

In Sprachspiele verstrickt –
oder: Wie man der Fliege
den Ausweg zeigt

Verflechtungen von Wissen und Können

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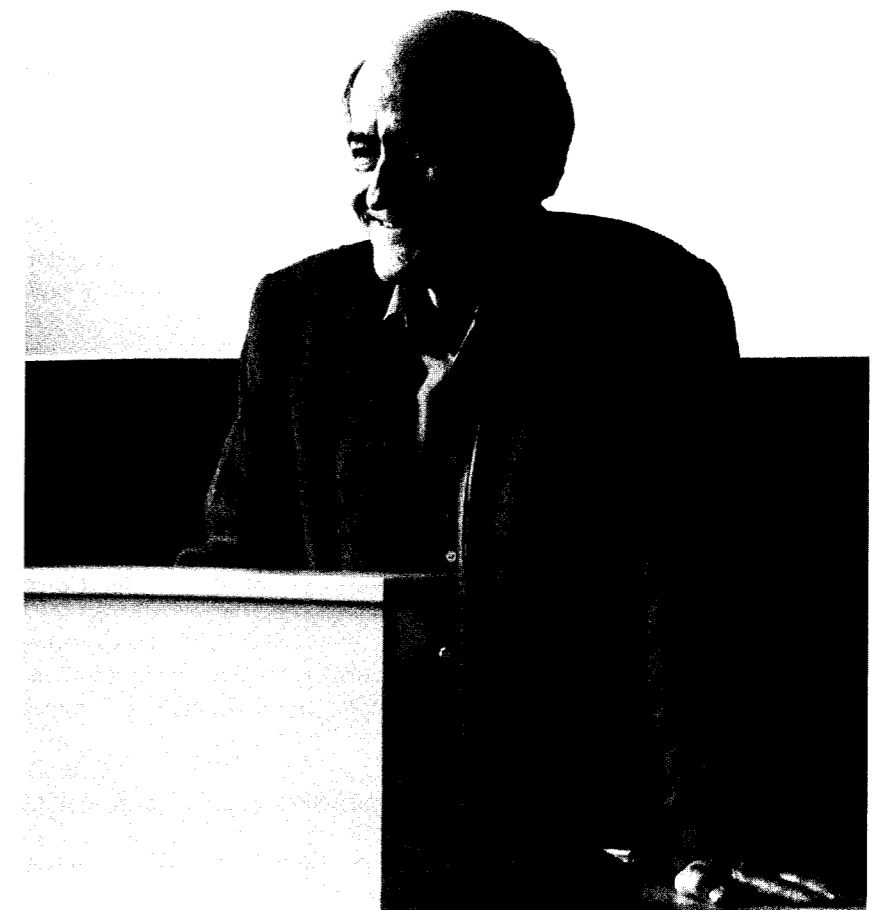


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A Development in Wittgenstein's Conception of Philosophy: From "The Method" to Methods

James Conant

1. How Many Wittgensteins?

I had the pleasure and good fortune in the summer semester of 2004 to teach a seminar on Wittgenstein together with Hans Julius Schneider while I was visiting in the capacity of *Gastprofessor* at the Institute for Philosophy at the University of Potsdam. I cannot think of a more fitting tribute to Hans Julius Schneider than for me now to try to develop my thoughts a bit further on the topics that he and I discussed in that seminar. Some of what I will say in this paper, in order to set up the framework for the rest, will cover some ground that will be quite familiar to him; but some of it, I hope, will broach ground that is less familiar and hopefully also of interest to him. As my aim here is to provoke further dialogue about matters of common interest, I will not shrink from making some rather heterodox claims about the character and shape of Wittgenstein's philosophical development.

Six years since co-teaching that seminar, as I sit now before my desk writing this paper in Chicago in the year 2010, a minor controversy in which I am one of the alleged participants is taking place in the tiny world of Wittgenstein scholarship – a controversy about how many Wittgensteins there are. My colleague David Stern, at the comparatively nearby University of Iowa, takes me not only to be a participant in this controversy, but also to be a proponent of one particular extreme view, (what he calls) "the one-Wittgenstein view". His main complaint is directed, however, not only at people who, as I allegedly do, espouse this view, but also against their alleged opponents in the controversy:

[I]t is nearly always presupposed that either there was one Wittgenstein, that in essentials Wittgenstein's philosophy never really changed, or that there were two Wittgensteins, that there was a fundamental change between the early and the philosophy.... Very few interpreters seem prepared to even consider the possibility that these are restrictive and constricting alternatives, or that the best interpretation might well be one

that recognizes both continuities and discontinuities in Wittgenstein's philosophical development.¹

What Stern says here ("very few interpreters seem prepared to even consider") ought to strike one as a bit of a stretch, given that the revelation ("the best interpretation might well be one that recognizes both continuities and discontinuities") is a truism – true about pretty much any interesting philosopher. Kant, Russell, Heidegger, and Putnam come immediately to mind as particularly pertinent examples about whom this is obviously true, but in each case it is not at all easy to say how it is true. And it is perhaps especially difficult in the case of Wittgenstein to see precisely how properly to balance the continuities against the discontinuities in a full narrative of the character of his philosophical development. The devil lies in the details here.

It has been a central motivation of mine in developing, together with Cora Diamond, a certain reading of Wittgenstein's early work – which has come to be known as "the resolute reading" – to begin to fill in some of the background which I believe needs first to be in place before one is in a position fully to appreciate the specific difficulties which must attend any attempt to sketch such a narrative of the overall arc of Wittgenstein's philosophical trajectory. In a moment I will say more about what I mean when I speak of "a" (or what others mean when they speak of "the") "resolute reading". First, however, I just want to say this much about the original motivation behind developing such a reading of early Wittgenstein: the motivation was to help put one in a position better to understand better what sort of break it is with traditional philosophy (and therefore with his own earlier philosophy) that Wittgenstein sought to undertake in his masterwork *Philosophical Investigations*.

Given that this was the original motivation, the misunderstanding involved in Stern's claim that Conant (and Diamond, and various other resolute readers) are committed to "the one-Wittgenstein view" is quite fundamental. I would be happy if this paper were able to put an end to the ascription of such a view to a commentator on Wittgenstein simply on the grounds that he or she advocates a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*. For to advocate such a reading of the *Tractatus* is not yet to take a stance on the question "How many Wittgensteins are there?" nor, for that matter, even if one thinks there is more than one Wittgenstein, is to commit oneself to any particular answers to questions about where and when a (or "the") significant break in Wittgenstein's philosophizing occurs over the course of his development.

This is not to deny that such a reading of Wittgenstein's early work has substantive implications for how one answers questions such as those men-

¹ David Stern: *How Many Wittgensteins?*, in: *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, edited by Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä, Working Papers from the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, No. 17 (2005), p. 170.

tioned above. It is only to maintain that these implications are not straightforward and that they themselves therefore represent matters about which resolute readers might well disagree. In this paper, I will defend one particular line of thought about these matters. I should not be taken to be speaking for other resolute readers of Wittgenstein in doing so. I do hope, however, to illustrate how the framework of a resolute reading of Wittgenstein's early work can furnish a fresh perspective from which to consider questions about the overall development of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy. The real interest of this paper will therefore lie not in contributing to debates about how to read Wittgenstein's early philosophy, but rather in addressing a certain question about the development of his philosophy as a whole.

A good way to begin on the latter topic is to consider what a remark such as the following is doing in the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*:

Four years ago I had occasion to re-read my first book (the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) and to explain its ideas to someone. It suddenly seemed to me that I should publish those old thoughts and the new ones together: that the latter could be seen in the right light only by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking.²

Proponents of the standard narrative of Wittgenstein's development can and do take this passage as a bit of textual evidence that Wittgenstein is here asking us to see his early work as directed against his later work. But how is it directed against his early work? In particular, why does he say that "the latter could be seen in the right light *only* against the background of my old way of thinking"? The presence of the word "only" here suggests that what is to be found in the pages of the *Tractatus* is not simply a recurrence of confusions also to be found in the less difficult writings of lesser philosophers, but rather that there is something to be found there that is not easily found elsewhere; and that it is this difference between what is found there and what can be found elsewhere in philosophy that recommends those early pages for inclusion in the single volume at issue here. The presence of the "only" suggests that, if we want to see his new way of thinking in the right light, we need first to see it against the background of features of his old way of thinking which he takes to be both peculiar to that way of thinking and peculiarly important to an understanding of the new way of thinking. Otherwise any of a variety of other backgrounds would serve just as well. What I will be calling "a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*", I shall suggest, helps to focus attention on one important aspect of his old way of thinking which he both takes to be peculiar to that way of thinking and the overcoming of which he takes to be peculiarly important to an understanding of the new way of thinking.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations, op cit*, p. x.

2. Resolute Readings of the *Tractatus*

The dispute between resolute readers and their critics has tended to take its point of departure from the question how one ought to understand the following climactic³ moment in the *Tractatus*:

My propositions serve as *elucidations* in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as *nonsensical*, when he has used them -- as steps -- to climb out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)⁴

Taking this passage as my point of departure, I will provide, in this section of the paper, a very sketchy account of what will be meant in the remainder of this paper by “a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*”,⁵ primarily by saying a bit about what is involved in climbing up and throwing away this ladder on any resolute interpretation of the book of which that ladder forms the body. Beyond this, I will have nothing further to say in these pages about the internal commitments of such a reading. In particular, this paper will refrain from rehearsing any of the (exegetically or philosophically motivated) reasons why an open-minded reader might want to look with sympathy on such an interpretative approach to the *Tractatus*. The burden of this paper will rather be to clarify one of the ways in which such a reading might bear on questions pertaining to an understanding of the relation between Wittgenstein’s early and later work, and thereby to explore one aspect of the question whether such an approach to reading Wittgenstein commits one, as David Stern alleges, to some version of a “one-Wittgenstein view”.

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

³ Pun intended.

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.54. (my emphases). Quotations from the *Tractatus* will be drawn from either the David Pears and Brian McGuinness translation (London 1963) or from the reprint of the C. K. Ogden translation (London 1981), or some emendation or combination thereof.

⁵ The characterization of such readings 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; cf. also p. 73, note 10. Goldfarb’s article lays out some of the issues in dispute very well. See also Diamond’s: *Realism and Resolution* (which replies to Goldfarb) in the same issue.

the author of that work, in section 6.54, aims to call upon his reader to do (when he says that she will understand him when she reaches the point where she is able to recognize his sentences as nonsensical) is something that requires the reader of the work first to grasp and then to apply to the sentences of the work a *theory* that has been advanced in the body of the work – a theory that specifies the conditions under which sentences make sense and the conditions under which they do not.⁶ In order to be able to give content to the idea that we are able to come to grasp the commitments of such a theory, a commentator must hold that there is a fairly substantial sense in which we can come to “understand” the sentences that “explain” the theory, despite the fact we are eventually called upon to recognize these very same sentences as nonsense. Resolute readers hold that to read the *Tractatus* in this way is seriously to underestimate what is involved in the request that we come to recognize these sentences as *nonsense*.

On standard readings of the book, the point of a significant number of the sentences of the work is to achieve the formulation of an adequate set of theoretical *criteria of meaningfulness*. These criteria when applied to the very sentences that adumbrate them yield the verdict that they do not meet their own criteria and thus are to be condemned as nonsensical. Resolute readers are unhappy with any such reading for a variety of reasons. For the present purpose, however, it will suffice to note that they are committed to rejecting any such reading because they are committed to rejecting the idea that the author of the work *aims* to put forward substantive theories or doctrines. Wittgenstein tells us that the kind of philosophy he seeks to practice in this work consists not in putting forward a theory, but rather in the exercise of a certain sort of activity – one of elucidation.⁷ The core commitment of a resolute reading for the purpose of this paper lies in its insistence that a proper understanding of the aim of the *Tractatus* depends upon taking Wittgenstein at his word here. A close reading of the text guided by this commitment leads us to the following gloss on his early understanding of the aim of this activity:

Early Wittgenstein aimed to practice a conception of philosophy in which philosophy is not a matter of putting forward theses, doctrines or theories, but consists rather in an activity of elucidation; and any apparent theses that are put forward in the course of that activity, if it succeeds in its aim, are to be revealed as either (1) initially philosophically attractive yet in the end only apparently meaningful (*Unsinn*), or (2) either

⁶ Notice: this feature of a resolute reading – as, too, with regard to each of the other features to be mentioned below – merely says something about how the book ought *not* to be read, thereby still leaving much undetermined about how the book ought to be read.

⁷ For more discussion of this topic, see my: *The Method of the Tractatus*, in: *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives in Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck, Oxford 2002.

genuinely meaningful (*sinnvoll*) or merely tautologous (*sinnlos*) but only once clarified and hence drained of their initial philosophical eros.⁸

Let's call this "the avowed aim". If one adopts it as a point of departure for reading the text and allows oneself "strictly to think it through"⁹, resolute readers take a proper understanding of the avowed aim to have far-reaching exegetical consequences. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that, once this business of strictly thinking it through gets underway, many of the further commitments of resolute readers can be seen to fall into place as corollaries that follow from it. I will confine myself here simply to mentioning three such corollaries.

The first pertinent corollary (of a resolute rejection of an intended commitment on the part of the author of the work to any theory or doctrine) is the rejection of any intended commitment to an *ineffable* theory or doctrine. This means that resolute readers are bound to reject the widely held view that the relevant "propositions" of the work (namely, those concerning which Wittgenstein said, at §6.54, that they are to be recognized as "nonsensical") are to be "understood" as conveying ineffable insights that the reader is to "grasp" even though the author cannot "express" them. On standard readings of the work, the alleged insights here in question are held to be individuated through an identification of substantive constraints on sense adumbrated through the aforementioned criteria on meaningfulness set forth in the body of the work. It is through the "violation" of these constraints that the sentences in question are revealed as simultaneously meaningless yet able to convey something determinate. The form of their meaningfulness is

⁸ It would be a mistake to read this paragraph as saying (as the writings of standard readers sometimes seem to suggest) that we can just go about inspecting sentences and (apart from consulting their context of use) sorting them into categories such as the *sinnlos* and the *sinnvoll*. For discussion of this topic, see Cora Diamond: *Crisscross Philosophy*, in: *Wittgenstein at Work*, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer, *op. cit.* In the interest of keeping things as simple as possible, I will have nothing further to say about the topic of that which is *sinnlos* in this paper. For a discussion of some of the points that arise in connection with this topic and how to accommodate them in a resolute reading, see Michael Kremer: *Mathematics and Meaning in the Tractatus*, in: *Philosophical Investigations* 25 (2002).

⁹ I am alluding here to a formulation of Wittgenstein's regarding what is involved in philosophical elucidation that surfaces in passages such as the following: "[I]dealism, strictly thought out [*streng durchgedacht*], leads to realism." – and: "[S]olipsism, strictly followed through [*streng durchgeführt*], collapses into pure realism." The first is from *Notebooks: 1914-1916*, eds. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Chicago 1979); p. 85. (I have emended the translation). The second is from the *Tractatus*, 5.64. (I have emended the translation.) For further discussion of the importance in Wittgenstein's work of such a conception of thinking things through, see my: *On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy*, in: John Whittaker (ed.): *The Possibilities of Sense*, New York 2003.

supposed to highlight, in each case, a particular feature of the general conditions on sense specified by the theory in question. This requires that the meaningfulness of these sentences has, in each case, a logically distinct and specifiable character. It becomes, on standard readings, a central burden of the theory (supposedly adumbrated in the book) to give content to this idea of logically determinate forms of nonsense – where each of these forms of nonsense is alleged to acquire the potential for communication that it specifically possesses in virtue of its violation of a distinct requirement on sense laid down by the theory. This commits standard readers to the idea that the sort of nonsense that is at issue here must come in a variety of logically distinct kinds.

This brings us to the second pertinent corollary: the rejection of the idea that the *Tractatus* holds that there are logically distinct kinds of nonsense. This is sometimes put by saying that the *Tractatus* aims to show that there is no such thing as substantial nonsense. From the perspective of a resolute reader, it makes little difference whether the candidate criteria for lending substance to nonsense involve considerations of verifiability, bipolarity, logical well-formedness, or some other putative respect in which a "proposition" is held to be intrinsically flawed because of its own internal logical or conceptual structure. Part of what the *Tractatus* seeks to show, according to resolute readers, is that all such "criteria of meaningfulness" cannot do the sort of work to which we want to put them in our philosophical theorizing. Any reading of section 6.54 that takes the recognition on the part of a reader there called for to require a substantive employment of such criteria qualifies as an instance of an irresolute reading, as long as it is committed to ascribing to the *Tractatus* a theory which its author must endorse and rely upon (if he is to be able to prosecute his program of philosophical critique) and yet which he must also regard as nonsense (if he thinks through the commitments of his own theory).¹⁰

¹⁰ Many critics of resolute readings notice that resolute readers are committed to one or another of the corollaries, without ever managing to get the guiding commitment of such a reading clearly into view. Such critics notice that resolute readers are committed to rejecting some particular putatively Tractarian account of what makes some sentences nonsensical (say, an account based on illegitimate syntactical combination), while assuming that a resolute reader must share with the proponent of a standard sort of reading the idea that the charge of nonsense leveled at the end of the *Tractatus* is to be underwritten by *some* theory – be it one that is advanced within the body of the work or one that is imported into the work from the outside. These critics thereby assume that these readers must want to substitute some alternative theoretical account of the grounds of sense for the particular one under criticism. These critics then become understandably very puzzled about how such a reading can possibly be thought to be sustainable. For they assume that the discovery that there are no logically distinct kinds of nonsense is itself arrived at through the elaboration

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

The author of the *Tractatus* wants its reader to reject the sentences of the book as nonsense on principled grounds; yet, in the very moment of rejecting them, the reader is to continue to retain a grip on these grounds by continuing to identify, grasp, and believe that which these sentences would say, if they had a sense.¹¹

Let's call this "the paradox". To be resolute in one's approach to the *Tractatus* involves taking this paradoxical idea itself to form a *part* of the ladder that we, as readers, are meant to climb up and throw away (rather than taking it to be an account of what it *is* to throw away the ladder). Thus, it involves taking the sort of recognition that readers of the work are called upon to attain in section 6.54 to require a recognition that the intermediate stages that we, as readers, seem to occupy (when we take ourselves to be able to identify, grasp, and believe what these sentences intend to convey) are *aspects of the illusion* that the work as a whole seeks to explode – that they are themselves rungs on the ladder that we are asked to climb up and throw away.

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

and application of a theory of sense that these readers are now committed to viewing as having somehow been successfully articulated by the author of the *Tractatus*, even though the propositions by means of which it is to have been articulated have been relegated to the status of mere nonsense. This then leads to the criticism that the resulting reading renders the propositions of the book too semantically impoverished to be able to articulate the theoretical conceptions about the nature of nonsense that the readers in question are committed to ascribing to the work. I enthusiastically endorse this line of argument as a criticism of a possible (misguided) reading of the *Tractatus*. But it is a species of irresolute reading that is here criticized.

¹¹ This idea that we can grasp what certain sentences would say if they had a sense is sometimes called *chickening out*. See Diamond: *The Realist Spirit*, op. cit., pp. 181-2, 194-5.

notation employed by the author of the *Tractatus* (in order to make certain philosophical confusions manifest) must be elucidatory instruments whose employment is not itself supposed to require commitment (on the part of those engaged in an elucidation) to any particular philosophical theses.

We are familiar in ordinary critical discussion with procedures in which confusion in thought can be brought to a person's attention through a procedure of reformulation – in effect, through substituting one expression for another. This is most commonly accomplished by substituting one expression in the speaker's native language for another. But if the speaker is familiar with a foreign language then that familiarity can be exploited to bring further elucidatory resources to bear on the situation. Thus, an equivocation involving "or" in ordinary English can be brought to a speaker's notice, if he speaks Latin, by asking him whether he wants to translate his English sentence into Latin using "aut" or "vel". No "theory of Latin" is required in order for the speaker to take advantage of this elucidatory tool. All that is required is knowledge of how properly to translate English sentences into Latin ones. By being forced to reflect upon what is involved in the task of having to choose one of these Latin expressions over the other, the speaker can be made to realize that he has been hovering between alternative possibilities for meaning his words without determinately settling on either one.¹² According to resolute readers, this is what nonsense is for the author of the *Tractatus*: an unwitting wavering in our relation to our words – failing to make genuine determinations of meaning, while believing that we have done so.¹³ And the *Tractatus's* understanding of the character of nonsense, according to resolute readers, is internally related to its understanding of the proper role of logical notation in philosophical clarification.

If our English speaker above did not know Latin, but instead had been taught an appropriately designed logical notation (in which each of these two different possible translations of the English sign "or" corresponds to a different symbol in the notation) then exactly the same clarification could be effected using this notation. No theory of the notation is supposed to be here required, merely a mastery of its proper use. What is needed here – to paraphrase *Tractatus*, §4.112 – is not a commitment to some doctrine, but rather a practical understanding of how to engage in a certain sort of activity. The forms of notation to which the *Tractatus* introduces us, of course, involve manifold degrees and dimensions of designed regimentation (in our use of

¹² For further discussion of this example, see Conant and Diamond: *On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely*, in: Max Kölbel / Bernhard Weiss (eds.): *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, London 2004, pp. 61-2.

¹³ See Wittgenstein: *Tractatus*, op. cit., §5.4733.

distinct signs to express logically distinct modes of symbolizing) far beyond a single distinction in the use of signs to mark a mere distinction between two different ways of using a particle of speech such as “or”. In principle, however, if our aim is restricted to the Tractarian clarification of thought, then the point of the exercise of mastering and applying such notation and the justification of the procedures involved need not differ in any essential way from those involved in the case of asking someone to translate “or” as either “vel” or “aut”. The difference here (in the character of the exercise and the procedures it involves) is one of degree not of kind. The forms of notation introduced by the *Tractatus* therefore are not conceived by its author as requiring independent theoretical justification; and, if they did, this would defeat their purpose. They are put forward as *proposals*. If we try this notation, we will see that it allows us to become clear (when there is something we want to say) about what we want to say; and (when there is not) it allows us to become clear about the character of our failure in our having unwittingly failed to say anything. With respect to understanding his purpose in introducing us to these instruments of logical notation, we may be said to understand the author of the *Tractatus* each time we recognize how these alternative forms of expression (which the notation makes available) enable the recognition of nonsense.¹⁴ It is in this way that the notation is meant to serve as a device that facilitates a reader’s ascent up the rungs of the ladder.

3. The Old Way of Thinking against the Background of the New

The author of *Philosophical Investigations* tell us that the most crucial moments in philosophical conjuring tricks are the ones that are apt to strike one as most innocent.¹⁵ This remark, I take it, bears on the evolution of his later philosophy in two ways. First, it is tied to his later apprehension that it is much more difficult to avoid laying down requirements in philosophy than his earlier self had ever imagined – where this is tied in the later work, in turn,

¹⁴ A story about this can count as a version of a resolute reading only to the extent that an understanding of the author here rests upon nothing more than a cultivation of the reader’s logical capacities – capacities that she exercises whenever she thinks or speaks. These capacities are honed in the context of philosophical elucidation through our learning such things as how properly to parse sentences whose surface grammar confuses us, how properly to employ the fragments of logical notion to which the author of the *Tractatus* introduces us, and so on. But the point of exercising such comparatively more determinate logical capacities is to refine the antecedently available general capacity which the reader brings with her to an encounter with the text: namely her ability to discern sense, recognize nonsense, and distinguish the one from the other.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., §308

to the need to develop a form of philosophical practice that can diagnose, identify, and clarify the precise moments in which such requirements on thinking are first unwittingly laid down, well prior to their manifesting themselves to the thinker as commitments of any consequence.¹⁶ Second, it required a set of procedures for the conduct of the new activity of diagnosis, identification, and subsequent clarification that would not themselves prove to carry further unwitting commitments in their train (introducing another metaphysics newly built into the successor conception of clarification). Hence the need to develop a non-dogmatic mode of philosophical correction (an, as it were, further layer of correction directed at each of the moments of correction themselves, and a further layer upon that, and so forth). An elucidatory procedure whose steps are arraigned in the form of a ladder is no longer up to this task: the procedure must be able to crisscross in such away as to allow each step in the investigation devoted to exorcising a philosophical demon to itself be pondered, reassessed, and purged, in turn, of the possible latent forms of overstepping or overstatement that may unwittingly have insinuated themselves in the course of the elucidation of the original misconception.¹⁷ It is in this context (of cultivating such a non-dogmatic mode of philosophizing) that a method of writing characterized by an alternation of voices (including ones of overly insistent temptation and ones of overly zealous correction) proves its value and comes to transform the face of Wittgenstein’s authorship. This raises many questions (regarding the aims and methods of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy) well beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to confine our attention here briefly to the ever-recurring first step in this crisscrossing procedure – a step that has no role and can have no role to play in his earlier ladder-climbing mode of philosophical elucidation: namely, the step in which one seeks to uncover that crucial sleight of hand in the philosophical conjuring trick that is apt to strike one as most innocent.

Wittgenstein’s original aim, in writing the *Tractatus*, was to bring metaphysics to an end; and the method of clarification he thereby sought to practice, to achieve that end, was to be one that was itself free of all metaphysical

¹⁶ One way of summing up this immense difference between early and later Wittgenstein would be to say that the following question assumes a pivotal importance in later Wittgenstein’s investigations that it never (could have) had in early Wittgenstein’s procedures: How does philosophy begin? On this, see Stanley Cavell’s: *Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein’s Investigations*, in: Hans Sluga / David Stern (eds.): *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge 1996.

¹⁷ “[M]y thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination—And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought crisscross in every direction” (*Philosophical Investigations*, p. ix).

commitments. The following remark brings out how his later writing (unlike most of the commentary on it) continues to keep this feature of his earlier thought firmly in perspective while seeking to focus attention on its problematic commitments:

We now have a theory, a "dynamic theory" of the proposition; of language, but it does not present itself to us as a theory. For it is the characteristic thing about such a theory that it looks at a special clearly intuitive case and says: "That shews how things are in every case; this case is the 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.¹⁸

This passage brings out nicely why things must go wrong if one's reading of Wittgenstein is organized around a focus on the following question: "Which parts of the theory that the *Tractatus* aimed to put forward did later Wittgenstein think was wrong?" If one reads Wittgenstein in this way, then one is apt to skip over the following seven aspects of later Wittgenstein's interest in (what one thereby calls) "the theory of the *Tractatus*": (1) that what we are able to see as heavily freighted philosophical commitments in the early work did not present themselves to the author of the *Tractatus* as such, (2) that it is the characteristic thing about such "theories" that, at the deepest level, they garner their conviction not from a conscious intention to put forward an ambitious philosophical claim, but rather from an apparently innocent attention to what presents itself as a special clearly intuitive case, (3) that an unprejudiced view of such a case already appears to permit one (without any additional theoretical underpinning) to exclaim: "That shews how things are in every case; this case is the exemplar of *all* cases", (4) that it is therefore particularly helpful to look at examples of philosophers who are already in the grip of such apparent forms of clarity in those moments in their thinking that occur prior to any in which they take themselves yet to have begun philosophizing, (5) that it is even better, if one can find one, to look at the example of a philosopher who, in the teeth of an avowed aim to eschew any such commitments, nonetheless falls into them, (6) that the author of the *Tractatus* is *the* prime example of such a philosopher, and therefore, in a sense, the ideal target for the form of philosophical criticism to be prosecuted in the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*, (7) that the ultimate quarry of philosophical criticism in these pages is never this or that philosophical thesis or theoretical commitment, but rather a characteristic form of expression – one that holds us captive and strikes us as so very obvious that we imagine that it allows us to be able to penetrate the appearance of language and see what *must* lie beneath the surface.

¹⁸ Wittgenstein: *Zettel* (translated by G. E. M. Anscombe), Oxford 1967, §444.

The preceding seven points represent a brief attempt to summarize certain aspects close to the heart of Wittgenstein's mature conception of philosophical method, as well as to summarize an important aspect of his thinking close to the heart of his mature perspective on the differences between the conceptions of philosophical method present in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively. With these seven points before us, allowing ourselves to assume that they capture important differences in the conceptions of philosophy in the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* respectively (and allowing ourselves for a moment to subscribe to the facile idea that there is just one important "break" in Wittgenstein's philosophical development), the following point can now be made: any account of something that deserves to be called "*the* break" between early and later Wittgenstein must be one which is able to locate in the philosophy that supposedly lies on the far side of this break resources for philosophical criticism sufficient to vindicate an entitlement to these seven points. And now let us ask: does the later Wittgenstein who comes into view on the standard narrative of his philosophical development command such resources? Or, correlatively: does the Wittgenstein of 1929 – or, for that matter, the Wittgenstein of 1935 – command such resources?

4. Norway, 1937

Wittgenstein spent most of the twelve years between 1929 (after he returned to living and thinking full time about philosophy in Cambridge, England) and 1951 (the year of his death), trying to write the book that eventually would become the *Philosophical Investigations*. Halfway through this period, in August of 1936, he withdrew to the tiny hut that he had built himself, in a remote location at the very end of the Sognefjord, in Skjolden, Norway, in order to be able to continue his work on the book in complete solitude. After an abortive start, he turned his attention in November, 1936, to reworking material that essentially consisted of a draft of sections 1 – 189 of Part I of *Philosophical Investigations*. Roughly the first half of this material was re-worked in the remaining two months of 1936 and (after a break to spend Christmas with his family in Austria) the second half of it was re-worked in Skjolden between February and May of 1937. It was during these months that sections 89 to 133 came to assume something close to resembling the form in which they now appear in the final published version of *Philosophical Investigations*. What happened during this period in Norway?

On a standard narrative of Wittgenstein's philosophical development, the most significant break in his philosophical development came in or around 1929. On this telling of the story, the period shortly thereafter is the one in

which the most significant revolution in his conception of philosophy was allegedly effected. What happened in Norway in 1937, according to this narrative, therefore, is simply that later Wittgenstein turned his attention more closely to certain topics, thereby applying his already fully developed later conception of philosophy to hitherto comparatively unexplored philosophical issues, with the consequence that he further developed the implications already latent in that conception (that he began to espouse in or around 1929) for the particular topics at hand.

This narrative, of course, leaves lots of room for us to view what happened in Norway in 1937 to be of great consequence, especially in as much as it is there and then that Wittgenstein completed the first fairly finished draft of the opening bit of the famous passages of the *Philosophical Investigations* now known as “the rule-following considerations”. But what the standard narrative does not countenance is the idea that Wittgenstein’s *conception of his method in philosophy* underwent a significant revolution while he was in Norway in 1937. One reason it does not countenance this is simply because the standard narrative puts in place and operates with a particular sort of idea of what would and could count as a significant sort of development in Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy. This blinds it to certain possibilities.

As David Stern indicates, there is a tendency to distinguish between two Wittgensteins: an early and a later one. It is also customary to see the former’s activity as culminating in the *Tractatus*, while dating the inception of the latter’s activity at around 1929, when he becomes centrally concerned to criticize the *Tractatus*. This much seems to me to be right about this standard telling of the story of Wittgenstein’s development: if we want to understand the nature of a break between someone whom we want to call an “early” Wittgenstein and someone whom we want to call a “later” Wittgenstein, then we do need to understand the nature of the latter’s criticism of the former. The customary way of locating this break is via certain philosophical doctrines – doctrines that are taken to be central of the teaching of the *Tractatus* and then subjected to criticism by the later Wittgenstein. The doctrines that are usually seized upon and most highlighted in standard tellings of this story (about what early Wittgenstein was for and later Wittgenstein was against) are ones that resolute readers have argued are already fiercely under attack in the *Tractatus*.

This has led to others saying about such readers, as David Stern does, that their view must be that there are no significant differences between early and later Wittgenstein. And when they say this about me, I deny what they say. This is not my view, I say, far from it. Thus a situation of the following sort comes about: one in which it now seems incumbent upon me to offer a tidy alternative picture of my own of Wittgenstein’s development – one in which I specify where and when, according to me, the break between early and later Wittgenstein occurs. And I find that I cannot do this. The more

closely I look at the character of the development of Wittgenstein’s thought, the more complex and nuanced and graduated the sorts of changes that development undergoes come to appear to me to be. So, in answer to the question “What is *your* story of Wittgenstein’s development?”, I am inclined to say “Well, it’s complicated.” But that is not a satisfying answer.

If, however, I had to go on German television right now, and the host of the TV show were to point a pistol at my temple and to say to me: “Professor Conant, please tell our TV audience right now where and when, according to you, the biggest single break comes in Wittgenstein’s philosophical development, or else we will shoot you here and now in front of millions of people on German television!”, then I would answer: “Norway, 1937” Of course, if I were on a television show, I would not be given any time to explain this answer. As I am, fortunately, not addressing this question as the guest on a television show, I will take advantage of the situation to try to explain a bit more *why* I would say this. I offer this answer, however, not because I wish to endorse the idea that Wittgenstein’s philosophical development underwent a single decisive moment of discontinuity and that it is useful to sort of everything in his work into two separate and utterly distinct categories – the category of the texts that he wrote before the crucial moment dawned and the category of the texts that he wrote after that crucial moment dawned. In the end, it is precisely this aspect of the standard narrative that I would most like to do away with. Thus I offer my overly simplistic answer to my imaginary German television interviewer not as some form of last word about how to tell the story of Wittgenstein’s philosophical development. Rather I offer it as a corrective and an antidote to the standard narrative, precisely in the hope that it will help to bring out an important aspect of the actual complexity of the development of Wittgenstein’s philosophy that goes missing on the standard narrative.

I am willing to maintain that the “break” in Wittgenstein’s philosophy that I will go on to identify in the pages that follow is at least as significant as any that takes place in or around 1929. This is a strong claim. To say this, however, is not to deny that significant reasons for dissatisfaction with his early philosophy did begin to come into view for Wittgenstein in and around 1929. Nor is it to deny that there are other very significant revolutions that his thought undergoes, for example, in the period between 1913 and 1918, and, for example, again in the period between 1945 and 1951. Thus to claim the importance that I wish to for what happens in Norway in 1937 therefore is not suggest that this is actually where *the* real “break” happens. It is merely to suggest that a careful attention to the sort of criticism of his earlier conception of philosophy that Wittgenstein begins to initiate in 1937 can afford us a perspective from which we can begin to see much of what is partial and distorted in the standard narrative of Wittgenstein’s philosophical development.

5. Two Senses of 'Piecemeal'

In order to achieve this perspective, it will help first to distinguish between two different things that commentators have meant to say when they have said what seemingly amounts to the saying of a single sort of a thing about the character of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy. In saying these two different things, in each case, commentators tend to use the same word – the word 'piecemeal' – which helps to create a certain confusion that I would first like to undo.

Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems is a piecemeal one, we are told by the commentators that I have in mind. But what does this mean? In the passages from McGinn and Goldfarb that I will cite below, we will encounter two different commentators explaining the sense in which the expression 'piecemeal' does or does not properly apply to *early* Wittgenstein's conception of method in philosophy. In the former of these passages, Marie McGinn comments on the way in which early Wittgenstein strives not to treat each of the problems piecemeal; whereas, in the latter, Warren Goldfarb's explicates the sense in which Wittgenstein's practice of philosophical clarification is only properly understood once it is recognized as essentially piecemeal in character. Thus, on a superficial reading, it might appear that one of these commentators is concerned to affirm something that the other is concerned to deny.

The apparent disagreement here might be summed up as follows: Goldfarb thinks early Wittgenstein's method is piecemeal (whatever that means); whereas McGinn denies this. I think the disagreement here is merely apparent. But, before I say why, let us see look more closely at why each of these commentators is drawn to reach for the concept of the piecemeal in their respective attempts to characterize some aspect of early Wittgenstein's philosophical procedure. I take it, first of all, that each of them has a hold of an important part of the truth of Wittgenstein's philosophy, at this early point in its development, and, secondly, that it is not easy to keep these two parts of the truth about Wittgenstein's early philosophy sufficiently far apart – far enough apart so that one of these can vary independently of the other over the course of Wittgenstein's development.

McGinn's aim is to try to bring out what is at issue in remarks of Wittgenstein's, especially in his early *Notebooks*, in which he speaks of himself as grappling with "a single great problem". Here is one such remark:

Don't get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole *single* great problem, even if this view is still not a clear one.¹⁹

¹⁹ Wittgenstein: *Notebooks, 1914-1916* (translated by G. E. M. Anscombe), Oxford 1961, p. 23. The following is a related passage: "The problem of negation, of disjunction, of

Let me say, first of all, that I agree with McGinn that the aspiration that is expressed here in the *Notebooks* is one that continues to shape the conception of philosophical method at work in the *Tractatus*. In fact, I wish to argue for an even stronger claim: namely, that this aspiration – for a single free view over the whole of philosophy – continues well into the period of work that people ordinarily think of as belonging to that of the "later" Wittgenstein. I will also be concerned to argue for two further related claims: (1) that Wittgenstein's eventual abandonment of this aspiration represents as significant a development in Wittgenstein's philosophical trajectory as any that is properly associated with the break between the *Tractatus* and the work that Wittgenstein wrote during the first half of the 1930s, and (2) that it represents a shift in his thinking about the nature of philosophy whose momentousness becomes completely obscured on the standard telling of Wittgenstein's philosophical development.

Here is how McGinn summarizes what is at issue in the passage from the *Notebooks* in question:

Wittgenstein here [in the above passage from *Notebooks, 1914-1916*, p. 23] instructs himself not to try to treat each of the problems piecemeal.²⁰

I will return to McGinn's point here in a moment. But before I do, let us complete our brief survey of the two different senses in which the expression 'piecemeal' can be helpfully employed in the context of elucidating Wittgenstein's thought. Here is Goldfarb explaining the sense in which the *Tractatus* is committed to (to something one might want to call) "a piecemeal approach" to solving philosophical problems:

The lesson is that "nonsense" cannot really be a general term of criticism. As a general term of criticism, it would have to be legitimized by a theory of language, and Wittgenstein is insistent that there is no such thing. ("Logic must take care of itself.") ... Wittgenstein's talk of nonsense just is shorthand for a process of coming to see how words fall apart when worked out from the inside. What Wittgenstein is urging is a case-by-case approach. The general rubric is nothing but synoptic for what emerges in each case. Here the commonality with his later thought is unmistakable.²¹

The sense of 'piecemeal' that concerns McGinn – that is, the sense in which early Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems is anything but piecemeal – has to do with the unitary character of the method he employs, that is, with what makes it correct to speak of there being such a thing as *the* method of the *Tractatus*. The sense of 'piecemeal' that concerns Goldfarb –

true and false, are only reflections of the one great problem in the variously placed great and small mirrors of philosophy" (*Notebooks, 1914-1916*, p. 40).

²⁰ Marie McGinn: *Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy and the Idea of 'The Single Great Problem'*, in: Alois Pichler / Simo Sätelä (eds.): *Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and his Works*, op. cit., p. 100.

²¹ Goldfarb: *Metaphysics and Nonsense*, op. cit., p. 71.

that is, the sense in which early Wittgenstein's approach to philosophical problems of necessity requires a case-by-case approach – has to do with the application of “the method of the *Tractatus*” to individual philosophical problems, and with why such an application must of necessity be retail, rather than wholesale.

Let us first explore for a moment this latter sense of the term, in accordance with which early Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical method *can* properly be said to be piecemeal. This requires getting firmly into focus a critical difference between standard and (what have now become know as) resolute readings of the *Tractatus*.

As we saw above, according to standard readers, what the author of that work, in section 6.54, aims to call upon his reader to do (when he says that she will understand him when she reaches the point where she is able to recognize his sentences as nonsensical) is something that requires the reader of the work first to grasp and then to apply to the sentences of the work a *theory* that has been advanced in the body of the work. And, as we also saw, in order to be able to give content to the idea that we are able to come to grasp the commitments of such a theory, a commentator must hold that there is a fairly substantial sense in which we can come to “understand” the sentences that “explain” the theory, despite the fact we are eventually called upon to recognize these very same sentences as nonsense. And, finally, as we saw, resolute readers are committed to rejecting such a reading, in part on account of some of the consideration above. In the context of summarizing this aspect of the dispute between standard and resolute readers above, I touched upon Wittgenstein's declaration that the kind of philosophy he seeks to practice in the *Tractatus* consists not in putting forward a theory, but rather in the exercise of a certain sort of activity – one of elucidation²²; and I remarked that a core commitment of a resolute reading lies in an insistence upon the thought that a proper understanding of the aim of the *Tractatus* depends upon taking Wittgenstein at his word here.

Peter Hacker is explicit about the fact that a standard reading of the *Tractatus* requires that one not take Wittgenstein at his word on this point:

To understand Wittgenstein's brief remarks about philosophy in the *Tractatus*, it is essential to realize that its practice and its theory are at odds with each other. The official de jure account of philosophy is wholly different from the de facto practice in the book.²³

²³ P. M. S. Hacker: *Insight and Illusion*, 2nd Edition, Oxford 1986, p. 12.

What would it be to take Wittgenstein's remarks about philosophy in the *Tractatus* at face value? According to resolute readers, to regard one of the sentences (of which the body of the book is comprised) to be a *rung on the ladder* (that we are asked to climb up and then throw away) is to take it to belong to this aspect of the task that the author of the work has set us. The reader reaches a moment in which she understands the author (and what he is doing with one of his sentences) each time she moves from a state of appearing to herself to be able to understand one of these sentences to a state in which it becomes evident to her that her earlier “state of understanding” was only apparent. This point is reached not through the reader's coming to be convinced by an argument that forces her to believe *that* such-and-such is the case, say, by convincing her that the sentence fails to meet certain necessary conditions on sense. (Why should she ever believe the conclusion of such an argument, if she takes herself still to be able to understand the sentence in question? As long as she is able to do this, doesn't she have good reason to question the premises of the argument?) Rather, the point is reached, in each case, by her experience of the sentence (and the sort of understanding it can seem to support) undergoing a transformation. Each such moment of “understanding the author” involves, in this sense, *a change in the reader*. Her sense of the world as a whole, at each such moment, waxes or wanes, not by her coming to see *that p* (for some effable or ineffable, propositional or quasi-propositional *p*), but rather by her coming to see that there is nothing of the form ‘*that _____*’ (of the sort she originally imagined) to believe. So a point of understanding the author is reached when she arrives at a moment in her relation to a given form of words when she is no longer able to sustain her original experience of “understanding the sentence”. The task of thus overcoming each such particular appearance of sense (that each such rung on the ladder at first engenders in a reader) is an arduous one. The form of understanding that is at issue here for resolute readers can only be attained piecemeal, sentence by sentence.

Since they hold that the *Tractatus* has no general story about what makes something nonsense, resolute readers are obliged to hold that these moments of recognition that a reader is called upon (in section 6.54) to attain must come one step at a time, in the way that Goldfarb sketches in the quotation on your handout. This is contrary to the spirit of most standard readings, according to which there can be a possible moment in a reader's assimilation of the doctrines of the book when the theory (once it has been fully digested by the reader) can be brought simultaneously to bear *wholesale* on all of the (putatively nonsensical) propositions that make up the work. According to such a reading of the *Tractatus*, once we have equipped ourselves with the right theory of language, we can determine where we have gone right and

where we have gone wrong in philosophy, simply by applying the theory to each of the things we are drawn to say when speaking philosophically.

According to resolute readers, it is a central project of the *Tractatus* to criticize just this conception of the role that theory can play in philosophical clarification – the very conception that standard readers assume lies at the heart of the book. Equally controversially, according to resolute readers, this rejection of the understanding of the role of theory in philosophy not only marks an important point of *discontinuity* between Wittgenstein's thought and that of the philosophical tradition, but it also makes an important point of *continuity* between the thought of early and that of later Wittgenstein.

We might sum up the alternative (so-called resolute) view of Wittgenstein in question here as follows: Wittgenstein, early and late, rejected a wholesale conception of how progress in philosophy is to be achieved – philosophical clarity must be won piecemeal, one step at a time – thus not through the application of a general philosophical account to a class of instances that fall under the categories catered for by the account, but rather through a procedure of philosophical clarification that requires the case-by-case interrogation of genuinely felt individual expressions of philosophical puzzlement.

The foregoing was my very brief attempt to summarize (what we might call) the Goldfarb sense of 'piecemeal' – the sense in which, according to resolute readers, Wittgenstein *is* committed to a piecemeal procedure in philosophy. Now what about (what we might call) the McGinn sense of 'piecemeal'?

In the quotation from McGinn above, she comments on the passage about the Single Great Problem from the *Notebooks* by saying that Wittgenstein there "instructs himself not to try to treat each of the problems piecemeal". The first thing we need to see is that what McGinn takes early Wittgenstein to be there instructing himself not to do (in her use of the expression "treat each of the problems piecemeal") and what resolute readers (such as Goldfarb and myself) take early Wittgenstein to be committed to doing (in their use of the expression "treat each of the problems piecemeal") are *not* the same thing. The ambition touched on in the remark from the *Notebooks* (the ambition to attain a view of the problems of philosophy that allows them all simultaneously to come into view as aspects of "a whole *single* great problem") is an ambition that Wittgenstein takes himself to have realized by the time of completing the *Tractatus*. It is tied to the remark in the Preface of the *Tractatus* that "the problems have in essentials finally been solved". The problems have in essentials been solved because *the* method of their (dis)solution has been found. The application of this method to the problems of philosophy (that require treatment by the method) is for early Wittgenstein, nonetheless, a piecemeal process in (what I have called) the Goldfarb sense – that is why the

problems have been solved only in essentials, and not in their details. It is the latter distinction (between solving the problems in essentials vs. in their details) that mandates the early procedure of piecemeal interrogation of sentences that resolute readers insist upon. This is not to be confused with a more fundamental distinction in philosophical conception between the methodological monism of the early Wittgenstein (who seeks to present *the* method of clarification) and the methodological pluralism of the later Wittgenstein (who seeks to present an open-ended series of examples of methods – a series that can be continued in both unforeseen and unforeseeable ways) – and that can be broken off at any point. A resolute reader who insists upon things being piecemeal in the sense that goes with the first of these distinctions need not hold that they are piecemeal in the sense that goes with the second of these distinctions (and therefore need not deny that there is an enormous difference in methodological conception between early and later Wittgenstein). The definite article in the title of my paper "The Method of the *Tractatus*" (a paper which, incidentally, insists upon the piecemeal character of any application of *the* method) is supposed to mark an important point of difference between early and later Wittgenstein in this regard.²⁴ A resolute reader who fails carefully to distinguish these two senses (in which something about the early method can be said to be "piecemeal") runs the risk of falling into thinking that a bare commitment to resolution itself entails a needlessly severe claim regarding the extent of the continuity that can be found in Wittgenstein's philosophy.²⁵

The expression 'piecemeal' therefore, employed in the Goldfarb sense, can be a useful locution for marking a profound continuity in Wittgenstein's thought that runs from the *Tractatus* to the end of his philosophical life. And the expression 'piecemeal', employed in the McGinn sense, can be a useful locution for marking a profound discontinuity in Wittgenstein's thought. At what point does this latter break in his conception of philosophy arise?

6. From Methodological Monism to Methodological Pluralism

As I already mentioned that I would tell the host of the imaginary German television show: I believe that the correct answer to that question is 1937. To document that claim properly would require going into a level detail that does

²⁴ See: *The Method of the Tractatus*, in: Reck (ed.): *From Frege to Wittgenstein*, op. cit. Oxford 2002.

²⁵ There are such resolute readers around now who take themselves to be in agreement with my work. They are not.

not fit well into the genre of an article-length contribution to a volume of essays. I will therefore confine myself here to an attempt to sketch the larger framework within which such an investigation would take place.

As I have already in effect indicated above, I do think this much is clear: whenever exactly that break took place, it has been fully accomplished in the final version of Part I of *Philosophical Investigations*. Of particular interest in this connection is the entire stretch in *Philosophical Investigations* that runs from §89 to §133. In almost every remark we have some effort on Wittgenstein's part to bring his later methods of philosophy into relief by contrasting them with his earlier conception of *the* method (cf. §133) of philosophy, and yet numerous local moments of continuity surface within this overarching contrast. This contrast – between *the* (early) method and the (later) methods – draws many of the other points of difference between the early and later philosophies together and, in particular, the difference between the *Tractatus's* point of view on the problems of philosophy (according to which they have in essentials been solved) and the refusal of such a point of view in the *Investigations* (in which the essentials can no longer be separated in such a manner from the details of their treatment). The confidence expressed in the claim (in the Preface to the *Tractatus*) that the problems of philosophy have in essentials been solved is tied to a confidence that, at least in its essentials, *the basic outline* of the method for dissolving *all* such problems has been put in place. (This, in turn, is tied to a confidence that there is something which is *the* logic of our language – the structure of which can be displayed in a perspicuous notation.) The *Tractatus* aims to furnish this basic outline and demonstrate its worth. Once it has successfully done so, it is now to become clear, in retrospect, that the prior absence of a serviceable method had been the big problem for the early philosophy – for the solution to all other problems had depended on the solution to this one – and now that *it* has been resolved, they, are in principle (if not yet in practice) also resolved. This central (apparent) achievement of the early philosophy, in turn, becomes a central target of the very late philosophy. The entire stretch in *Philosophical Investigations* that runs from §89 to §133 can be read as seeking to expose the latent preconceptions that allowed early Wittgenstein to imagine that he had done this – that he had been able to survey *the* structure of the problems *as such* and attain a perspective on them from which there could appear to be one big problem that could admit of an overarching form of solution (at least in its essentials). Yet, at the same time, there is much of local value in his early conception of clarification that is to be recovered within this fundamental break with the early conception. Hence, even in the course of this markedly critical sequence of reflections on the relation between the early and later conceptions of philosophical method, a crisscrossing method of investigation is required – one that denies nothing of value and recoups each of the gains of the early philosophy, while

laboring to identify each of the moments in which it oversteps or overreaches. One might think that the question of “the extent of the continuity and the discontinuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy” here at issue has primarily to do with the relation between the author of the *Tractatus* and the author of the *Investigations*. But I think this would be quite mistaken. And the mistake in question here extends to the scope of the contrast between conceptions of philosophical method drawn in the last sentence of §133: “There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.”²⁶ I do not mean to suggest that it is incorrect to understand the contrast in play here to be one that marks a difference between the Tractarian methodological conception (the conception of *the* method) and that of §133 (the conception that there is not *one* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods). But one should not conclude on this ground that §133 contains no criticism by Later Wittgenstein of *Middle Wittgenstein*. For this idea of “the method” did not immediately die with Wittgenstein's return to full-time philosophizing in 1929. §133 is arguably equally concerned to draw a contrast between the later methodological conception and the very emphatic views of Middle Wittgenstein. Despite the far-reaching differences in their respective methodological conceptions, there remains the following important similarity between Early and Middle Wittgenstein: each believes he has hit upon *the* method. One of Middle Wittgenstein's favorite ways of putting this, in the context of discussing his “new” method, is to emphasize how philosophy can now become a matter of *skillful* practice. There can be skillful philosophers as there are skillful chemists, because “a new method” had been *discovered*, as happened when chemistry was developed out of alchemy: “The nimbus of philosophy has been lost. For we now have a method of doing philosophy... Compare the difference between alchemy and chemistry; chemistry has a method.”²⁷ What matters now is not the truth or falsity of any specific philosophical results but rather this all-important fact: “a method had been found.”²⁸ The contrast between there being *a* philosophical method (according to Middle Wittgenstein) and there being philosophical methods (according to Later Wittgenstein) represents an important difference in the respect in which he thinks philosophy can and should aspire to a form of maturity – a form of maturity that does, for example, properly characterize the manner in which an immature discipline (say, chemistry) can be said to

²⁶ Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit., §133.

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930-1932*, edited by Desmond Lee, Ottawa-New York 1980, p. 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

have successfully differentiated itself from the form it took in its infancy through having come to attain a form of maturity marked out by the fact that the fundamental questions of the discipline are no longer primarily concerned ones of method – a condition, that is, in which the majority of the practitioners, at any given time, are properly able to rest content with a stable conception of the sort of methods appropriate to such a form of inquiry.

It would be a mistake here to think that Middle Wittgenstein here thought that philosophy should aspire to imitate the method or methods of science. That would be a misunderstanding of how Wittgenstein viewed philosophy, early, middle, and late. The point is rather that Middle Wittgenstein, like Early Wittgenstein yearned for the possibility of an overview of the possible forms of difficulty that characterize philosophical problems. In this respect, a possible (and arguably fantastic) imaginary future state of medicine might serve as a better analogy here than chemistry. Imagine a future in which the science of medicine has attained the sort of maturity that Wittgenstein postulates the science of chemistry can and has, where even once the science of the possible forms of disease and their possible forms of cure has been completed, the art of medicine might well persist as a form of craft that cannot itself be reduced to a form of science, even if its instruments of cure rests on one. What makes this analogy more fitting is the fact that, for the author of the *Tractatus*, for example, the provision of a proper *Begriffsschrift* is the sort of thing that would, on the one hand, at least implicitly afford an inventory of all of the possible forms of philosophical confusion, just as the tools it would afford would provide a complete toolkit for the treatment of those forms of confusion. Yet its exhaustiveness in these respects would not eliminate the need for a form of elucidatory craft when it came to the clarification of philosophical problems. So to say that one has attained an overview of all of the forms of philosophical confusion need to be to deny that, for example, the discernment of which particular – or which particular combination of – forms of notation (of the sort that the *Tractatus* introduces, such as the truth-table notation, the *Klammerausdruck* notation for generality, the N-operator notation for the general form of the proposition, etc. for the treatment of philosophical problems) will be help with this particular philosophical confusion might not be readily apparent, so that such a form of discernment might well require considerable elucidatory experience, delicacy of judgment, and philosophical craft. Similarly, even once the right elucidatory tools have been identified, their application to a particular form of confusion might well be a piecemeal matter, yielding limited relief and freedom from perplexity at each step in the process, such that the overall procedure (which aims to make the problems completely disappear) might require considerable deftness, patience and art on the part of its practitioner.

To employ a dangerous (because potentially misleading) analogy: just as the discovery of all possible medical vaccines and cures for all possible forms of disease would not necessarily eliminate the art of medicine, since even the medical practitioner armed with a complete medical toolkit would still require experience, judgment and medical craft properly to diagnose, treat and, heal any particular form of illness, so that the true business of medicine must remain a forever piecemeal and unfinished task; so, too, for the author of the *Tractatus*, even after *the* method of philosophy has been discovered (and thus, in this sense, the problems have been solved in their essentials), the work of philosophical elucidation – the true business of philosophy – must remain a forever piecemeal and unfinished task (one which, with respect to its application in detail, must go on indefinitely without ever reaching a final resting place).

It is this aspect of the methodological aspiration of the *Tractatus* that remains very much alive in Middle Wittgenstein, so that what is at issue here is arguably the central difference in the thought of (what we might call) the Early Later Wittgenstein and the Later Later Wittgenstein. Thus it would be a mistake to think that §133 (in its denial that there is “a philosophical method”) is primarily concerned to draw a contrast between the “early” view (where early = *Tractatus*) and the “later” view (where later = *Investigations*). It is worth noting in this connection that the predecessor version of §133 in *The Big Typescript* is missing the last sentence (about there not being a philosophical method, but rather different methods).²⁹ Yet much of §133 as we find it in the *Investigations* is already in *The Big Typescript*, and is clearly concerned with drawing contrasts between the author’s (i.e., Middle Wittgenstein’s) conception of philosophy and that of the Early Wittgenstein.

We here stand at the threshold of a broader inquiry. In order to see how the point just made about §133 represents only the tip of a larger iceberg of forms of revision in Wittgenstein’s texts – forms of revision that themselves are symptomatic of a sea-change in his conception of philosophical method – what one would need to do is to investigate the detailed ways in which entire stretch in *Philosophical Investigations* that runs from §89 to §133 involves a careful rewriting of the chapter on Philosophy in *The Big Typescript*, so as to purge of it of its commitment to the idea that the method has been found once and for all (so that the problems of philosophy are of such a sort that the essentials of their solution allow for a sort of discovery that can be separated from the messy details of their treatment) and thus that – even though much work remains for individual practitioners of the subject to – the nimbus of philosophy has been lost once and for all (for philosophy has now been reduced to a

²⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *The Big Typescript* (translated by C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue), Oxford 2005, p. 316.

craft of applying a set of tools whose fundamental nature and character have been successfully identified and supplied). It is this conception of what he seeks, in seeking *the* method of philosophy, that Wittgenstein finally came to abandon in Norway in 1937.

On later Wittgenstein's conception, the treatment of philosophical problems can no longer be separated in this way from a continuing exploration of the fundamental character of philosophy itself – which is to say that philosophy can never lose its nimbus while remaining philosophy. The forms of creativity required for the discovery of fruitful methods in philosophy and the forms of creativity required for the fruitful application of such methods to particular problems of philosophy are recognized by later Wittgenstein as two aspects of a single task, each of which requires an unending cultivation of the latter.

A careful examination of the relevant differences between §89 to §133 of *Philosophical Investigations* and the chapter on Philosophy in *The Big Typescript* nicely brings out one aspect of the way in which the break with the *Tractatus* was a graduated one, that was distributed over widely dispersed junctures in his philosophical development. Here we see two crucial steps coming one after the other. Middle Wittgenstein (who still thought there was one method) thought that Early Wittgenstein had been confused (in thinking that it was possible to solve *all* the problems *at once* by solving them *in essentials*). Yet Later Wittgenstein (who thinks there can only be methods) thinks Middle Wittgenstein is still confused in his criticisms of Early Wittgenstein (i.e., he has unwittingly preserved an essential feature of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*). This shows how, as a matter of historical fact, the process of purging *himself* of the unwitting metaphysical commitments of the *Tractatus* is one that unfolded for Wittgenstein, over the course of his own philosophical development, in (what we might call) a “piecemeal” manner – in yet a third application of that term to Wittgenstein's philosophy. In this third application of the term, what is at issue is not some particular aspect of Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical method, but rather the shifts that the various aspects of that conception undergo over time. What I hope to have begun to make plausible in this paper is that a proper and careful telling of *that* tale is a delicate and difficult matter and one which has still gone largely untold.

„Die Wahrheit verträgt kein Mehr oder Minder“

Geert Keil

Den Satz von Frege, den ich für den Titel meines Beitrags ausgeliehen habe, könnte man für ein philosophisches Glaubensbekenntnis halten. Als einem solchen könnte man ihm die Bemerkung Adornos zur Seite stellen, in der Philosophie sei die halbe Wahrheit schon die ganze Unwahrheit. Und wem Adorno keine Autorität ist, der mag an Matthäus 5, 37 denken: „Deine Rede aber sei: Ja, ja; nein, nein. Was darüber ist, das ist vom Übel“.

All das meint Frege nicht. Es geht ihm nicht um die Tugend der eindeutigen Rede oder um einen Rat an die Philosophen, sich nicht mit Halbwahrheiten zufriedenzugeben. Es geht ihm schlicht darum, was Wahrheit *ist*. Lässt sich das Prädikat „ist wahr“ abstufen, oder ist Wahrsein eine Entweder-oder-Angelegenheit?

Frege selbst ist der Auffassung, dass mit der Rede von mehr oder minder Wahrem das Wahrheitsprädikat missbraucht wird. Dieser Auffassung war schon Aristoteles und mit ihm die Mehrheit der Philosophen, die über diesen Gegenstand nachgedacht haben. Auch die klassische Logik und die meisten Bedeutungstheorien basieren auf dieser Annahme: Eine wohlgeformte Aussage, die überhaupt wahrheitsfähig ist, ist entweder wahr oder falsch. Den Entweder-oder-Charakter der Wahrheit drücken drei eng verwandte logische Prinzipien aus, das *Bivalenzprinzip*, das *Tertium non datur* und der *Satz vom Widerspruch*. Über die Unterschiede zwischen diesen drei Prinzipien ist viel Tinte vergossen worden. Ich behelfe mich mit den folgenden Standarderläuterungen:

(i) Das *Bivalenzprinzip* sagt, dass alle Aussagen wahrheitswertdefinit, nämlich entweder wahr oder falsch sind. Es verbietet Wahrheitswertlücken und lässt als Wahrheitswerte nur „wahr“ und „falsch“ zu.

(ii) Der *Satz vom ausgeschlossenen Dritten* behauptet die Allgemeingültigkeit des Aussageschemas P oder $\neg P$. Mit anderen Worten: Jede Aussage der Form $P \vee \neg P$ ist logisch wahr. Aristoteles drückt das Prinzip so aus, dass es zwischen den beiden Gliedern eines Widerspruches nichts Drittes oder Mittleres geben könne (*Met.* 1011b).