions that serve as a framework for other propositions which themselves are elucidations enabling one to progress to a point where the propositions in the text are understood as nonsensical. I think that a better understanding is one in which the propositions of the text serve as a means to shed light that enables one to see that the propositions of the text are senseless. The difference I want to stress is that in the end Conant leaves us with an *understanding about* nonsense, while I believe that Wittgenstein's intention is to enable us to *see immediately* the work as nonsensical. This

reading is supported by the final passage at 6.54: “He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright” (emphasis mine).

Conant believes the *Tractatus* leaves the reader free from the attraction he or she has for words that are meaningless (i.e. philosophical doctrine). In answer to the question “What does this understanding leave us with after we have thrown away the ladder?” Conant’s reply is “our own sense of deprivation.” (TATL, 337) That is, Conant believes we are simply left with silence, as found at 7. The sense of deprivation is one in which we are left with a feeling of loss for something we never had. However, despite the important points Conant makes regarding the elimination of metaphysical language, this not the aim of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein’s intention is not to leave us with a sense of deprivation. Rather, he wants to lead us to a point where we will see the world correctly. I think if Wittgenstein’s concern was with metaphysics or the rejection of metaphysics he would have stated his position in the Preface. Conant may be right that Wittgenstein’s work destroys a house of cards, or an unfounded notion of metaphysics, but Wittgenstein’s intention is to set limits to the expressions of thought so that we can see the world aright. The focus of the *Tractatus* is neither metaphysics nor the rejection of metaphysics. Rather, the aim of the text is the clarification of thoughts in order to determine what can and cannot be spoken. What follows from that point may or may not be metaphysics, (or something else altogether), but it is important that we keep Wittgenstein’s aim of the *Tractatus* foremost in our attempt to understand the book.

If we understand the *Tractatus* in terms of limiting language to what we can say, the point I have made through this book is that what cannot be put into words must not be conflated with reality. That is, while there is nothing that can be said about metaphysics, *Realität*, the solipsistic self, objects and the mystical cannot be expressed in words. To explain this point I turn to Conant’s discussion about the fourth rung of his description of the ladder. Conant’s interpretation of this rung is that one realizes that what cannot be thought also cannot be grasped. While this view is correct, he fails to recognize the significance of what cannot be thought, or said. Conant states that at the fourth rung one realizes that the “it” in metaphysics cannot be said, but one continues to communicate under the guise of showing rather than saying thoughts about the “it” (NW, 196). Conant’s view is that simply there is no “it” to be either said or shown. In contrast to Conant, I believe a more plausible position is that the “it”, as he calls it, cannot be put into words and cannot be said either to exist or not exist. Wittgenstein’s point is that what lies outside language cannot be expressed in language. The problem with phrases such as “what lies outside language” suggests that something is outside a barrier into another space, as one might think of something being outside a jar. However, “outside” does not mean the other side of language. In the example of contradictory opposites we discussed in chapter 5, outside language means not-language. What lies outside language does not possess the quality of individuation. What is not-language,

in this case, means only that nothing can be said. As I mentioned, from the viewpoint of outside language this implies that one cannot say that a thing exists or does not exist. However, while Conant stresses the first part of 6.54, he neglects the second part: "He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright." That is, while stressing the elimination of nonsensical propositions, Conant neglects the importance of seeing the world aright.

The significance of the latter passage at 6.54 is found in the word "see". What Wittgenstein means by seeing the world aright is linked to seeing the world *sub specie aeterni* (6.45 and NB, 83). If we take at face value Wittgenstein's letter to Ficker, the point of the *Tractatus* is an ethical one. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the ethical means the "good or bad exercise of the will" (6.421). Ethics is transcendental; it cannot be put into words (6.421). However, as the good exercise of the will, it is an action. By this action he means that the will is the "centre of the world, which we call the I, and which is the bearer of ethics" (NB, 80). According to Wittgenstein, the I is not something we know or experience, as we objectively know the world (*ibid.*). The I lies outside the world. By the term "good exercise of the will" Wittgenstein means that an act is an action without the subject or the actor, as we discussed in the previous chapter. In other words there is only the action. The other example we considered was the relationship of the thinker to thoughts. According to Wittgenstein, the subject lies outside the world, so one cannot say that there is a thinker that thinks thoughts; rather, there are only thoughts. In other words, the actor is the action, and the thinker is the thought. The point of ethics is to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis*; that is, to see the world from the outside (NB, 83). This view cannot be accomplished with propositions about what it means to see from this perspective; rather, Wittgenstein leaves the reader with the silence he mentions at 7. If we read 6.54 in light of NB 83, to see the world from the outside means to see the world aright. The view of the world we find at NB 83 is to see the world without propositions, *sub specie aeterni*. To view the world in this way, as we read at 6.45, is the mystical.

## CONCLUSION

Although the metaphysical accounts of the *Tractatus* found in Anscombe and Hacker offer an interesting interpretation of the passages we discussed, their views on the book must be rejected because they do not take into account other passages that reject metaphysics. On the other hand, Diamond and Conant reject all metaphysical views, including that there are two kinds of nonsense, illuminating and meaningless. Diamond provides sound arguments that reject both the positivist's and the metaphysical reading of the text and offers an interesting account of entering the illusion of the *Tractatus* in order to remove the allure of metaphysical propositions.

Conant follows Diamond in kind and offers an interesting account that focuses on the example of the ladder at 6.54, but as with Diamond he fails to explain the passages on the mystical in his account of the text. Although the mystical reading of the text rejects the metaphysical interpretation, it does not fall into Conantian nonsense and a sense of our own deprivation. What the mystical view offers that I believe is consistent with the text is that in seeing the propositions in the text as nonsense (as what cannot be put into words) one sees the world aright.