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Nonsense and Clarification in the *Tractatus* – Resolute and Ineffability Readings and the *Tractatus'* Failure

In this paper I discuss the role of the nonsensical 'statements' of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the aims of the book, a topic which has in recent years been the subject of, at times heated, controversy among Wittgenstein's readers.[1] In this debate the so-called ineffability interpretation argues that the role of nonsense in the *Tractatus* is to make us grasp ineffable truths which 'strictly speaking' cannot be said or thought[2]. By contrast, the interpretation known as the resolute reading emphasises the incomprehensibility of the notion of ineffable truths. According to the latter, nonsense in the *Tractatus* serves a therapeutic purpose: that of curing us from attempts to put forward nonsensical philosophical doctrines[3]. By employing a method of juxtaposition I

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[1] Cf. for instance, Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (Routledge, London, 2000).

[2] The proponents of ineffability readings include G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's* Tractatus (Hutchinson University Library, London, 1959), Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1973), Norman Malcolm, *Nothing Is Hidden, Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986) and *A Religious Point of View?* (Winch, P., ed., Routledge, London, 1993), David Pears, *The False Prison*, Vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987), Bertrand Russell, "Introduction" (Russell's introduction to the TLP), and currently most notably P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion* (Rev. ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986) and "Was He Trying to Whistle It?", in A. Crary & R. Read (eds.), *The New Wittgenstein* (Routledge, London 2000).

[3] This reading is developed and supported by for instance James Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder", *Yale Review* 79 (1990), pp. 328–364, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", in E. H. Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein, Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002), and "Mild Mono Wittgensteinianism", in Alice Crary (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA., 2007), Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA., 1991) and "Realism and Resolution: Reply to Warren Goldfarb and Sabina Lovibond", *Journal of Philosophical Research,*

aim to show that something important can be learned from both lines of interpretation, and seek to articulate an interpretation that includes certain elements of both readings. In particular, I wish to throw light on the issue of what it means to speak of the *Tractatus'* failure and how its failure might be described.

1. Hacker's ineffability interpretation: the problem with ineffable truths

A very important aspect of the *Tractatus'* conception of logic is the idea of the autonomy of logic: that language itself takes care of itself, not leaving any room for illogical, nonsensical sign formations. This view has the consequence that there is no need for a theory of types as a theory of correct symbolism purporting to show which symbols are permissible. Rather than aiming to regulate language use, in logic we can only try to clarify what makes sense and what does not. This view is expressed by Wittgenstein as follows (cf. MS 101, 8r, 13r[4] where the following remarks are drafted):

> Logic must take care of itself.
> A possible sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted. ("Socrates is identical" means nothing because there is no property which is called "identical". The proposition [Satz] is nonsense because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol is in itself impermissible.)

Vol. XXII (1997), James Conant and Cora Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", in M. Kölbel and B Weiss (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance* (Routledge, London, 2004), Warren Goldfarb, "Metaphysics and Nonsense: on Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*", *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol. XXII (1997), Michael Kremer, "Contextualism and Holism in the Early Wittgenstein: From *Prototractatus* to *Tractatus*", *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1997) and "The Purpose of Tractarian Nonsense", *Noûs*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2001), Brian McGuinness, "The So-called Realism of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*", in I. Block (ed.), *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981), Matthew Ostrow, *Wittgenstein's* Tractatus, *A Dialectical Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2002), Thomas Ricketts, "Pictures, Logic, and the Limits of Sense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*", in H. Sluga & D. Stern (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) and Peter Winch, "Discussion of Malcolm's Essay", in P. Winch (ed.), *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (Routledge, London, 1993).
[4] References to Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* will be by type-/manuscript number.

> In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic. (TLP 5.473)
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> Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have not given meaning to some of its constituent parts.
>
> (Even if we think we have done so.)
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> Thus "Socrates is identical" says nothing because we have given *no* meaning to the word "identical" as an *adjective*. For when it occurs as the sign of equality it symbolizes in an entirely different way – the symbolizing relation is another – therefore the symbol is in the two cases entirely different; the two symbols have the sign in common with another only by accident. (TLP 5.4733)

According to Wittgenstein, therefore, there is no such thing as an illogical symbol. A sign combined with other signs either symbolises or not, but there are no illogical combinations of symbols that constitute impossible, illegitimate symbols with a nonsensical sense, as it were. Combining signs in illogical ways results in a failure to symbolise anything, and examples of such cases are not symbols. Nonsense, that is to say, is a matter of some of our signs failing to symbolise, or more precisely, of our failing to employ our words in a meaningful way.

But given this account of nonsense and provided that the sentences of the *Tractatus* (or many or most of them) are nonsense, as Wittgenstein says in TLP 6.54, what could be the intended role of such nonsensical sentences in his book? For what purpose did Wittgenstein write a nonsensical book?

According to Peter Hacker, nonsense can be split into two basic categories: overt and covert. In the latter category (which is the philosophically interesting one) we can draw a further distinction between misleading and illuminating nonsense. The former is unself-conscious nonsense attempting to say what can only be shown. The latter is self-conscious nonsense intended to reveal its own nonsensicalness.[5] Hacker writes: "Illuminating nonsense will guide the attentive 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."[6] Hence, although nonsense nei-

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[5] Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 18, 19; for Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing, see TLP 4.12–4.1212.

[6] Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 18, 19.

ther says nor shows anything[7], it seems possible to grasp what some-one means by a nonsensical sentence. "Apparently what someone means or intends by a remark can be grasped even though the sentence uttered is strictly speaking nonsense."[8] According to Hacker, an example of this sort of a case is Wittgenstein's statement that: "What solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself." (TLP 5.62)

This account of the function of nonsense seems problematic, however. Naturally, a nonsensical sentence can *appear* to have a sense – because we are accustomed to the words which are used, or for other psychological reasons. But how can anybody mean anything by a non-sensical sentence? Its nonsensicalness means that it symbolises or represents nothing. The sentence has no meaning for its author nor for anybody else because there is nothing the sentence means. This problem with Hacker's interpretation of the role of the *Tractatus'* non-sense, arising from the above account of what nonsense might convey to us, can be brought into sharper focus as follows.

Ultimately, Hacker's view of what nonsense in the *Tractatus* is meant to convey is, in a way, very straightforward. The book contains an argument which leads the reader to realise the nonsensicalness of what is said in the book. More precisely, the book contains a theory of representation (the picture theory of proposition) from which it follows that formal properties of symbols cannot be talked or thought about – and that a theory of types is merely not necessary, but impossible.[9] Consequently, many remarks in the book, i.e. those "talking" about the formal or necessary features of language or of the world, are nonsense. However, it does not follow from this, in Hacker's view, that such remarks could not convey truths of some sort to us. Rather, the theory and the line of argument are what constitutes the famous ladder of the *Tractatus*. To climb the ladder is to follow the argument of the book, and to throw the ladder away is to draw the self-destructive conclusion that what is said in the book is nonsense. But after we have thrown away the ladder something remains: we have gained an understanding of the essence of language and the world, of "what

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

cannot be said, but manifests itself in what can be said".[10] Thus, as Hacker says: "[...] there are, according to the author of the *Tractatus*, ineffable truths that can be apprehended."[11]

But it is the self-destructive nature of the argument that is problematic. For if the book is nonsense, how can it contain a theory or an argument? There is no such thing as a nonsensical argument, and one cannot draw any conclusions from what looks like an argument but is nonsense. Put in another way, insofar as Wittgenstein's doctrine of representation is able to demonstrate the nonsensicalness of philosophical doctrines concerning the necessary features of language and the world, then apparently he has managed to construct a very extraordinary doctrine: one capable of demonstrating its own nonsensicalness. But this leaves us with a paradox: if his doctrine is nonsense, it does not demonstrate anything; in order to demonstrate something it must not be nonsense.[12]

Hacker's interpretation, therefore, *ends* in a paradox. Taking seriously the nonsensicalness of nonsense, nonsense cannot convey any thoughts or truths to us. Yet, Hacker has no further suggestions as to what we are to do with or should learn from the paradox of the book. But is it plausible that Wittgenstein would have been unaware or ignored such a stalemate result which makes the point of the book outright incomprehensible? I think not. Notably, there is also no textual evidence that Wittgenstein though that his book fails *because of its paradox*, whatever faults he came to see in it. Therefore it seems more plausible that Wittgenstein did not conceive the role of the *Tractatus*' nonsensical sentences along the lines of the ineffability interpretation, as attempting to convey theoretical insights or a nonsensical doctrine. Rather, in order to avoid the sterility of the outcome of the ineffability interpretation, that is, to find out *what to do with* the paradox or *what it might be meant to do to us*, we must break with the idea that the *Tractatus* intends to put forward a theory. An alternative to Hacker's interpreta-

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[10] Hacker, "Was He Trying to Whistle It?", p. 365; Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, p. 26.

[11] Hacker, "Was He Trying to Whistle it?", p. 368; cf. pp. 353, 357.

[12] Wittgenstein says in the Preface to the book that he takes thoughts expressed in it to be true. This as such cannot be used as a line of defence for an ineffability view, unlike Hacker seems to think ("Was He Trying to Whistle It?", p. 360). The reason is the unclarity of which remarks and which thoughts Wittgenstein might be referring to. It might be that there are true thoughts in the book, but then again, these might not be the ones which are declared nonsense.

tion of the role of nonsense in the *Tractatus* has been suggested by the book's resolute readers. I will next examine this line of interpretation, as articulated by James Conant.

2. Conant's resolute reading: the programme of the *Tractatus*

According to Conant, the method of the *Tractatus* and the method of philosophy in general, as conceived by the *Tractatus*, is therapeutic: philosophy attempts to cure us from the temptation to put forward philosophical doctrines by showing that (and how) such attempts lead to nonsense. Or as Conant puts it: "[…] the aim of Tractarian elucidation is to reveal (through the employment of mere nonsense) that what appears to be substantial nonsense is mere nonsense" – where substantial nonsense would serve the "conferral of insight into inexpressible features of reality".[13] I will call this method "elucidation-with-nonsense". This interpretation has an important advantage over Hacker's: it does not involve the problematic notion of a nonsensical theory. Nonsense is not thought to bring to view any philosophical truths. It is meant to make manifest its own nonsensicalness and that of seeming philosophical doctrines. This way the book aims to change the way we conceive of philosophy and philosophise.

The nonsensicalness of the *Tractatus*, therefore, does not constitute a problem for Conant in the same way as it does for Hacker. On Conant's reading, the book does not contain an argument and, consequently, there is no argument which could collapse, when it turns out to be nonsense. Conant, that is to say, does not interpret the *Tractatus* as intending to put forward a philosophical theory of representation, or a *general criterion of sense* on the basis of which we must deem the book nonsense. Rather, the nonsensicalness of philosophical doctrines as well as each individual sentence of the *Tractatus* is to be exposed case by case relying on a non/pre-theoretical understanding of what it makes sense to say, or on our "ordinary logical capacities", which we posses as competent language users.[14] Thus, it is characteristic of

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[13] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", p. 421; cf. quotations in section 3 below.
[14] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", pp. 423, 424; Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", pp. 64, 74.

Conant's interpretation that he takes the book to exemplify or exhibit a philosophical programme, rather than to theorise about and lay the foundation for such a programme.[15] The *Tractatus* seeks to introduce a programme for philosophical clarification, i.e. a certain way of approaching philosophical issues, by making apparent how philosophical sentences, which we are inclined to take as making sense, dissolve into nonsense upon closer examination.[16]

From the point of view of this reading, the last remark of the *Tractatus*, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent", should then not be taken to constitute a *conclusion*. Rather, it is an invitation to philosophise in a certain way. The *Tractatus* puts forward a programme for future philosophy, but this future is not something which begins *after* this book. It is meant to begin with this book itself, with the reader's response to it, with her beginning to philosophise in a novel way. This, one could say, is what the book is meant to *do* to us: it is meant to make us begin anew in philosophy.

The last observation provides us with yet another way of contrasting Conant's reading with Hacker's, it being characteristic to the latter that it emphasises a distinction between philosophy as it is preached and as it is practised in the *Tractatus*. According to Hacker, the *Tractatus* is the swansong of the old metaphysical philosophy. It promises something new, but does not yet exercise this new philosophy.[17] Conant reads the *Tractatus* as exemplifying a new way of philosophising.

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[15] Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder", p. 343.

[16] Similarly, Conant's interpretation itself can be characterised as a programme for reading the book, rather than an established reading that offers definite interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks. It is an attempt to offer guidelines for those willing to work their way through the book (to climb Wittgenstein's ladder) with the purpose of verifying its statement that the book is nonsense (throwing the ladder away). As Conant and Diamond put the point, there is no trick that turns Wittgenstein's ladder into an elevator taking us immediately where climbing the ladder was supposed to take us. (Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", p. 47)

[17] Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, pp. 12, 27, 156.

3. Problems with Conant's interpretation: a paradox again

Although Conant's reading seems able to show a way ahead from the paradox which the ineffability reading ends with it is not without problems of its own. I will next discuss a problem with Conant's view that the method of philosophy in general, according to the *Tractatus*, is elucidation-with-nonsense, or more specifically, a problem regarding his interpretation of the *Tractatus'* remark 4.112.

Conant's reading is based on the assumption that the word "elucidation" (in its different forms) is used in the same sense in the remarks 4.112 "The aim of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. […]" and TLP 6.54 "My propositions elucidate in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as nonsensical, […]". As Conant writes: "When Wittgenstein says (in §4.112) that a philosophical work consists essentially on elucidations, the term 'elucidation' is a rendering of the same German word (*Erläuterung*) that occurs in §6.54 […]."[18] Furthermore it is characteristic to Conant's interpretation that he takes 4.112 as a remark about the philosophical method employed *in* the *Tractatus*. As he writes, referring to 4.112: "'Philosophy' here means: philosophy as practiced by the author of the *Tractatus*."[19] But both of these assumptions – which a really two sides of one coin – can be contested. More accurately, they must be contested on pain of a paradox, as I will argue.

Let me begin with a problem regarding the textual grounds of the view that "elucidation" is used in the same sense in 4.112 and 6.54[20]. Notably, these two remarks are not the only ones in which this word occurs in the *Tractatus*. For instance, in TLP 3.263 Wittgenstein uses "elucidation" in a sense which is clearly different from its sense in 6.54. According to 3.263, elucidations are sentences which contain

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[18] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", p. 379.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 379.

[20] The appearance of the word "elucidation", or the string of signs "elucidation", in the remarks 6.54 and 4.112 does not as such constitute evidence for Conant's interpretation. This follows immediately from the conception of meaning and logic Conant attributes to the *Tractatus*, and seems to endorse. According to this conception, what matters is how the word is used in specific contexts. Its use in one context does not yet determine how it is to be understood in another (cf. Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", pp. 379, 378).

(so-called) primitive signs and are used to explain the meanings of such signs. Importantly, however, there is no suggestion that Wittgenstein would conceive such elucidations nonsensical, and consequently, that they could be taken to exemplify the method of elucidation-with-nonsense. Rather, he says of such explanations/sentences that "They can […] only be understood when the meanings of these signs are already known." (TLP 3.263) But surely there is something to be understood and meanings to be known only insofar elucidations in this capacity have a sense. My point then is: if Wittgenstein uses the term "elucidation" in 3.263 differently from 6.54 it is problematic to *assume* that "elucidation" has the same sense in 6.54 and 4.112. Indeed, on the basis of normal conventions concerning books it would be more natural to think that the sense of "elucidation" in 4.112 would be the one introduced and explained in 3.263. A different sense will then be introduced later in 6.54 which, notably, explicitly explains the sense in which the sentences of the *Tractatus* are meant to be elucidatory – as is conventional when a word is used in a novel or a deviant sense for the first time.[21]

But this point is not about textual evidence alone. Admittedly, evidence is often likely to be scant in the case of the *Tractatus.* The real problem is that granted his assumption Conant's interpretation seems to lead to a paradox in Wittgenstein's view of philosophy. This is problematic because we cannot read Wittgenstein as employing the term "elucidation" in 4.112 in a way which leads him into a paradox and *simultaneously* maintain that he uses the term to explain the *Tractatus'* conception of philosophy, whereby such explanations are not nonsense. (Conant's statement that "'Philosophy' here means…" certainly creates the impression that he takes 4.112 as a meaningful remark.)

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[21] I will not discuss in any detail the implications of reading "elucidation" in 4.112 in the sense explained in 3.263. One possibility is to regard elucidatory sentences as fully analysed or elementary sentences, hereby intimately connecting the terms "clarification" and "elucidation" in 4.112 with the *Tractatus'* term "logical analysis" (elementary sentences being the end product of analysis). That there should be such a connection is not implausible or surprising, but something we should expect. But I only note this in order to make the point that there are alternative interpretations of "elucidation" in 4.112 suggested by my critique which are not obviously absurd but merit serious consideration. (Moreover, given that there is some room for a discussion of the meaning of "elucidation" in 3.263 there are other possibilities for reading 3.263 and 4.112 together besides the one outlined here.)

The problem can be formulated as follows. In TLP 6.53 (quoted in section 6 below) Wittgenstein says that the *Tractatus* does not adhere to the strictly correct method of philosophy. The book talks nonsense (as explained in 6.54), whereas the correct method would be only to say nothing except what makes sense, and to demonstrate to others that what they have said does not make sense. Thus, Wittgenstein, importantly, distinguishes between the method employed in the *Tractatus* and what would be the strictly correct method. Now, as the resolute readings have made plausible, the book's nonsensicalness as such does not need to constitute a problem. Wittgenstein might be talking nonsense with the purpose of curing us of the temptation to talk philosophical nonsense. Nevertheless, if we follow Conant and use 6.54 to explain what Wittgenstein means by "elucidation" in 4.112 we end up with a paradox. The paradox arises because 6.54 is a remark specifically on the *Tractatus* (concerning the status of its sentences), whereas 4.112 is a remark on philosophy in general and how it should be practised[22]. The conflation of these two types of remark leads to the paradoxical view that, according to Wittgenstein, philosophy, as he thinks it should be practised, does not conform to the correct method of philosophy. Crucially, if this incorrect way of philosophising, nevertheless, is the appropriate one in practice – i.e. one leading to desired results; and why else would Wittgenstein suggest we adopt it? – we face a paradox: Wittgenstein says that the incorrect method is the correct method of philosophy.

The problem might be summed up thus: whereas there need not be anything odd in one asserting that a particular book does not adhere to the correct method of philosophy, to say that philosophy as it should be practised does not adhere to the correct method creates a

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[22] That 4.112 is a remark on philosophy in general, I take it, is evident from the way it is phrased. In particular, according to 4.112 "A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations." From this we may conclude that insofar as the works produced are essential to philosophy, philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, consists essentially of elucidations. Moreover, given that 4.112 would be plainly untrue as a historical (or sociological) remark on how philosophy is or has been practised, it must be a remark on how philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, is to be conceived. It is a programmatic remark explaining the *Tractatus* conception of philosophy. (Or perhaps the remark is to be read merely as an 'explanation', insofar as it is nonsense to portray "consist of elucidations" as a necessary property of philosophical works. If we were not confused, we would recognise that anything that counts as a philosophical work simply consists of elucidations.)

paradox. Conant's interpretation leads us to this a paradox by projecting the sense of "elucidation" in 6.54 on the remark 4.112.

This description of the difficulty with Conant's interpretation, however, already suggests a way out of it. We can avoid the paradox by distinguishing between the method of philosophy which the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce and the one it employs for this introductory purpose, the latter method being elucidation-with-nonsense. Thus, instead of conceiving the use of elucidatory nonsense as the method which the *Tractatus* proposes we should adopt, we are to conceive its elucidatory nonsense as a *means* of introducing a different philosophical method. The method which the *Tractatus* is concerned to introduce, in turn, is the strictly correct method of philosophy referred to in 6.53 (quoted below), which does not involve the employment of nonsense. But now a question arises: If the notions of elucidation and clarification in 4.112 cannot be explained by reference to 6.54, how should we then understand 4.112? What is the method of philosophy which Wittgenstein seeks to introduce if it is not elucidation-with-nonsense?

It is noteworthy that my discussion of the paradox of Conant's interpretation has reintroduced the distinction emphasised by Hacker between the methods practised and preached by the *Tractatus*, according to which there is one method the *Tractatus* employs and another one it seeks to introduce (cf. end of section 2). Because of problems with the notion of ineffable truths, this distinction is no longer to be spelled out the way Hacker does. The idea that the method employed in the *Tractatus* consists of Wittgenstein putting forward a nonsensical argument and doctrine is to be abandoned on the grounds that it leaves us in a sterile stalemate situation, with no way ahead from the resulting paradox (cf. end of section 1). Nevertheless, the distinction seems still worth holding on to in a revised form[23], because it can release us from the paradox of Conant's reading. Moreover, as I will explain, the distinction will prove significant later in connection with the issue of what it means to describe the *Tractatus* as failing to reach its goal of philosophy devoid of doctrines. As then regards the question concerning the method the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce, it might now also be phrased thus: provided that the method which the *Trac-*

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[23] According to this revised version the method which the *Tractatus* practises is elucidation-with-nonsense, as described by Conant – or a certain variant of this method, as explained in section 5 below.

tatus practises is that of elucidation-with-nonsense, what is the method it preaches? But before trying to answer this question let us consider a different way of motivating it and arriving at it.

One might ask: assuming that Wittgenstein thinks elucidation-with-nonsense is the method of philosophy in general, why did he not simply discuss *other philosophers'* nonsensical claims, if all he wanted to do was to demonstrate a method of elucidation-with-nonsense? In this case, *any* nonsensical philosophical claims would have done in principle. Consequently, Wittgenstein would not have had to spend almost ten years in developing the allegedly nonsensical doctrine of the *Tractatus*, and there would apparently not have been any need to employ the incorrect method in the book, i.e. to talk nonsense. A second problem with Conant's interpretation, therefore, seems to be that, insofar as he does not distinguish between the method practised and preached by the *Tractatus*, he cannot explain why Wittgenstein chose to discuss just those nonsensical statements in his book that he did.

This problem for the resolute readings[24] has been briefly considered by Cora Diamond.[25] Although she does not offer a definitive answer, the objection has been taken up by Warren Goldfarb who proposes an answer. According to him, "[…] in showing that there is no such thing as an ontological theory, one should give the best ontological theory one can find, and show its terms fall apart upon closer logical inspection. Similarly with a theory of propositions."[26] But even though this answer has some *prima facie* attraction, it will not do for the reason that it involves treating nonsense as if it made sense. For clearly one cannot say that one piece of nonsense is better (more true, or even more plausible, and so on) than another, unless "best possible" means "most plausible *looking*, though really nonsense". This, however, turns Wittgenstein's choice of ontology into a question about the most effective psychological trick to play on the reader, i.e. how to make a theory look most plausible. Such tricks aside, the problematic question remains. Why specifically *this* "nonsensical theory"? What does it have to do with the method of philosophy which the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce? Evidently, in order to answer this

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[24] Originally this problem was brought to my attention by Wolfgang Freitag.
[25] Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* , p. 34.
[26] Goldfard, "Metaphysics and Nonsense: on Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*", p. 71.

question, we must be able to answer the question: what is the method which the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce? Let us turn to this question now.

4. The method the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce

I will next outline an account of two functions the *Tractatus'* nonsense might be taken to serve.[27] My goal here is to answer the question raised about the identity of the method the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce, and to explain how Conant's paradox is to be dissolved. But despite the critical argumentative context, the indebtedness of the account to Conant (and Diamond) should be evident. I will seek to provide an answer to the question, "why did Wittgenstein choose to use these bits of nonsense rather than some others?" by mainly relying on things the resolute readers have said.

Firstly, instead of providing us with a paradoxically nonsensical doctrine the *Tractatus* aims at demonstrating that the clarification of philosophical problems requires a particular approach to philosophy, which differs importantly from how philosophy has been traditionally conceived. More specifically, according to Wittgenstein, philosophers have made a mistake in treating statements concerning the essential, i.e. necessary features of things as if they were simply another type of statements of fact. (According to Wittgenstein, there is "a confusion, very widely spread among philosophers" about this issue (TLP 4.122). Its clarification is, as we may read from a letter to Russell, Wittgenstein's "main point" and "the cardinal problem of philosophy" (CL, 124).) Accordingly, one important aim of the *Tractatus'* nonsense (as emphasised by Conant and the resolute readers) is to show case by case how attempts to put forward statements about such necessary features of things dissolve into nonsense. By clarifying the distinction between statements concerning facts and what is necessary, the *Tractatus* then throws light on philosophically important aspects the logic of our language. Notably, Wittgenstein should not be read as reporting a discovery or aiming to provide us with new knowledge. As competent language users we already recognise the distinction between the factual and the necessary in our employment of language. Only, this

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[27] Conant ("The Method of the *Tractatus*", p. 378) "lists" two aims of the *Tractatus*. My account of the two tasks overlaps with Conant's, but also differs from it.

distinction is not clearly reflected in ordinary language which therefore is prone to confuse us.[28]

Wittgenstein's elucidation of the distinction between the factual and the necessary also implies a fundamental shift in how we should conceive philosophy. From his perspective philosophy is not to be thought of as a super-science among sciences that can reach more fundamental insights and an even higher level of generality with its statements about necessities than is possible for the sciences that put forward empirical generalisations and laws that apply to the actual world. Rather, the distinction which Wittgenstein draws between statements concerning the factual and the necessary implies that philosophy is not engaged in theoretical assertion at all. Contrary to what has been traditionally assumed, philosophy is not in the business of stating facts or making true/false statements about things (including language). (Cf. TLP 4.111)

But Wittgenstein, I believe, seeks to do more than just to point out a confusion relating to the practice of philosophy, that is, to make a negative, critical point, and to exemplify the method of elucidation-with-nonsense. Secondly, the *Tractatus* outlines an approach to philosophy, or a conception of philosophy as an activity of clarification, that respects the distinction between the factual and the necessary as he draws it. According to this conception, philosophical clarification consists in the employment of certain logical tools: a particular notation, a *Begriffschrift* or a concept-script, which makes possible the clear presentation of the logic of our expressions. The employment of this notation for the purposes of clarification is then what he refers to in 6.53 as the strictly correct method of philosophy, in contrast to the method actually employed in the *Tractatus* (elucidation-with-nonsense). Let us first look more closely at the notion of a concept script and then return to the issue of the role of the *Tractatus'* nonsense.

A concept-script, as Wittgenstein says, is a notation (*Zeichensprache*) which "is governed by *logical* grammar – by logical syntax" (TLP 3.325). By the notation being governed by logical grammar he means that a concept-script is designed in such a way that it reflects clearly the logic of language, as exhibited in the use we make of words, and

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[28] I will not discuss in this paper any examples of how Wittgenstein elucidates the distinction between the factual and the necessary by using nonsense and making relevant statements dissolve.

does not allow for nonsensical sign formations.[29] In this respect a concept-script differs importantly from the everyday language. The latter serves also other purposes besides logical clarity, for instance, the economy of expression. Consequently, everyday language "disguises thought", as Wittgenstein says. (TLP 3.325, 4.002)

It is then characteristic of the concept-script that, in contrast to the ambiguous expressions of the everyday language, each sign of the concept-script symbolises in only one way, or has only one mode of symbolising (*Bezeichnungsweise*), as one can say in the *Tractatus'* terminology (cf. TLP 3.32-3.323). In this sense logical distinctions are, as it were, embodied in the signs of the concept-script. Or as Conant puts it, in the concept-script each sign wears its mode of symbolising on its sleeve.[30] Consequently, a concept script makes it possible for us to avoid logical confusions and philosophical problems resulting from confusions relating to the modes of symbolising of our signs. Its employment allows us to comprehend more clearly what our words mean and what it makes sense to say. (TLP 3.323–3.325, 4.003) Or as Conant says, "[...] a *Begriffschrift* (i.e. a symbolic notation founded on the principles of logical grammar) serves a hermeneutic role. It helps us to see better what someone means by her words or what we mean by our own words."[31]

More specifically, clarification with the help of the concept-script may be characterised as the activity of translating our expressions (those of everyday or scientific languages, for instance) into the formulae of the concept-script. That is, given that the concept-script excludes all logical errors (TLP 3.325), we can determine what makes sense by trying to translate the relevant expressions into the concept-script. Whatever cannot be translated or expressed in the concept-script then is nonsense. This process of translation may also be called "logical analysis", whereby rules for the translation of our expressions to those of the concept-script are definitions of our expressions in terms of the logically simpler expressions of the concept-script. (TLP 3.261, 3.343)

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[29] Anything that can be called "language" accords with or is governed by logical grammar in another sense: in the sense that there are no illogical symbols (cf. discussion in section 1).

[30] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", p. 402.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 412.

Importantly, to translate our expressions into the concept-script or to analyse them in its terms is not to make true/false statements. (Evidently, translating and asserting are two different language-games, as one might express this point.) Rather than to assert anything, to translate a statement in the concept-script is to reformulate it with the purpose of rendering more perspicuous what is being said. Hence, there is clearly a sense in which the activity of clarification aided by the concept-script (or logical analysis) does not result in doctrines. Instead, what is necessary (essential) and possible will, upon an analysis, simply be read out of the expressions of the concept-script. Consequently, there is no need for philosophical doctrines as attempts to state what is necessary and possible. Indeed, given that stating philosophical doctrines involves a logical mistake, such doctrines cannot be expressed in the concept-script at all, since it excludes all logical errors. Thus, Wittgenstein's new conception reduces philosophy to the elucidation of what can be said by means of the clear expression what can be said. Our comprehension of what is necessary and possible is, once we begin philosophising this way, simply reflected in our language-use.

As for Conant's interpretation, I am uncertain of the degree to which he would agree with my suggestion that what Wittgenstein refers to as the strictly correct method in TLP 6.53 is the method of clarification-with-the-concept-script (as I will call the method just characterised).[32] In particular, he might disagree with my next suggestion that it is the method of clarification-with-the-concept-script

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[32] In one of his essays Conant says, by reference to TLP 6.53, that the *Tractatus* "condemns 'the strictly correct method'" on the grounds that this method would not be satisfying to the other (Conant, "Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder", p. 362). I do not regard this as a serious obstacle to the interpretation which I am suggesting. To look at the issue more closely, according to Wittgenstein, someone might not find the correct method satisfactory because "[…] – he would not have the feeling that we are teaching him philosophy – [...]" (TLP 6.53). But just as well as a condemnation of the correct method this statement might be read as stating the extent to which, Wittgenstein thinks, the other (still) has to change in order to arrive at a correct philosophical point of view. Hence, the statement might be regarded as part of Wittgenstein's project of helping the other to reach clarity: it notes a difficulty that he expects people to feel with the method of philosophy he seeks to introduce, and regards as the strictly correct one. Or: it gives a measure of the distance between traditional philosophy and his approach, providing a criterion for what counts as having gone through the process of transforming one's outlook to which the *Tractatus* invites its reader.

rather than elucidation-with-nonsense which the *Tractatus* is concerned to introduce, and that its nonsense is a means of introducing a concept-script. For this means that the purpose of the *Tractatus'* nonsense is not merely to exemplify the method of elucidation-with-nonsense. Rather, nonsense is a makeshift tool for introducing the strictly correct method. But although these last suggestions might seem to invite disagreement, there is also a sense in which they remain thoroughly Conantian (or Diamondian).[33]

When Conant introduces his interpretation of the term "elucidation" in the *Tractatus* he uses Frege's philosophy of logic as an object of comparison. According to Conant, Frege calls "elucidation" a particular manner of explaining the principles of his concept-script which involves the employment of what is strictly speaking nonsense and to be taken with a "pinch of salt". Nonsense plays here a transitional role. Frege uses it to introduce his novel notation and it is to be discarded as soon as the reader understands how the concept-script functions.[34] Now my suggestion is simply that we carry over to the *Tractatus* what Conant (and Diamond) say(s) about Frege. The significance of this transposition is that it brings to the fore a programmatic aspect of the *Tractatus*, i.e. *a claim* it makes about the future of philosophy, a future mode of philosophising which it does not itself yet

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[33] Importantly, my amendment of the interpretation preserves points that Conant makes about the concept of necessity and the *Tractatus* in Conant ("The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege, and the *Tractatus*", *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1991), a paper to which his 2002 paper is meant as a sequel (Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", endnote 11). Note also that it does not follow from my emphasis on the distinction between the methods that the *Tractatus* employs and introduces that i) these methods might not have important affinities, and ii) elucidation-with-nonsense could not serve other purposes besides the introduction of the concept-script in the *Tractatus*. (For example, Wittgenstein's "discussion" of ethics towards the end of the book might be seen as not part of the task of the introduction of the concept-script.) I only wish to suggest that a consistent interpretation of the *Tractatus* as an attempt to philosophise without doctrines, but as involving a relapse to such doctrines, requires that we see elucidation-with-nonsense as serving a particular purpose, namely that of introducing the method of elucidation-with-the-concept-script. (But here I am a little ahead of myself. These points will become clearer later on.)

[34] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*", p. 385 ff.; cf. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, Ch. 6.

exemplify[35]. Thus, I shift emphasis from the method employed by the *Tractatus* to the method it seeks to introduce, where my underlying motivation is to dissolve the paradox of Conant's reading as well as prepare the ground for the clarification of the terms in which the issue of the *Tractatus'* failure is to be discussed. – But is there any plausibility to my suggestion that Wittgenstein uses nonsense to introduce a concept-script?

Somewhat surprisingly, there is a lack of consensus in the secondary literature with respect to the question, whether the *Tractatus* actually provides us with a concept-script. For instance, Matthew Ostrow writes in his recent book on the *Tractatus*: "But while it is unquestionable that the notion of canonical Begriffschrift plays an important (if extremely unclear) role in the *Tractatus*, it is equally certain that Wittgenstein has not actually *provided* us with any such language."[36] Russell, on the other hand seems to have no doubt in his Introduction to Wittgenstein's book that it does provide us with such a notation calling it "Wittgenstein's theoretical logical language" (TLP, 16). As regards Conant, I am uncertain whether he would say that the *Tractatus* provides us with a full-blown concept-script or merely with fragments of a concept-script with the purpose of clarifying the idea of such a script and its relevance to philosophy[37]. However, in order to explore a line of interpretation that seems able to answer important questions regarding Wittgenstein's text, and jettisoning any worries about my unorthodox company[38], I maintain that the *Tractatus* does indeed seek

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[35] Although the introduction of the concept-script does constitute an act of the clarification of aspects of the logic of language, the *Tractatus* does not, strictly speaking, analyse its own or anybody else's nonsense by employing a concept-script. The closest it comes to this is that it introduces its concept-script by way of contrasting it with Frege's and Russell's: by explaining how certain problems arising in their scripts can be avoided in the *Tractatus'* script (cf. for instance TLP 3.331–3.333).

[36] Ostrow, *Wittgenstein's* Tractatus, *A Dialectical Interpretation*, p. 9.

[37] By "full-blown" I mean complete, where the criterion of completeness for a concept-script is that it should be applicable to whatever tasks of logical analysis we need to employ it in. Thus, that something cannot be given a satisfactory analysis in terms of a particular concept-script indicates that the script is either incomplete or misconstructed.

[38] In endnote 1 I list Russell as a representative of ineffability interpretation. Commonly, he is not highly praised as a reader of the *Tractatus,* but is used to exemplify a certain elementary misunderstanding since Anscombe (*An Introduction to Wittgenstein's* Tractatus). On the other hand, *how* Russell came to this misunderstanding could perhaps be explained (at least partly) by his focusing his attention on the logical

to introduce what Wittgenstein perceives as a full-blown concept-script, i.e. to define and explain to us the principles of such a notation.

More specifically, the *Tractatus'* concept-script is a scheme for the analysis of propositions a central component of which is better known under the misleading name "the picture theory of propositions". This 'theory' is a model for the so-called elementary propositions according to which such propositions are pictures of states of affairs consisting of concatenations of simple names. Standing for the objects of the world, the names picture a state of affairs through their combination in the proposition that matches the combination of the objects in the state of affairs. (TLP 3.14, 3.21, 3.22, 4.0311) This model of elementary propositions the *Tractatus* complements by a model of complex propositions as truth-functional combinations of elementary propositions (TLP 5). Consequently, we have a two-layered scheme for the analysis of propositions: at the level of complex propositions a truth functional analysis will be given. Such an analysis may then be carried on further at a sub-sentential level, extending the analysis to the simple components of propositions.

My suggestion, therefore, is that the real significance of 'the picture theory', as conceived by Wittgenstein, is that it constitutes a scheme to be employed in the logical analysis of propositions. Thus, rather than perceiving himself as putting forward a speculative theory of the nature of propositions, Wittgenstein aims to provide us with a notation to be employed in the philosophical clarification of language, i.e. a concept-script. Importantly, to seek to put forward such a notation is not to seek to put forward a doctrine about anything. In particular, as already noted, the *Tractatus'* nonsensical sentences are to be regarded merely as a means for introducing its concept-script[39]. This means that

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tools which the *Tractatus* seeks to offer, i.e. on Wittgenstein's concept-script, while failing to notice how Wittgenstein re-thinks the status of such a script. (For Wittgenstein a concept-script is not a means for a regimentation of language imposed on it from the outside. Thus, there is no theory of types for Wittgenstein in Russell's sense; cf. section 1.)

[39] In effect my suggestion is that we read what appear as dogmatic statements constituting an ontology and a theory of language, as explaining or defining the principles of Wittgenstein's notation. Thus, for instance, the beginning of the book should be read as saying something like, "From the point of view of the notation to be introduced, the world consists of facts not things." Why Wittgenstein does not actually express himself this way is explainable by reference to his claim that his notation/method contains the solution to all philosophical "in essentials" (TLP,

they do not constitute a nonsensical doctrine, but are to be discarded, when the reader has grasped the principles of Wittgenstein's notation. Indeed, it is central to the idea of the *Tractatus'* concept-script that in this notation it is not possible to talk about simple names or about the general propositional form in the manner in which the *Tractatus* – seemingly – talks about these things. Instead, Wittgenstein's notation merely displays propositions as consisting of simple names and having the form of representations of reality. It is then a characteristic mark of Wittgenstein's concept-script that it treats propositions as analysable into true/false pictures of states of affairs consisting of simple names and as having the general form of true/false representations of reality (cf. TLP 4.5).

Wittgenstein writes about these issues in a notebook in the spring of 1915:

> Is there a general propositional form? Yes, if one understands thereby the sole "logical constant"! Again and again it looks that the question "Are there simple things?" has a sense. And yet the question must be nonsense!–
>
>   It would be vain to try and express the pseudo-sentence "Are there simple things?" in the concept script. (MS 102, 85r/NB, 45e)

Thus, according to Wittgenstein, there is a general propositional form, but only in the sense of a logical constant or a variable of the concept-script (TLP 4.53, 5.47). That propositions have this form is not a fact or truth about propositions which could be expressed in the concept-script. Similarly with concepts (or "pseudo-concepts") such as thing and other formal concepts. (TLP 4.1272) As for simple names, sentences concerning them cannot be translated into the concept-script, as Wittgenstein notes in the quotation. Rather, their existence will be shown in the concept-script as the indefinability of certain symbols, or the impossibility of further logical distinctions in the case of certain expressions. (TLP 3.26, 3.261) Or as Wittgenstein says about simple

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Preface; see below for further discussion). For if Wittgenstein is correct and his concept-script correctly captures the logic of though and language, then there is no other point of view for anyone to adopt. Consequently, to talk about a point of view is redundant – or simply nonsense. (For the criterion of correctness for a concept-script, see below.) In addition to "statements" of the above type the *Tractatus*, of course, contains many explicit definitions of the form "I will call…" and "I will write…" characteristic of someone introducing a notation.

objects in his notebook (about two and a half weeks later), they are, as it were, described by means of the process of logical analysis through which we come to know them:

> […] we do not infer the existence of simple objects from the existence of particular simple objects, but rather know them – by description, as it were – as the end-product of analysis, by means of a process that leads to them.
>
> For the very reason that a way of talking is nonsensical, it is still possible to go on using it – see the last remark. (MS 102, 104r, 105r/NB 50e)

What Wittgenstein says here about the kind of use he thinks can be made of nonsense is also highly relevant. It seems that, according to him, one can talk nonsense as long as there is something else one can fall back on which is independent of the nonsensical statements concerning it. A nonsensical doctrine, of course, does not meet this requirement. It leaves us with nothing when it dissolves into nonsense, because whatever it seemed to provide us with depends on what was said. Things are different, however, in the case of a notation. After the nonsensical statements which were used to 'explain' the principles governing the notation have dissolved, we are left with a notation and the ability to employ it, – assuming that the 'explanations' were successful. And crucially, because there is a way of demonstrating the nonsensicalness of those 'explanatory statements' their use is *justified.* To talk nonsense is not to mislead as long as one is able to clarify what the nonsensicalness of one's statements consists in and is clear about their nonsensicalness, i.e. can provide an analysis that shows this.

As then for the justification of the notation (or scheme of analysis) itself, the point made in the first paragraph of the last quotation might be given a more general formulation in order to explain this. The justification of the notation does not lie in it allegedly corresponding to 'facts' about language or the world which language represents, or in the alleged correctness of the doctrine that has been put forward. (All such stories about correspondence are nonsense, involving the infamous "from sideways on"[40] glimpse at the world or language.) Rather, the *only* justification for the notation is that it is *actually* capable of clarifying our logical and philosophical problems, rather than

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[40] For this expression, which originates with John McDowell, see Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*, p. 185.

creating new such confusions. This is the criterion of adequacy for a concept-script. As Wittgenstein expresses this point in the *Tractatus*: "[…] we are in possession of the right logical conception, if only everything is all right in our symbolism." (TLP 4.1213) Thus, for instance, the notion of simple names (as part of our analytical tool-box) is justified insofar as simple names are arrived at through a process that actually clarifies our unclarities to us, – instead of, ultimately, adding to them.

Herewith I end my account of the departure I suggest from Conant's interpretation. The point of my re-introduction of the distinction between the methods employed and introduced (practiced and preached) in the *Tractatus,* and the shift of emphasis on the latter method, besides avoiding the paradox of Conant's interpretation, is twofold. Firstly, it provides us with an answer to the question raised at the end of section 3, why Wittgenstein did not simply discuss nonsense produced by other philosophers if he was only concerned to introduce a method of elucidation-with-nonsense? Insofar as Conant's characterisation of the *Tractatus'* method makes it impossible for him to answer to this question, his overall account of the *Tractatus* seems to have a serious gap in it. The answer we now have is that the *Tractatus'* nonsense is used to introduce Wittgenstein's concept-script and to 'explain' its principles (but cf. also note 33). This is why an examination of other peoples' nonsense, or any significantly different set of nonsensical statements would not do. Secondly, the interpretation I suggest can clarify to us what it means to describe the *Tractatus* as failing, and how Wittgenstein ultimately fails in his attempt to overcome philosophical doctrines. I start with the question, what it means to ascribe a failure to the *Tractatus,* and return to different ways of describing its failure subsequently.

5. What it means to describe the *Tractatus* as failing

After his "The Method of the *Tractatus*" Conant has sought to explicate how his interpretation – contrary to how it has appeared to some – does not commit him to the claim that Wittgenstein successfully abandoned philosophical doctrines in the *Tractatus*. According to Conant, the book unwittingly puts forward a philosophical doctrine and has metaphysical commitments not recognised as such. As he

writes with Diamond, "[…] there was an entire metaphysics of language embodied in his earlier method of clarification, […]"[41] I agree with this, and have argued along similar lines elsewhere.[42] The important question, however, is: how exactly to account for the failure?

The way Conant makes room for the *Tractatus'* failure is by distinguishing between Wittgenstein's intentions and his actual achievements. Although Wittgenstein's *intention* was not to put forward a doctrine, this is what he *actually* ended up doing.[43] Nevertheless, provided the way Conant characterises the method employed by the *Tractatus*, it not clear that he can consistently ascribe to it a failure of this kind. The problem is that the method of elucidation-with-nonsense, as described in "The Method of the *Tractatus*", seems to match Wittgenstein's aim/intention of abandoning doctrines so remarkably well as not to leave any room for a relapse to doctrines. Thus, the distinction between Wittgenstein's intentions and actual achievements is in danger of shrinking to a vanishing point. The problem can be explained as follows.

It seems that unless one distinguishes between the methods the *Tractatus* employs and introduces, no text immanent[44] grounds can be given for saying that the *Tractatus* fails to abandon doctrines. For insofar as we read the *Tractatus* as only seeking to introduce a method of elucidation-with-nonsense by way of examples, there is no reason to

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[41] Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", p. 84.

[42] See Oskari Kuusela, "From Metaphysics and Philosophical Theses to Grammar: Wittgenstein's Turn", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2005).

[43] Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", pp. 46, 64; see also Conant, "Mild Mono Wittgensteinianism".

[44] Certainly, in order to justifiably speak of the *Tractatus'* failure, we need to be able to explain by reference to the book itself why something in it should be seen as constituting a failure, for instance, why the method of logical analysis it introduces should be seen as involving doctrinal commitments. As regards the proper grounding of one's interpretation of the *Tractatus,* it is therefore not good enough, for example, just to take the later Wittgenstein's word for it that there were "grave mistakes" in the *Tractatus* (cf. PI, Preface). Similarly, I exclude, for example, the interpretation that the *Tractatus'* failure consists in the paradox of its nonsensical doctrine on the grounds that it is not plausible that Wittgenstein was in his book committed to such a paradoxical doctrine (cf. section 1). This is an example of the exclusion of an interpretational claim on a text-immanent basis.

ascribe any doctrines to it[45]. To exemplify a method of clarification by showing how it works in particular cases is not yet to put forward a doctrine about anything, for example, about what philosophy *must* be or what language *must* be. (A string of examples need not be understood as implying any doctrines about the necessary features of whatever is exemplified.)

Rather, it seems that one can only attribute doctrinal commitments to Wittgenstein insofar as one interprets the role of its examples in a particular way: as being used for the purpose of laying down a foundation for an allegedly universally applicable method of philosophy. That is, insofar as Wittgenstein can be described in the *Tractatus* as making claim about what philosophy and its method *must* be, then there are grounds for saying that the *Tractatus* did indeed fail to abandon doctrinal commitments. But to maintain that Wittgenstein seeks to establish such a doctrine of philosophy is to see Wittgenstein as engaged in something more than mere elucidation-with-nonsense in Conant's sense. To see the *Tractatus* as *actually* committed to a doctrine about philosophy is to see it as engaged in a philosophical project of preaching, not only practising a method. Hence, to ascribe to the *Tractatus* a failure in the form of a relapse to doctrines requires introducing a distinction between the method it practices and preaches. More specifically, if my discussion above carries any conviction, it requires comprehending elucidation-with-nonsense as a method Wittgenstein employs to provide a general justification for a method he preaches, i.e. elucidation-with-concept-script or the strictly correct method of 6.53 (cf. section 6). Here elucidation-with-nonsense emerges as an attempt to justify a method of philosophy once and for all and in advance of the latter's employments in particular cases.

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[45] One may also try to locate the *Tractatus'* failure somewhere else, that is, to explain it as failing for reasons other than unwitting doctrines (see Rupert Read and Rob Deans, "'Nothing is Shown': A resolute Reply to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe and Vilhauer", *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2003). In that case the description of the book's failure might not require taking on board a distinction between the methods it preaches and practises. I will not discuss this option here, however, mainly for the reason that the later Wittgenstein himself characterises the *Tractatus* as failing because of unrecognised theoretical commitments (cf. Z §444). This characterisation may be taken as a hint for where to look for the *Tractatus'* failure, but ultimately an account of the failure must be given by reference to the *Tractatus* itself, as explained in the previous note.

In this connection it is also important to note the following. It is indeed possible to describe the method of elucidation-with-nonsense as actually employed in the *Tractatus* in such a way that it involves unrecognised doctrinal commitments, for example, relating to the unity of concepts.[46] To give such a description of Wittgenstein's actual procedure in the *Tractatus*, however, is to characterise him as engaged in a particular kind of project one has no reason to depict him as engaged in, unless one takes him to be trying to move beyond exemplifying a method by its application to particular cases. Thus, the possibility of characterising the method actually employed in the *Tractatus* as involving doctrinal commitments requires distinguishing between the methods preached and practised in the book. Accordingly, it is ultimately only by reference to the method Wittgenstein preaches that one can attribute any doctrinal commitments to him. If the method preached by Wittgenstein did not involve doctrinal commitments, there would be no reason to think the method he practices involves such commitments.

Finally, yet another way to explain my point is this. If one accepts the *Tractatus'* invitation to philosophise in the way described by Conant, it is not correct to characterise one as relapsing to doctrines. Such a relapse emerges only as a mistaken assumption about what elucidation-with-nonsense can achieve. More specifically, if in employing this method one really relies on our ordinary logical capacity, there is no reason to attribute one any mistaken assumptions about what elucidation-with-nonsense can do. This is so, at any rate, insofar as it is no part of this ordinary capacity that its operation must be based on unified definitions of concepts. The method employed by the *Tractatus*, therefore, is not elucidation-with-nonsense as described by Conant. Rather, the method described by Conant seems to be a more advanced one, perhaps reflecting Wittgenstein's later rather than

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[46] The employment of the method of elucidation-with-nonsense to bring to view the essence of propositions, for instance, presupposes that all propositions share the same essential characteristics. Only on this assumption is it possible to hope to proceed from a discussion of a limited number of examples to an insight about what *all* cases *must* be. This procedure, however, presupposes a particular doctrine of conceptual unity according to which all instances falling under a concept must share certain essential characteristics, these characteristics being the ground for their classification under the concept.

early philosophical ideas (cf. CV, 64 which Conant quotes as a motto in his 2002 paper).

It therefore looks that Conant needs to incorporate a distinction between the methods employed and introduced in the *Tractatus* into his interpretation, in order to account for its doctrinal commitments. Or as one might perhaps describe the situation: by attributing doctrinal commitments to the *Tractatus* Conant seems to be tacitly presupposing a distinction between a method preached and practiced by Wittgenstein. But it also appears that the distinction is not ultimately available for Conant because it is in conflict with his characterisation of the *Tractatus'* method. If this is correct, the incorporation of this distinction requires him to revise the claim of his 2002 article that there is a single method which the *Tractatus* seeks to introduce by exemplifying it. As said, the distinction is needed, above all, to ascertain a proper grounding in the text of the *Tractatus* for Conant's claim about the book's failure. In addition, however, by incorporating the distinction he is also released from the paradox of his interpretation as well as receives an answer to the question, why Wittgenstein included just those nonsensical sentences in his book he did. But having now completed my discussion of the terms in which to characterise the *Tractatus'* relapse to doctrines, let us turn to the issue of where exactly its failure lies.

6. The *Tractatus'* failure: the doctrine of clarification and its presuppositions

Before discussing the motives of my departure from Conant's interpretation in section 4 I mentioned a criterion of adequacy for a concept-script, as understood by Wittgenstein. (The criterion is not correspondence with language or the world, but the script dissolving all logical problems, paradoxes and so on.) In the light of this criterion the most straightforward sense in which the *Tractatus* fails is that Wittgenstein's concept-script cannot accommodate all the logical distinctions we might wish to draw, i.e. that analysis of language in the terms of Wittgenstein's concept-script creates rather than solves logical problems. An example of the *Tractatus* failing in this respect is the so-called colour-exclusion problem which brings to view a problem with the idea that all inferential relations between sentences could be pre-

sented as truth-functional relations in the concept-script.[47] (I will not go into the colour-exclusion problem here but cf. Ms108, 31; Ms112, 126vff.; Ts209, 34.)[48]

The emergence of such problems might be considered as an embarrassment to Wittgenstein who in the Preface to his book states boldly by reference to the problems of philosophy: "I am, therefore, of the opinion that I have in essence finally solved the problems." (TLP, 28)[49] The emergence of the colour-exclusion problem would be somewhat embarrassing insofar as the sentence quoted is an expression of Wittgenstein's confidence in the superiority of *his* concept-script, and he is claiming that *this particular notation* holds the key to the solution of all logical and philosophical problems. But the sentence might also be read as expressive of a broader philosophical vision. Interpreted this way it is not about the superiority of Wittgenstein's concept-script although, to be sure, he offers this notation thinking that it might contain the solution to all philosophical or logical confusions[50]. Instead, the sentence expresses confidence in an approach of a certain *kind.* According to this interpretation, not so much depends on how successfully the *Tractatus'* concept-script manages all details, and a problem such as the colour-exclusion problem is not an embarrass-

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[47] In the light of the interpretation that I am suggesting there is, therefore, nothing surprising in that upon his return to Cambridge Wittgenstein tried to fix his concept-script with respect to the colour-exclusion problem. In contrast, one might ask (echoing the last problem raised in section 3): why would he have tried to fix something that was meant to be mere nonsense from the start? Notably, Hacker ("Was He Trying to Whistle It?", pp. 377, 378) presents Wittgenstein's attempts to fix the *Tractatus'* conceptions as evidence for Wittgenstein not treating them as nonsense, and as supportive of the interpretation that the *Tractatus* puts forward an ineffable doctrine. I hope it is clear on the basis of the preceding sections that this argument is not valid. There are good reasons to think that what Wittgenstein wanted to fix was not a doctrine but a notation to be used for the purpose of philosophical clarification.

[48] For discussions, see Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein, Frege and the Vienna Circle* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988) and José Medina, *The Unity of Wittgenstein's Philosophy, Necessity, Intelligibility, and Normativity* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002).

[49] I am not entirely certain about how to best translate this sentence. The German reads: "Ich bin also der Meinung, die Probleme im Wesentlichen endgültig gelöst zu haben."

[50] Wittgenstein does take up the possibility that he might not have got everything right in the Preface, saying "May others come and do it better." (TLP, 29) This might be taken as a reference to the possible shortcomings of his concept-script although this is, admittedly, uncertain.

ment. Nevertheless, because approaches of the kind that the *Tractatus* promotes ultimately involve a commitment to philosophical doctrines, the book must be considered a failure as an attempt to overcome philosophical doctrines. But these two interpretational options mean that we must distinguish between i) a more specific and ii) a more general sense in which the *Tractatus'* approach involves a commitment to philosophical doctrines.

The more specific sense in which the *Tractatus'* approach to philosophy involves a commitment to a philosophical doctrine is this. The idea that all logical or philosophical problems are solvable by using Wittgenstein's concept-script commits him to a doctrine of the essence of language. According to this, all sentences that make sense are analysable into elementary sentences consisting of simple names or their truth-functional combinations in such a way that there are no logical distinctions which the analysis cannot accommodate. In other words, Wittgenstein is committed to a doctrine that language use is ultimately a matter of true/false representation of reality. This commitment comes to view, for instance, in 6.53, where Wittgenstein identifies propositions that make sense with the propositions of natural science, which in turn are said to be true/false propositions (TLP 4.11):

> The correct method of philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. [...] (TLP 6.53)

Thus, I propose to read 6.53 as an example of text-immanent evidence for the *Tractatus'* doctrinal commitments. When characterising the strictly correct method as one that does not involve the clarifier making any nonsensical statements, and identifying what makes sense with the propositions of natural sciences, Wittgenstein is making just the kind of statement he should not be making, if he was not committed to a doctrine about language or the limits of sense. Similarly, when making a statement about what we are to do *whenever* someone says something metaphysical, he seems to be making a statement about what we *must always* do when we philosophise, and to be advancing a doctrine about the method of philosophy.

As regards the debate between the ineffability and resolute readings, the significance of Wittgenstein's commitment to a doctrine of language and philosophy in the above sense may be understood as follows. The interpretation that the *Tractatus'* sentences are simply nonsense, merely used to introduce a notation is capable of releasing Wittgenstein from the charge that he seeks to put forward a paradoxically nonsensical doctrine. (He was not trying to whistle it.) Consequently, the *Tractatus'* failure is not as straightforward as the ineffability readings suggest. Nevertheless, ultimately a resolute reading of the type I propose does not release the *Tractatus* from all doctrines either. A reading of this kind only suggests that the *Tractatus'* relapse to doctrines more subtle, thus offering a more plausible account of how Wittgenstein could commit the mistake he did. Now the *Tractatus'* failure is not a matter of the book containing a paradoxically nonsensical doctrine, but the paradox is still part of Wittgenstein's strategy. The real failure is that the methodology which is introduced by employing nonsense itself involves commitment to philosophical doctrines. (Here I am again in agreement with Conant about how to characterise the *Tractatus'* failure.[51] Notably, however, the method Wittgenstein describes in 6.53 is not compatible with the method of elucidation-with-nonsense as described by Conant.[52] As I read Wittgenstein, in 6.53 he is talking about the method he seeks to introduce.)

But as mentioned, the *Tractatus'* failure may also be given a more general formulation. Wittgenstein seems committed not only to a particular doctrine about language, and a rather narrowly defined conception of the method of philosophy, but also to a doctrine of philosophy in a looser and broader sense. For even if we grant Wittgenstein the reservation that *his* concept-script might not be able to solve all philosophical problems, he still seems committed to the view that all problems can be solved by employing a method of the perspicuous presentation of language *such as* his concept-script. This can be explained in the following way.

Dissatisfied with the *Tractatus'* concept-script one might seek to construe a different notation – one that, for instance, can handle the

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[51] Cf. the quotation from Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan", in the preceding section and Conant, "Mild Mono Wittgensteinianism".
[52] Conant, "The Method of the *Tractatus*".

colour-exclusion problem and other problems that we are concerned with. Nevertheless, this is only, to put it bluntly, to seek to exchange one doctrine of language for another. Any alternative regimentation – ordering, arrangement – of language use or its grammar that is claimed to contain the solution to all philosophical problems may be characterised as a doctrine of language: as *the* true account of its functioning that *must* be adopted. What remains constant in exchanging one concept-script for another is the conviction that *some* particular regimentation of language use does indeed contain – or *must* contain – the solution to all philosophical problems (by contrast, cf. PI § 132). Thinking about philosophy in this way one is, therefore, committed to a doctrine about what the solution to philosophical problems *must* look like. Accordingly, whichever of the two interpretations of the above quotation from the *Tractatus'* Preface we choose, Wittgenstein remains committed to a doctrine of philosophy and its method.

As regards problems with such a doctrine of how philosophical problems must be solved, it seems problematic because it is – as a first approximation to a diagnosis – premature. For even if one grants Wittgenstein the critical point that it is wrong to comprehend necessities and possibilities as an object of factual statements, it does not follow that *some particular* regimentation of language use *must* contain the solution to *all* philosophical problems. But the real reason for abandoning such final analyses of language is not that the conviction about their existence seems ungrounded. Rather, such a conviction is based on confusion. Briefly, as long as it has not been determined what problems belong to the class of all philosophical problems, it makes no sense to claim that one has outlined a solution to all these problems. Or as Wittgenstein says in his lectures in 1932–33:

> In philosophy we give rules of grammar wherever we encounter a difficulty. […] We might feel that a complete logical analysis would give the complete grammar of a word. But there is no such thing as a completed grammar. […] Logical analysis is an antidote. Its importance is to stop the muddle someone makes on reflecting on words. (AWL, 21)

Thus, rather than aiming to provide solutions to philosophical problems in the abstract, we should, according to Wittgenstein, comprehend the clarification of language use as a method for solving particular, actual problems (cf. PI § 133). As he says, logical analysis is an antidote. More generally, I believe, such considerations also lie behind

his later characterisation of philosophy, according to which "There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods." (PI § 133) For if one cannot assume that philosophical problems all share a common essence, then one cannot determine, on the basis of a limited number of examples, what the essence of all such problems *must* be. But if it is not possible to determine the essence of philosophical problems once and for all in this manner, then it can hardly be justified to claim that there is a particular method we may assume to contain the solution to all philosophical problems. My suggestion then is that by acknowledging this critical point in his post-*Tractatus* work, Wittgenstein was able to move beyond the idea that there should be something like *the* method of philosophy. Having released himself from this preconception, it became possible for him to recognise the actual manifoldness of philosophical problems and the fact that their successful dissolution may require a variety of methods. From such a perspective the methods of clarification-with-nonsense and clarification-with-concept-script can then finally be seen as equally justified, provided that each is used only where appropriate.

Accordingly, it is important that in his later philosophy Wittgenstein 'merely' seeks to demonstrate a method by examples (PI § 133). Here Wittgenstein's examples are examples of actual philosophical problems. Such examples, in turn, cannot guarantee a range for his methods which reaches any further than what the examples exemplify. This range may be wide, and there may be many ways of taking something as an example of something, but examples cannot justify the claim that this is how we *must* philosophise. At the same time, however, Wittgenstein's later approach would at last seem immune to the charge that it involves a commitment to a doctrine of what philosophy *must* be.[53]

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