

# Wittgenstein-Studien

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für einen Mangel *unsererseits*. Aber darüber brauchen wir, wenn es stimmt, unser Herz nicht zu bekümmern, weil wir es nicht können. Weil wir sind, wie wir sind. Weil wir Kreaturen sind.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mein Dank gilt Christian Skirke, Raymond Geuss, Martin Eichler, Jörg Schaub und den Teilnehmern einer von Gabriela Mras organisierten Tagung an der WU Wien. Einige der vorstehenden Überlegungen finden sich in rudimentärer Form in Raatzsch 2008, andere in entwickelterer Gestalt in Raatzsch 2013.

Sebastiaan A. Verschuren, Erfurt

## Johannes Climacus reads the *Tractatus*

**Abstract:** James Conant's farthest point of resolute navigation into the *Tractatus* has up to now received very little attention: a division of Tractarian matters among two separate lists. In this paper, I argue that this division is deeply mistaken as it fails to see the unity of logic in the *Tractatus*. This unity is anyway a much neglected topic in the literature on Wittgenstein's early philosophy. Conant's resolute reading of the *Tractatus* provides a good opportunity to bring it to the fore and to illustrate its pivotal importance.

In his paper *Wittgenstein's Later Criticism of the Tractatus*, Conant presents his readers with three intriguing lists, of his own fabric, so as to clarify the point of Wittgenstein's later criticism of the *Tractatus*.<sup>1</sup> According to Conant's lights, later Wittgenstein is predominantly if not exclusively concerned to pick at so-called metaphysical commitments in the *Tractatus* – items that in Conant's presentation figure on his second list. What Conant takes to be excluded from this list are philosophical commitments that, in his words, “already figured as candidates for dissolution through the activity of clarification in the *Tractatus*” (188). These kinds of commitments become a list of their own: the first one in Conant's presentation. As Conant points out, the two lists bear to each other most intimately as the items on the second list concern preconceptions in the activity of dissolving such philosophical items as figure on the first list. These preconceptions Conant characterizes as “the undissolved metaphysical residue” (188) in the *Tractatus*: stuff and matter that early Wittgenstein *failed* to recognize as metaphysical commitments – failed, because of his having fallen short of meeting (what Conant takes to be) his own philosophical aim in the *Tractatus*.

In this paper, I shall be exclusively concerned with Conant's first and second list.<sup>2</sup> If his avowed partition of Tractarian matters among a couple of lists is a perforce consequence of *his* resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, then, I embrace

<sup>1</sup> Conant presents this paper as an excerpt from his much longer *Mild-Mono-Wittgensteinianism*. This lengthy chapter has in fact given birth to several excerpts circulating under such titles as *Continuity and Discontinuity in Wittgenstein's Philosophy* and *Eine Skizze von Wittgensteins Spätkritik am Tractatus*. The latest excerpt that has come to my attention appeared in 2012 under the title *Wittgensteins spätere Kritik des Tractatus*. Although these excerpts show little differences among each other, I quote here *only* from Conant 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Conant's third list concerns items each of which “corresponds to a moment in Wittgenstein's work, early and late, that a resolute reader may take to mark either a moment of continuity or one of discontinuity, or [...] both” (199).

it as a welcome opportunity to show what, according to my mind, has gone wrong with this reading. But before introducing Conant's first and second list, in the second section below, I should like to pay attention to some 'other' issues first.

## 1. "Taking Wittgenstein at his Word"

Wittgenstein, famously, makes mention of a certain ladder near the end of his *Tractatus*.

My propositions elucidate in this way that he, who understands me, will recognize them in the end as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through them—on them—over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) (TLP: 6.54)<sup>3</sup>

Wittgenstein's ladder looms conspicuously large in Conant's thinking on both the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's criticism of it in a work as the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, where Wittgenstein 'merely' employs the ladder as a metaphor,<sup>5</sup> Conant is at great pains to frame large stretches of his thinking in terms of this figure of speech. For example, Conant conceives his first list (cited below) as "a provisional specification of some of the rungs" (179) of Wittgenstein's famous ladder.<sup>6</sup> Though this first list is supposed to be provisional, Conant's objective to specify this thing as rungs on Wittgenstein's ladder seems to be anything but that: provisional. I take this objective as an example of what it is for Conant to take Wittgenstein at his word.

My reason for paying attention to Conant's way of taking Wittgenstein at his word is that he, first, constantly harps on the importance of taking this man at his word himself, and, second, just *has* a rather peculiar way of doing so. Thus, as Conant writes: "*Wittgenstein* tells us 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 elucidation. The<sup>7</sup> core commit-

<sup>3</sup> Amended translation. Unless otherwise indicated, TLP is throughout this paper TLP 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein himself, however, does not waste a single word on his metaphor in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein says: 'so to speak' (cf. TLP: 6.54).

<sup>6</sup> In his thumbnail sketch of the project of the *Tractatus* "How Wittgenstein's Ladder Turned into a Fly-bottle", Conant writes (869): "The book takes the form of a ladder – a ladder we are to ascend and then throw away".

<sup>7</sup> In his contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, Conant no longer speaks of the core commitment but, rather, of a core commitment: "Wittgenstein declares that the kind of

ment 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*" (174; emphases mine). These are interesting words, for several reasons to be sure, but the one that I should like to address here concerns Conant's innocuously looking 'here'. For what does this demonstrative refer to? I raise this question as all that Conant gives us to freeze onto is, in fact, *his own way of taking* Wittgenstein at his word. But does Wittgenstein really tell us that the kind of philosophy he seeks to practice in the *Tractatus* is what Conant takes it to be?

I suppose that Conant, the moment he speaks of taking Wittgenstein at his word, is not referring to what his own way of doing so has come up with, but to the following passage from the *Tractatus*.

Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts.

Philosophy is not a *Lehre* but an activity.

A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.

Philosophy does not result in 'philosophical propositions', but rather in the clarification of propositions.

Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to delimit them sharply. (TLP: 4.112., amended translation)

If this passage is supposed to back up Conant's own words, then, I take Conant's way of taking Wittgenstein at his word *here* for another example of what it is for him to take Wittgenstein at his word. For it—i. e. TLP: 4.112 alone—does not tell us at all that "the kind of philosophy that Wittgenstein 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 elucidation" (emphasis mine). TLP: 4.112 *makes mention* of a certain conception of philosophy, but from this fact it is still a long way towards the estimation that it is in *Tractatus* itself where Wittgenstein seeks to administer this very conception. If Conant has had only TLP: 4.112 in mind, then, I would say, he jumps to his estimation by the aid of a *non sequitur*.

If philosophy is what Wittgenstein says it is in TLP: 4.112, then, indeed, he might well have practised *no* philosophy at all in the *Tractatus*. And *one* way Wittgenstein might have done this is that he has willingly violated against the *conception* of philosophy as expounded in TLP: 4.112. But, of course, whether

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 elucidation. 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 at his word *here*" (627).

or not Wittgenstein has advanced thus in the *Tractatus* is a matter for us to find out.<sup>8</sup>

Another example of Conant's way of taking Wittgenstein at his word comes with his fondness of quoting TLP: 6.54 in conjunction with his anxiousness to append to it the following comment: "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*" (173).<sup>9</sup>

As with the innocuously looking 'here' before, Conant first *paraphrases* a remark of Wittgenstein – only to mistake his paraphrasing for Wittgenstein's own words. Thus, where Conant writes that "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*" – it is, I suppose, not these words themselves that Conant's phrase "this particular nicety of formulation" refers to. But what about Wittgenstein's own words, then? Well, provided that Wittgenstein is at all on an asking tour in TLP: 6.54, I would not say that he *asks* us to understand *him*. This apart, I have no idea what Wittgenstein asks me to do *should* he ask me to understand *him*. Who is *he*? Wittgenstein or the author of the *Tractatus*? Indeed, what about the notion of understanding the author of a work at all? Does Wittgenstein provide us with such a notion, that is, in the *Tractatus*, or should we take care of it ourselves? In the latter case: how about understanding *him* on the basis of what we should take care of ourselves? In the former case: where in the *Tractatus* does Wittgenstein provide us with such a notion? Anyway, should I, after having worked my way through the *Tractatus*, promulgate something like the following: "All right, Wittgenstein, I understand you, now that I have come to recognize your sentences as nonsense"? What am I supposed to understand now, that is, beyond the sort of thing as that of having recognized the sentences of the *Tractatus* as nonsense?

<sup>8</sup> Notice that Wittgenstein speaks of *thoughts* in TLP: 4.112, – i.e. that it is these things that philosophy makes clear and delimits sharply. But if it is thoughts that philosophy elucidates, i.e. makes clear and sharply delimits, how then can Wittgenstein have practiced this kind of philosophy in the *Tractatus* if he, in TLP: 6.54, appeals to our recognizing his sentences as nonsense? Here I merely raise this question, without thereby wanting to suggest anything decisive.

<sup>9</sup> This same passage also in all of the cited articles in footnote nr. 1. Other articles in which Conant entertains his phrase (or variations thereof) "the reader's coming to understand the author of the work" are Conant 1991: 159, Conant 2002a: 198, Conant 2002b: 117, Conant 2004: 869, Conant and Diamond 2004: 56, 85.

Perhaps the most curious thing about Conant's talk about understanding the author of the *Tractatus* is that he does not clarify the phrase 'understanding the author of the *Tractatus*' at all. On the contrary, Conant avails himself of it without further ado while setting the stage of his resolute way of taking the *Tractatus*. Whatever it is that Wittgenstein says in TLP: 6.54, there are a good many things in this paragraph to which one needs to pay due attention. But Conant, rather than going through at least some of them, settles on one such thing, only to treat the rest of Wittgenstein's remark according to this very settlement. But what, then, for instance, about Wittgenstein's *am Ende*: "My propositions elucidate in this way that he, who understands me, will recognize them in the end [*am Ende*] as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through them – on them – over them". Why, I ask, has Wittgenstein chosen to lay the charge of proclaiming nonsense in the hands of the actual formulation, rather than in the hands of such ones as the following?

My propositions elucidate in this way that he, who understands me, will recognize them *in the end* as nonsensical.

My propositions elucidate in this way that he, who understands me, will recognize them as nonsensical, *when he has climbed out through them – on them – over them*.

Should we say that there is something pleonastic about the words 'in the end' in Wittgenstein's own couching? It does not seem to be so as the clause "when he has climbed out through them – on them – over them" furnishes an important qualification of 'in the end'. Thus, our recognizing the sentences of the work as nonsense should transpire, not anyway, but by way of *them*, i.e., the sentences of the *Tractatus themselves*. Of course, this observation itself does not answer the question of how this recognizing is supposed to work. What is not clear either is whether it is the sentences of the *Tractatus alone* by dint of which we should come to recognize their own nonsensicality. But then it is still the sentences of the book alone which should decide such a question.

It is the sentences of the *Tractatus* that we are to *überwinden*, as Wittgenstein says in the same passage. We should do something and this seems to contrast with the person whom Wittgenstein stages in TLP 6.53, which is the very paragraph immediately preceding TLP: 6.54. For this person is merely *being* told that he has failed to give meaning to certain signs in his sentences. He has done nothing for himself to see that the method *being* applied to his sentences is the only correct method of philosophy. But, important, nor does he seem to be able to see this for himself in the situation specified. This person is unsatisfied, *in contrast* to us, who contentedly apply the only correct method of philosophy to

a piece of metaphysics. Obviously, Wittgenstein does not mean to leave his readers behind in a position like the one of the person in TLP 6.53.

Indeed, the intimate juxtaposition of TLP: 6.53 and TLP: 6.54 means to explicate an important difference. But we miss this difference if we fail to recognize what Wittgenstein means with “*überwinden* these sentences”. We are not supposed to *überwinden* such sentences as the person in TLP: 6.53 entertains; sentences, that is, to which we rather are to *apply the only correct method of philosophy*. It is precisely the sentences of the *Tractatus* that we are to *überwinden*, and once we have done this, and “see the world aright” (TLP: 6.54) *thereupon*, we are left *only* with the (only) correct method of philosophy, realizing that we had much better say nothing. So we are not to be left with this method in the manner the person in TLP: 6.53 is. On the contrary, the point of Wittgenstein’s *überwinden* is that we wholeheartedly subscribe to the only correct method of philosophy, that is, on the basis of the *Tractatus*, whose sentences we read and climb out *for ourselves*.

Now suppose that it is by way of the only correct method of philosophy that we should come to recognize the sentences of the *Tractatus* as nonsense. We should not find ourselves in any better position than the person in TLP: 6.53 if we, readers of the *Tractatus*, first merely *adopt* the only correct method under the authority of the *Tractatus* only to apply it to the sentences of the book so as to recognize their nonsensicality “sentence by sentence”<sup>10</sup>. For although we have *ex hypothesi* recognized the sentences of the *Tractatus* as nonsense, we have as yet failed to *überwinden* them. It is precisely this failure that renders our relation to the method no better than the one of the person in TLP: 6.53. To *merely adopt* Wittgenstein’s method is to establish a relation to it that is much like the one that the person in TLP: 6.53 has towards this method: he may well admit that he has failed to give meaning to certain signs in his sentences, but this admittance is not to be equated with his *acceptance* of Wittgenstein’s method as the only correct one of philosophy. The true recognition of this method is to be distinguished from our recognizing the sentences of the *Tractatus* as nonsense, that is, on the basis of the application of this method.

But if it is the sentences of the *Tractatus* themselves, and these sentences only, thus precisely those sentences that we should recognize as nonsense, if these same sentences should inoculate on us our full and complete acceptance of the only correct method: how then could the *application* of this method to the sentences of the *Tractatus* not come – too late? In other words, if we have come to realize, fully and wholeheartedly, that the only correct method is the one Witt-

genstein speaks of in TLP: 6.53, how then could we have come to realize this without realizing at the same time what the sentences that have made this possible – come to themselves?

What I have said just here surely concerns Wittgenstein words ‘in the end’ in TLP: 6.54. But how now does Conant treat these words? By way of a start, let us first see what Conant says in the following passage:

The reader is told [in TLP: 6.54] that those sentences in the work which are to serve as elucidations are able to serve their purpose only through the reader’s eventually (through gradually working her way through the book) coming to recognize them as nonsensical. This leaves it open for a resolute reader to claim that not every sentence in the book constitutes a stretch of elucidatory nonsense.<sup>11</sup> Only those sentences that are thus to be surmounted (or defeated, *überwinden*) form rungs of the ladder that is to be thrown away. (179)

The first thing to notice about this passage is that Conant does not distinguish between *überwinden* the sentences of the *Tractatus* and recognizing them as nonsense. The second thing is that Conant rides on the word *eventually* as the English rendering of Wittgenstein’s German *am Ende*. The difference between Wittgenstein’s *am Ende* and its English rendering (in the Pears’ and McGuinness’ translation) is that the latter is much more suggestive than the former of ‘in due course’. Conant, as the above passage bears out, rides upon this suggestive rendering when he says “through gradually working her way through the book”. The following passage nicely illustrates what *he* means with this kind of working one’s way through the book.

According to resolute readers, to take an item on the list to be a *rung of the ladder* is to take it to form a part of this 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 sentences (and the sort of understanding it can seem to support) undergoing a transformation. Each such moment of “understanding

<sup>10</sup> Conant’s phrase: 181; more on it below in the main text.

<sup>11</sup> But it is Conant’s way of taking Wittgenstein at his words in TLP: 6.54 that opens this door. Is the reader really told in this paragraph that *those* sentences in the work *which are to serve as elucidations* etc., etc.? And what if a Tractarian sentence *turns out* to be: *not* a stretch of nonsense? How did or does it fail to be elucidatory?

the author" involves, in this sense, a change in the reader. [...]. 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 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 be attained only piecemeal, sentence by sentence. (180f.)

Above I said that Conant does not explain what he means with 'understanding the author of the *Tractatus*'. And this passage is a good example of what one can do with such a term: One can employ it as a particular nicety of a clutch to hang some words on. What this clutch itself is supposed to do, in Conant's hands, apart from displaying his way of taking Wittgenstein at his words, remains a mystery.

In this connection, it is worth noticing how Conant operates with his own words. He first relates of a certain moment: "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". Conant then tells his readers that such a moment or point is reached, "not through the reader's coming to be convinced by an argument", but rather "by her experience of the sentence undergoing a transformation". But in the latter case, Conant merely repeats in other words what he himself takes the very point to be. What Conant should have said is that *for resolute readers* the point is reached by applying what he calls Tractarian elucidatory procedures to the sentences of the *Tractatus* (see below). But, then, his "argument": "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?"—applies *mutatis mutandis* to those readers of the *Tractatus* who have laid their complete hope and freedom on exactly these procedures.

The experiences that Conant speaks of seem to pose a number of *isolated* moments on one's way up on Wittgenstein's ladder. Thus, undergoing one such an experience is supposed to leave unscathed a number of other possibilities, further up on the ladder, of having one's experience transformed. "The task of thus overcoming *each* particular appearance of sense that *each* such rung on the ladder at first engenders in a reader is an arduous one" (emphases mine). This task, as we shall see, is above all a very curious one, precisely so in the light of the sorts of things that Conant *himself* specifies on his two lists.

Does Conant talk about his own experiences? That is, is his way of talking about the *Tractatus* in terms of having one's experience transformed many a time based on what he himself has experienced on his way up on Wittgenstein's ladder; or is his way of talking in such terms part of a clarification of what he means with his resolute reading of the *Tractatus*? Anyway, Conant does say such things as the following: "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 TLP: 6.54) to attain must come one step at a time" (182). Perhaps this is what Conant thinks *resolute* readers are obliged to, because otherwise they are not resolute readers. But not every reader is a resolute reader, and if a reader holds that the *Tractatus* has no general *story* – I think Conant means: *theory*<sup>12</sup> – about what makes something nonsense, he is surely not obliged to what a resolute reader according to Conant is obliged to. A last point to mention in this connection concerns again Conant's way of taking Wittgenstein at his word, for whence the idea of moments of recognition that a reader is called upon in TLP: 6.54? To be sure, from the fact that we should recognize Wittgenstein's *Sätze* (plural) as nonsense it does *not* follow that there should be moments of such recognition.

## 2. Two Lists: Two Types of Commitments

We better now have a look at those two lists mentioned at the outset of this paper. Conant's first list, as we have noticed, concerns "a provisional specification of some of the rungs" (179) of Wittgenstein's famous ladder. Provisional, perhaps, *also* because the list that Conant actually presents is a specification of only "some of the rungs" (179). Conant says that "two things should be true of each of the numbered propositions that figure on such a list: first, it should be a sentence that can be associated with a philosophical thesis that readers of the *Tractatus* might be inclined to ascribe to the work, and, second, it should be a sentence that resolute readers take to be an example of Tractarian elucidatory nonsense" (180). Here is Conant's first list:

<sup>12</sup> Conant *rejects* the following: "What the author of [the *Tractatus*], in 6.54, aims to call upon his reader to do [...] 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 condition under which sentences make sense and the conditions under which they do not" (173f.; original emphasis).

### The First List

1. A proposition is able to represent a state of affairs because it pictures it.
2. A proposition is a logical picture of a state of affairs when the fundamental elements of the proposition, the simple names, are logically combined in a fashion that parallels the manner of combination of the fundamental elements of the state of affairs, the simple objects.
3. Thought and language are able to represent reality because they mirror the logical form of reality.
4. The logical form that language and reality share cannot be expressed in language.
5. The features of reality that underlie the possibility of sense (or: the features of language that underlie the possibility of representation) are there all right, even if they cannot be expressed.
6. These features, though they cannot be expressed, can be conveyed by appropriately structured forms of nonsense.
7. These nonsensical "propositions" are not mere nonsense – they are not utterly devoid of logical structure.
8. Such "propositions" involve determinate violations of logical syntax.
9. Each such violation is coordinate with an (inexpressible) insight into an (ineffable) feature of reality.
10. Each such insight can be "conveyed" through the employment of the corresponding piece of nonsense.
11. What is brought out into the open in each such case, through its transgression, is a general condition on the meaningfulness of propositions.
12. The totality of such conditions constitutes the limits of (our, my) language.
13. The limits of language are the limits of the (our, my) world.
14. It is the role of a proper theory of language to demarcate these limits.
15. It thereby demarcates the boundary between sense and nonsense.
16. It thereby also demarcates the limits of the (my, our) world.
17. The demarcation of these limits enables one (me) to contemplate from above (outside, sideways on) our (my) language (world) as a bounded totality.

To be sure, my concern in the present paper is not with any of the items in particular that Conant has figuring on his first list. The same goes for Conant's second list, quoted below. Rather my concern is mainly with the divide that Conant's two lists seek to achieve, thus what it is that his first list puts on one side in relation to what his second list puts on the other side. That is, I am interested in what sort of divide these two lists *factually* comprise in relation to the sort of divide that Conant *means* to demonstrate with them. As we saw, items on Conant's first are *meant* to be metaphysical commitments that Wittgenstein

has wittingly laid down for us, readers of his book, to recognize as nonsensical. They "*already* figured as candidates for dissolution through the activity of clarification in the *Tractatus*" (188; emphasis mine). Items on Conant's second list, on the other hand, are *meant* to be what Conant designates as unwitting commitments on early Wittgenstein's part: stuff and matter that he not only did not mean to lay down for us to recognize as nonsensical but what he himself *failed* to recognize as metaphysical commitments in the activity of Tractarian clarification of sentences.

Conant "offers" his first list, i.e. "samples of candidate rungs", in a certain "spirit" (182). This spirit is a noteworthy appearance and I think we better give it a serious hearing: "Rather than specifying the rungs by picking out swatches of text drawn from the *Tractatus* in the form of particular quotations, I do so [...] by specifying particular lines of 'thought' that either figure centrally in the book or are naturally provoked by those that do and to which commentators (standard and resolute alike) have rightly attached particular importance. This allows us to achieve a higher level of generality in specifying rungs of the ladder than would be possible if we confined our selves to the letter of particular local formulations of each of these as they surface and resurface over the course of the text" (182).

But this so-called higher level of generality, I would say, rather does not make it easy to see each time what the particular local formulations are that Conant has in view and holds his items to be specifications of.<sup>13</sup> Thus, just to mention a few things here, I for my part find it difficult to see what an expression as "appropriately structured forms of nonsense" (item 6), or "Such 'propositions' involve determinate violations of logical syntax" (item 8), or "Each such violation is coordinate with an (inexpressible) insight into an (ineffable) feature of reality" (item 9) is supposed to bear upon on as far as the *Tractatus* itself is concerned. Conant's list, I fear, does not furnish *specifications* of particular local formulations of the *Tractatus*, but *ways* of taking Wittgenstein at his word. Consider his nr. 7: "These nonsensical 'propositions' are not mere nonsense – they are not utterly devoid of logical structure". This item, which deserves our special notice here, is among what Conant thinks that "readers of the *Tractatus* might be inclined to ascribe to the work". So it belongs to those things that we should finally throw away on account of our having recognized it as nonsense. But how now about this very item? Among the particular local formulations that Conant's

<sup>13</sup> The whole idea of specification is curious here and raises questions. How, for instance, about getting elucidatory nonsense by *specifying* on local formulations of the *Tractatus* that are precisely what they are: *elucidatory* nonsense, namely, on account of partaking of Wittgenstein's ladder?

nr. 7 has in view are, *I surmise*, the following ones, which Conant holds to belong to those passages of the book that “express in an extremely compressed fashion some of the central ideas [sic!] of the *Tractatus*” (Conant 2002c: 411).

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 is nonsensical because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol itself is impermissible.) In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic. (TLP: 5.473)

We cannot give a sign the wrong sense. (TLP: 5.4732)

Frege says: Every legitimately construed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts. (TLP 1998: 5.4733)

I read this passage as follows. When a proposition *turns out* to be nonsense it is still a *possible* proposition. Strictly speaking, a possible proposition is even the only thing in the world that is nonsense. That is, once left with a nonsensical proposition we are left, not with a mere string of signs, but with a possibility, which is a possibility *in logic*. But that means that a sign within a mere string of signs does not pose a *constituent* of a proposition.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein speaks of giving meaning to *constituents*: constituents of a (possible) proposition. In other words, nonsense is nonsense. To be sure, for Conant, too, nonsense is nonsense, but his slogan stands on different feet. The difference seems to be subtle, and yet, the consequences are anything but that. For Conant’s reading of those passages (that he takes to “express in an extremely compressed fashion some of the central ideas of the *Tractatus*”) has, I think, far from being idle in the construction of his two lists. And I have some serious problems with these two lists. Conant, then, resolute reader as he is, is inclined to ascribe to the *Tractatus* anything as his nr. 8 (“Such ‘propositions’ involve determinate violations of logical syntax”), whereas I merely wonder how *this* work could give rise to an inclination as that.

All in all, I believe that Conant seems to want so much as to put on his first list, in the form of certain specifications as he says, such sorts of talk ‘of’ the *Tractatus* that is concerned with propositions being pictures, also with such sorts of talk as how language catches up with the world, or the world with language. Indeed, he seems to want so much as to put on his first list precisely such talk ‘of’ the *Tractatus*, again in the form of certain specifications, that is con-

<sup>14</sup> Cf.: “Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning” (TLP: 3.3).

cerned with ‘a general condition on the meaningfulness of propositions’.—Let us have a look now at Conant’s second list:

### The Second List

1. The logical relations of our thoughts to each other can be completely shown in an analysis of our propositions.
2. These relations can be displayed through the employment of a logically absolutely perspicuous notation.
3. Through the employment of such a notation, it is possible for propositions to be rewritten in such a way that the logical relations are all clearly visible.
4. A proposition must be complex.
5. Every proposition can be analyzed.
6. Logical analysis will reveal every proposition to be either an elementary proposition or the result of truth-operations on elementary propositions.
7. All inference is truth-functional.
8. There is only one logical space and everything that can be said or thought forms a part of that space.
9. There is such a thing as the logical order of our language.
10. Antecedent to logical analysis, there must be this logical order – one that is already there awaiting discovery – and it is the role of logical analysis to uncover it.
11. By rewriting them in such a notation, what propositions our propositions are will become clear.
12. By rewriting them in this way, it will also become clear what all propositions have in common.
13. There is a general form of proposition and all propositions have this form.
14. In its thus becoming clear what propositions are, it will also become clear how misleading their appearances are – how much the outward form disguises the real hidden logical structure.
15. A logically perspicuous notation is the essential tool of philosophical clarification.
16. Through our inability to translate them into the notation, despite their resemblance in outward form to genuine propositions, certain strings of signs can be unmasked as nonsense, i.e., as strings in which signs to which no determinate meaning has been given occur.
17. All philosophical confusions can be clarified in this way.
18. By demonstrating the significance of this tool and its application in the activity of clarification, the problems of philosophy have in essential been finally solved.



Again, Conant offers his second list, i.e. “candidate formulations of some of the unwitting commitments that figured in the early work that are singled out in the latter work for criticism” (188), in a certain spirit. This spirit is as follows: “rather than specifying the commitments here at issue by picking out swatches of text drawn from the *Tractatus* in the form of particular quotations, I do so again, [...], by specifying particular preconceptions about how things must be that figure centrally in the book and to which any sensitive reader of the *Investigations* cannot help but attach importance – only now what are at issue are philosophical conceptions from which the author of the *Tractatus* failed to wean himself (rather than, as before, ones from which he attempts to wean his readers)” (188). “Again”, Conant adds, “this procedure will allow us to achieve a higher degree of clarity and generality in specifying the relevant sorts of commitments than would be possible if we had confined ourselves to the letter of their manifestation in the text” (188).

Notice that Conant stages a so-called sensitive reader in the above passage. I shall shortly relate of my personal encounter with this conventional figure. Another thing to notice is that Conant speaks of achieving “a higher level of clarity and generality”. But clarity has previously not been spoken of at all. And one wonders, now that Conant mentions it explicitly, which particular local formulations of the *Tractatus* he has been taken at their words at this time, and has been specifying on, so as to get anything as e.g. his item nr. 18: “By demonstrating the significance of this tool and its application in the activity of clarification, the problems of philosophy have in essential been finally solved”. It is not clear what Conant means with the phrase ‘demonstrating the significance of this tool’, any more than where such demonstration is supposed to be given in the *Tractatus*. But the most curious point about Conant’s second list is perhaps the series of items in which such contraption as the logical analysis of propositions looms large. Whatever it is, it obviously obtains wide-ranging capacities in Conant’s hands as it not only reveals “every proposition to be either an elementary proposition or the result of truth-operations on elementary propositions” (item 6); it also reveals what the general form of proposition is. But, as we shall see, to bring such assorted capacities to bear upon *one single* analytical tool is to misconceive what Wittgenstein’s notion of the general form of proposition was all about, or comes to.

There is a lot of talk about essence in the *Tractatus*, but none on Conant’s two lists. And yet, as we shall shortly see, what these lists do is to cut through nothing less than the essence of language. They cut through nothing less than logic itself, through what Wittgenstein calls “die allumfassende, weltspiegelnde Logik” (TLP: 5.511). They cut through it with the result that anything as mirroring logic finds itself back on the first list and anything as the general form of prop-

osition finds itself back on the second list. Thus in Conant’s hands, this general form is to lead a life in total isolation from the very idea that logic mirrors the world. But that is just the death on Wittgenstein’s early conception of logic: you cannot have the one without the other. But before turning to this point of criticism, I first should like to pass on the story of a very sensitive reader: of the *Tractatus*.

### 3. A Sensitive Reader. The Story of Johannes Climacus

*Conant’s original manuscript (Mild-Mono-Wittgensteinianism, cf. footnote 1) has been edited by a certain Johannes Climacus, “Assistant Professor, Department of Ludwig Studies, University of Skjolden”, who claims to have taken “the editorial liberty [...] to insert a brief abstract of each section of the paper at its beginning” (29). As these abstracts do not appear in any of the excerpted versions of the original (cf. footnote 1), I have taken the liberty to construe their noticeable absence as being of no great loss to Conant’s reading of the *Tractatus*. In a personal conversation, Johannes Climacus has given me an account of his own experience of climbing Wittgenstein’s famous ladder. The reader will find parts of this account in the section below, in a somewhat softened version of the original vernacular though. For Johannes Climacus has occasionally adopted “a heavily ironical tone”, to use this person’s own words.*

The commitments on Conant’s second list comprise the “undissolved metaphysical residue that came with [Wittgenstein’s] early understanding of what [the activity of clarification in the *Tractatus*] must *itself* involve” (188; emphasis mine).

Indeed, within Conant’s resolute reading of the *Tractatus* there seems to be every room for a genuine puzzle: Why on earth all this undissolved metaphysical residue in the mind of someone whose “aspiration” precisely it was “to eliminate metaphysics” (190)? Conant’s two lists stand for this puzzle, and he has a surprisingly simple explanation of why Wittgenstein failed to dissolve the residue: the author of the *Tractatus* was struck with *momentary* fits of blindness.

So, once explicitly formulated (as a self-standing set of mutually self-supporting commitments) and collectively exhibited (as a list of commitments expressed in propositional form), it is difficult to see how the resulting sentences could escape a sustained encounter with Tractarian elucidatory procedures with their pretensions to intelligibility unscathed. Having achieved a full appreciation of the unsustainably fragile character of the items on the second list, there are two options open to a resolute reader at this point. The first is for her to take this as evidence that these items do not belong on the second list at all, but rather on the first list (and hence that there is no second list). The second is for her to take this as evidence that the author of the *Tractatus* was remarkably able to blind himself to the character of the apparent commitments here incurred. As we shall

see, there is good reason to think she will only be able to make sense of the author of the *Investigations* (and his criticisms of the author of the *Tractatus*) if she takes the second option. (191f.)

Conant ascribes not only a certain blindness to the author of the *Tractatus*; this blindness, or so it seems, is also of quite a contingent character: early Wittgenstein *might* well have had perfect eyes all day long. Is it perhaps Conant himself who gives rise to puzzles? Let us try to see what is going on here.

The items on Conant's first list are commitments that Wittgenstein, so Conant, held out to us, readers, as the sorts of things that we should try to wean ourselves from – that is, *by way of 'Tractarian elucidatory procedures' to be applied to the sentences of the Tractatus corresponding to these commitments*. Now let us attend to how these procedures find their implementation on the part of the following ardent reader of the *Tractatus*: Johannes Climacus. This person, whom I have come to know as a wise man endowed with a great sensitivity of mind, is, at first, wholly enamoured of the fabulous world that the sentences of this work arouse in him. Of all the sentences of the book it is particularly those swatches of text corresponding to Conant's item nr. 1 (on his first list) that pay court to him. And thus it comes to pass that our Johannes Climacus falls in love with the *Tractatus*. But love, first, second, and all, has to deal with realities, and one such reality is that the more familiar our Johannes Climacus grows with the *Tractatus* the more it dawns upon him that the door of his beloved Tractarian world is being knocked on devilishly hard. Upon opening this door our Johannes Climacus sees himself confronted with the Tribunal of "Tractarian Elucidatory Procedures" (TTEP, in short), and he immediately realizes what task is incumbent upon him. And thus it comes to pass: Johannes Climacus, grudgingly, sets out to interrogate the sentences of the *Tractatus* according to the way the TTEP wants to have it: "sentence by sentence". And no sooner has he consented to its resolute ruling than his dear Tractarian world gives way to stuff and nonsense. As a result, Johannes Climacus is no longer able to blind himself to the character of the very thesis at issue (Conant's nr. 1): His experience has undergone a transformation, but, fortunately, he has been given an example of what it is to understand the author of the *Tractatus*—if only just once, for the time being.

Indeed, for the time being, for ahead of Johannes Climacus lie all those sentences of the *Tractatus* that still await interrogation by him. And this fact greatly agitates his heart, and confuses his sensitive mind withal. Why? Well, his *entire* former Tractarian world has fallen apart of its own accord, now that he is no longer able to blind himself to the true character of one single item: Conant's thesis nr. 1. Our Johannes Climacus at one time did behold Logic pure and simple, that

is, a certain Oneness of overwhelming beauty and serenity. But this Oneness is all gone now, along with every inspiring appeal that the *Tractatus* once exerted on him. All gone, *but not*, to be sure, because Johannes Climacus made out anything special in Conant's thesis nr.1: a sort of *foundation* with respect to everything else that added to the comprising of his Tractarian world. Precisely not: *that* is what it was for him to behold Logic *pure and simple*, this *Oneness* of beauty.

No longer able to blind himself to the true character of Conant's thesis nr. 1, there is nothing left for Johannes Climacus in the shape of an illusion or two for the TTEP to explode. All the sentences *to be interrogated yet* strike him with a singular and ugly leer; all the blood has been sucked out of them now that he has come to understand the author of the *Tractatus* for the first time. But, indeed, what about this so-called *first* time? Did the *Tractatus* not hold many more of these times in store? Was this promise not among the sorts of things that Johannes Climacus apprehended upon seeing the TTEP? What could he possibly do? His believe in the Tribunal is beyond measure: going bold and trying to blind himself to the true character of this tribunal is no option. On the contrary, his first experience of understanding the author of the *Tractatus* was such a great and fantastic *moment* in his life that he is most anxious to have more of them.

In this peculiar state of mind, Johannes Climacus determinedly rallies his powers of imagination and *somehow* manages to inoculate his mind with a continuing belief in some sort of Tractarian world. Though being a pale comparison to its former self, this new world is just fine enough to sustain the good humours of our Johannes that many a happy moment of understanding the author of the *Tractatus* will soon awash his mind. And thus it comes to pass: Johannes Climacus resumes his way through the *Tractatus*, up and higher on Wittgenstein's towering ladder, interrogating sentence after sentences, until he has reached, worn out but overwhelmingly satisfied, the back cover of Wittgenstein's book.—As an old man Johannes Climacus could still recount the many happy moments he had during his sustained encounters with the TTEP. And yet, these reminiscences kept being tainted by strong memories about his agonizing efforts to tax his imagination each and every time after the TTEP had exploded a sentence or two. For each time again he had to inflate some sort of Tractarian world out of the residual set of sentences. But what Johannes Climacus did not know, and never came to know, was that many of his happy moments also concerned the items that Conant has figuring on his *second* list.

But how now about Wittgenstein? Why is our Johannes Climacus such an astute and vigilant person and managed to wean himself of that wild orchard of commitments of which Wittgenstein, according to Conant, failed to wean himself at the time of writing the *Tractatus*? If Johannes Climacus was able to heal his

blindness to the real character of many a thesis, including those figuring on Conant's second list, thus *by way of Tractarian Elucidatory Procedures*, why should Wittgenstein have fallen behind this ability for such a long, long time?

After all, before the TTEP, a sentence is a sentence, no matter whether it concerns an item on Conant's first or second list. Our Johannes Climacus may well have felt a special sentiment with respect to some sentences of the *Tractatus*, and have felt little with respect to others, but the TTEP is perfectly indifferent to sobs and tears. Where there is nonsense it passes judgement accordingly: the TRIBUNAL cannot be credited with blindness. But if this tribunal was *the only one* that stood at early Wittgenstein's disposal, how then should he have been able to blind himself to the character of *exclusively* such items as figure on Conant's second list?

Indeed, how did Wittgenstein manage *not* to blind himself to the true character of *exclusively* such things that Conant has figuring on his first list? Whence this asymmetry? After all, there is only one Tribunal and it is this single thing upon which Conant brings Wittgenstein's momentary fits of blindness *and* his more lucid moments to bear. Recall that Conant finds it "difficult to see how the resulting sentences could escape a sustained encounter with Tractarian elucidatory procedures with their pretensions to intelligibility unscathed". Conant, obviously, does not find it difficult to see how the sentences concerning his first list *did not* escape such a sustained encounter.

Did not? Well, perhaps I had better notice at once that Conant writes: *could escape*, and not: *could have escaped*. Indeed:

The author of the *Tractatus* would not have viewed himself as proceeding dogmatically – putting forward theses (that are to be associated with each of the items [on Conant's second list]) that might be taken by a reader to seem to call for vindication. Rather, he would have regarded each of [these items] as pertaining to matters that become clear through the process of clarifying propositions, and, in particular, through the adoption and employment of a perspicuous notation. (194)

What this passage corroborates is that, first, *Wittgenstein's blindness* is a matter that Conant brings to bear upon the TTEP, and, second, Wittgenstein's blindness—is the blindness of a man who obviously never had a real and sustained encounter with the TTEP himself! How remarkable: Conant has the author of *Tractatus* do nothing but craft a ladder out of some dubious material, and has his resolute readers toil up this curious thing so as to come to understand its author.

Now notice the following: Although Conant finds "it difficult to see how the resulting sentences could escape a sustained encounter *with Tractarian elucidatory procedures* [emphasis mine] with their pretensions to intelligibility unscathed",

his *own* appreciation (cf. passage cited above) of what he calls "the unsustainably fragile character of" these sentences is anything but a matter to bring into connection with these procedures. On the contrary, Conant's appreciation is mortgaged: he borrowed it from Wittgenstein – from the *later* Wittgenstein. "I", Conant says, "offer the following candidate formulations of some of the unwitting commitments that figured in the early work *that are singled out in the later work for criticism*" (188; emphasis mine). And at p. 190 he says: "The second list illustrates the extent to which, *from the standpoint of his later thinking*, there was an entire metaphysics of language tacitly embodied in his earlier method of clarification" (emphasis mine).

But if it was later Wittgenstein who singled out *for criticism* this or that commitment because it lived a certain unwitting life in his early work, then, surely, this criticism was not the result of an overdue rendezvous on his part *with the TTEP*. But, then, if Conant *own* appreciation of the unsustainably fragile character of the items on his second list harks back all the way to Wittgenstein's later insights—how then should it be possible for Conant to find it "difficult to see how the resulting sentences could escape a sustained encounter with *Tractarian elucidatory procedures* with their pretensions to intelligibility unscathed" (emphasis mine)?

#### 4. The Purest of all Crystals has no Appendices

Conant, we saw, presents his second list as "a self-standing set of mutually self-supporting commitments" (191). I take the notion of self-standing to mean that none of these items requires the support of any of the commitments on his first list. Indeed, according to Conant, we as readers of the *Tractatus* are precisely asked to come to see the nonsensicality of such commitments as figure on his first list. As regards the notion of mutually self-supporting I am not quite sure about its import. It has an air of pleonastic overtone in the present connection. Anyway, according to Conant, Wittgenstein went through separate acts of commitment as regards the items on the second list, in spite of these things being *mutually* self-supporting. To be sure, this sense of separateness is operative among the items on Conant's first list as well, for here it is the reader of the *Tractatus* who according to Conant commits himself *again and again*.

So, then, it is the indicated sense of separateness among the items comprising a list, but so the very division of these items among two separate lists in which I can see nothing but a flawed reading of the *Tractatus*. What Conant, in my view, has explicated with his two lists is a misunderstanding of what logic in the *Tractatus* is. Of course, for Conant the very phrase 'what logic in

the *Tractatus* is' must strike a highly ambiguous chord: Are you talking here about what we take logic to be *before we begin to subject the sentences of the Tractatus to Tractarian Elucidatory Procedures*—or what we take logic to be *after a sustained encounter with these procedures*. Well, I propose to talk about logic in the former sense first, that is, in the remaining part of this paper, and to leave what Wittgenstein means with the application of logic (cf. TLP: 5.557) for another occasion.

If there is anything self-standing in the *Tractatus*, then, it is clearly logic. But logic, as I think early Wittgenstein sought to grasp it, does not come in parts. It rather comes as an encompassing whole, as a certain Oneness. No logic without Oneness. This Oneness, so my suggestion, encompasses items that figure both on Conant's first and second list.

"Logic", as early Wittgenstein wrote in one of his war-notebooks, "takes care of itself; all we have to do is to look and see *how* it does it" (emphasis mine).<sup>15</sup> And yet, it was only much later that Wittgenstein realized that it was not logic but he himself who took care of logic in the *Tractatus*. What he at the time of writing the *Tractatus* took for looking and seeing *how* logic takes care of itself, turned out to be nothing but "merely tracing round the frame through which" he "looked" at language and the world (PI: 114).<sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein, unwittingly, provided for the *how* himself. This *how* was informed, first and foremost, by what later Wittgenstein characterized as a requirement—namely, the requirement *that* logic is of the purest crystal. "But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction, but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.5563)" (PI: 97). That early Wittgenstein did not take this crystal as an abstraction comes out as well in the following passage:

On the one hand, it is clear that every sentence in our language 'is in order as it is'. That is to say, we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vagueness had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language still had to be constructed by us. — On the other hand, it seems clear that where there is sense, there must be perfect order.—So the perfect order must be even in the vaguest sentence. (PI: 98)

Early Wittgenstein did not take himself to be striving after an ideal as he thought that our ordinary language is already in order as it is. He even says that it is *clear* that every sentence in our language is in order as it. But clear it was to his early

<sup>15</sup> NB 1979: 11. Wittgenstein also writes: 'We must recognize *how* language takes care of itself' (NB 1979: 43; original emphasis).

<sup>16</sup> PI is PI 2009 throughout this paper.

mind because he was in the grip of an ideal, one that he thought is already part and parcel of our language, and without which he not only failed to see how language could ever be in order as it is but, important, also failed to see what *he* could possibly do in philosophy.

We want to say that there can't be any vagueness in logic. The idea now absorbs us that the ideal 'must' occur in reality. At the same time, one doesn't as yet see *how* it occurs there, and doesn't understand the nature of this "must". We think the ideal must be in reality; for we think we already see it there. (PI: 101)

In this passage, Wittgenstein exploits the difference, intimated above, between the *that* and the *how*: *that* the ideal 'must' occur in reality is perfectly clear; *how* it occurs there is not clear yet. Early Wittgenstein, then, set out to work so as to see how the ideal occurs there, only to notice much later that he was merely tracing a frame of mind—: not just any frame of mind but precisely the one that *urged him to believe* that logic *must* obtain in reality in the form of the purest crystal. This brings us to what Wittgenstein says in §107 of the *Investigations*:

The more closely we examine actual language, the greater becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I *discovered*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming vacuous.

Here Wittgenstein explicitly speaks of the requirement that he laid down at the time of writing the *Tractatus*. But then notice that, first, he speaks of *one* requirement only, and, second, this requirement does not concern a mere aspect of either this or that. Rather it concerns the whole embodiment of logic. Early Wittgenstein urged *logic* to be of the purest crystal. What does this mean? It means, first and foremost, that logic must be utterly simple — that it has no appendices: that it, like the purity of crystal, is cut out of one piece. Logic, in other words, is no assemblage. "In logic", Wittgenstein says (TLP 1998: 5.454), "there is no side by side, there can be no classification. In logic there cannot be a more general and a more special". (Indeed, this is what our Johannes Climacus saw: whatever has got its hands in logic is not in any sense more or less foundational than 'anything else' in logic). Logic, in short, does not know of more than one *Urzeichen*. This means that e.g. the possibility of the elementary proposition to appear in compound propositions is not a more general or a more special attribute of its essence than its being a picture is. The so-called truth-functionality of the elementary proposition is not one thing *besides* its being a picture.

Conants failure to grasp this Oneness of logic in the *Tractatus* comes out on p. 193, for instance. He writes: "it is the author's [i.e. early Wittgenstein's] tendency to sublime what proposition, language, logic, order, clarity, etc. are". But to mention *logic* besides such things as order, proposition, and language just is to misunderstand what (subliming) logic means for early Wittgenstein. Logic *treats* of the proposition (*Satz*) as much as of the word (cf. PI: 105); but so it *treats* of language as much as of the connection it bears to the world (see below). Indeed, where Conant mentions *logic* besides *order*, Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, speaks of logic as what *presents* the order:

Thinking is surrounded by a nimbus. – Its essence, logic, presents an order: namely, the a priori order of the world; that is, the order of *possibilities*, which the world and thinking must have in common. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty may attach to it. – It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction, but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the *hardest* thing there is (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* No. 5.5563).

We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential to us in our investigation resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so forth. This order is a *super-order* between – so to speak – *super-concepts*. (PI: 97)

I should like to give emphasis to the following points as regards this passage. First, Wittgenstein speaks of the incomparable essence of language. Second, this incomparable essence is the so-called *super-order*. Third, this order is not one order among other, possible orders but "the order existing between the (super-) concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, *and so forth*" (emphasis added). Fourth, this enumeration does not include logic. – Why not? Fifth, because this order is a matter of logic, and logic only: logic presents "an order, in fact the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*". Sixth, the order is what we try to grasp [*begreifen*]! Seventh, Wittgenstein does not even suggest, neither in the present passage nor at any other place in the *Philosophical Investigations*, of such a division as Conant envisages with his two lists. On the contrary, he rather explicitly states that the perfect order is what "the world and thinking must have in common"; with, eight, logic being the essence of thinking.

It should be noticed that early Wittgenstein was well aware of his requiring something, i.e. that logic must be simple. What he was not aware of, though, i.e., at the time of writing the *Tractatus*, was the real nature of this requiring.<sup>17</sup> As he

puts in the *Investigations*: one "doesn't understand the nature of this 'must'" (101). It was because he thought he saw the *must* ("the ideal") already "in reality" (cf. PI: 101) that he thereby also thought to have conceived his *complete* task as a young philosopher, namely, to enunciate the *how* of the ideal. Conant misconceives this *how*, i.e. the relation between the *that* and the *how*. Wittgenstein's *must* did not come piecemeal: he did not sublime each of the concepts involved ("proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so forth") one after another, only to take care that the resulting motley of sublimed concepts comprises a nicely sublimed motley. Early Wittgenstein would have lost his entire *interest* in doing philosophy should he have been deprived of the possibility to grasp logic in its simplest form. Later Wittgenstein speaks in this connection of "the *decisive* movement in the conjuring trick" (PI: 308; emphasis mine).

'A proposition, a queer thing!' Here we have already the sublimation of the whole account of logic. (PI: 94)

Now notice what Conant writes as regards sublimation in the *Tractatus*: "In the [second list], the italicized expressions *in each of the above sentences* indicate the occurrence of a moment of (what would count by later Wittgenstein's lights as) *metaphysical insistence* – a moment in which a requirement is laid down" (192, first emphasis added); "Each of the items on the [second] list is to be associated with an example of what later Wittgenstein refers to as the dogmatism into which we so easily fall when doing philosophy" (194, emphasis added). "Each of the italicized expressions on the [second list] furnishes an example of how, as later Wittgenstein puts it, the most crucial moments in the philosophical conjuring trick are the ones that are apt to strike one as most innocent" (195, emphasis added). But all this is to miss the point of Wittgenstein's trope of the conjuring trick as it precisely concerns the *very decisive* moment ("movement"): the very first, innocuously looking act that sets an *entire* investigation rolling; the act that establishes the *possibility* of an investigation in the first place. The decisive moment concerns the *that*, rather than the *how*: in the *Tractatus* it concerns nothing less than "the *whole* account of logic".

Wittgenstein, with his requirement on logic to be pure and simple, was looking for a *single answer* for all the questions of logic.

to his later conception of *laying down* requirements in philosophy. I think that Conant's phrase, i.e., "that it is much more difficult to avoid laying down requirements in philosophy *than his earlier self had ever imagined*" (195; emphasis mine) is extremely misleading. More on this point in my forthcoming *What Does It Look Like?*.

17 Early Wittgenstein's awareness of his requiring is something that does not come even close

'The essence is hidden from us': this is the form our problem now assumes. We ask: "What is language?", "What is a proposition?" And the answer to these questions is to be given once for all; and independently of any future experience. (PI: 92)

Wittgenstein, in this passage, asks two questions. But he might well have asked much more questions here: "What is a word?", "What is a proof", "What is truth" – to mention only a few of them in the light of precisely those notions that Wittgenstein mentions himself in relation to his concept of the (super-)order (cf. PI: 97). But then notice that the answer to the question "What is language?", for early Wittgenstein, had *at once* to be the answer to the question "What is a proposition?" – and so: *at once* to be the answer to every other question that he might have included here. The answer to every kind of question of logic should lead to *one and the same thing* –: The answer to one question should not stand "side by side" (see above) to the answer to any other question of logic; it should not be anything more special or more general than any other such answer. The idea that each and every answer to questions of logic should lead to one and the same thing comes out in many a passage from the *Tractatus*. Here is one such a passage:

A particular mode of signifying may be unimportant but it is always important that it is a *possible* mode of signifying. And that is generally so in philosophy: again and again the individual case turns out to be unimportant, but the possibility of each individual case points towards [*gibt uns einen Aufschluß über*] the essence of the world. (TLP: 3.3421, amended translation)

Wittgenstein says that the possibility of each individual case "gibt uns einen Aufschluß" about the essence of the world. To be sure, the English rendering of Wittgenstein's phrase *einen Aufschluß* in the translation of Pears & McGuinness (as well as in the translation of Odgen) is erroneous and, for that matter, misleading. The *possibility* of each individual case does not disclose *something* about the essence of the word. Rather, the possibility of each individual case points, as one might say, towards the essence of the world; each and every individual case is as it were a thoroughfare to the essence of the world. Should each and every individual case disclose only *some-thing* about the essence of the world: how are we to image this? Should we suppose that *all* individual cases disclose one and the same *some-thing* of the essence of the world, or that *one* individual case discloses only *some-thing* (say A) of the world with all the rest disclosing *some-thing* (say B) of the world, or that *two* individual cases etc., etc.? Take the second situation in this series of possibilities: are *some-thing* A and *some-thing* B supposed to be two *some-things* of *one and the same thing*,

namely, the essence of the world? If so, how are these two *some-things* connected to each other and: what sort of thing is supposed to do the connecting job?<sup>18</sup>

Early Wittgenstein would not have been able to cope with any of the possibilities at issue here. Should he lay hands on item A and so on item B, then, 'for one thing', both items count as logic. But, 'for another thing', this simply means for early Wittgenstein's vantage point, with its requirement on logic to be pure and simple, that item A and item B and all the other items he should come to lay hands on *must* be connected to each other; that is to say, they must *themselves* show in what *infinitely* fine connection they already stand to each other. The emphases here point toward an infallible movement of thought on early Wittgenstein's part without which he would not have known *his* own way about in philosophy. The following passages are of interest in the present connection:

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. (NB 1979: 23)

My *whole* task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. That is to say, in giving the nature of all facts, whose picture the proposition is. In giving the nature of all being. (NB 1979: 39)

The problems of negation, of disjunction, of true and false, are only reflections of the one great problem in the variously placed great and small mirrors of philosophy. (NB 1979: 40)

My difficulty is merely an – enormous – difficulty of expression. (NB 1979: 40)

What passages as these show is that Wittgenstein was most anxious to treat problems such as that of negation, disjunction, of true and false, as *partial* problems: as facets of one single problem. "How", Wittgenstein ask in the *Tractatus* (5.511), "can all-embracing logic, which mirrors the world – use such special crotches and manipulations?" His answer: "Only because they all connect themselves into an infinitely fine network, to the great mirror".<sup>19</sup> To be sure, each of

<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein uses the phrase "gibt uns einen Aufschluß über" more than once. Here is another such use: "Die Theorie der logischen Abbildung durch die Sprache gibt als erste einen Aufschluß über das Wesen der Wahrheits-Beziehung" (NB 1979: 15). Anscombe renders these words as follows: 'The first thing that the theory of logical portrayal by means of language gives us is a *piece of information* [sic] about the nature of the truth-relation' (emphasis mine).

<sup>19</sup> Amended translation. The rendering of Pears and McGuinness reads: "Only because they are all connected with one another in an infinitely fine network, the great mirror." The problem with this reading is that the reflexive mood in Wittgenstein's original is lost: it is the crotches and manipulations *themselves* that do the connecting job. To be sure, then, the crotches and manipulation are not connected *with one another*, for then the question is *what* it is that does the

the crotches and the manipulations poses a problem to the philosopher. But early Wittgenstein thinks that we misconceive these problems as long as we fail to see *that* they all bear upon one another. The import of the *that* lies, nay, is Wittgenstein's requirement of the crystalline purity of logic: what remains, for him, is the *how*. Again: "Logic takes care of itself; all we have to do is to look and see *how* it does it". Hence a remark as that "My difficulty is merely an – enormous – difficulty of expression". The crotches and manipulations, then, do not so much pose *partial* problem *tout court* for Wittgenstein as that he rendered each of them *part and parcel* of a single great problem. And it is precisely due to this very rendering that all of the involved concepts began to indulge in sublimation. Again, Wittgenstein did not go through an act of sublimation for each and every concept involved. Rather, each involved item received as it were the touch of sublimation the very moment Wittgenstein treated it as part and parcel of the great problem. He endeavoured to treat each and every problem from the vantage point from which the solution to each problem *had to be at once* the solution to each and every other problem.

So-called "all embracing logic", then, is the answer to everything early Wittgenstein wanted to have an answer to. By way of this singular thing early Wittgenstein would have answered each and every question of logic: negation, disjunction, generality, true and false, etc. To be sure, Wittgenstein, in the course of his early investigations leading up to the singular thing, still had to treat negation, disjunction, generality, true and false, etc., *piecemeal*. Thus, Wittgenstein did not seek to answer all questions of logic *by way of* this singular thing. No, this singular thing is the answer to all questions of logic: if you unpack it, you will get everything you need to know about negation, disjunction, generality, true and false, etc. And *that* you get everything when you unpack it, i.e., that you *must* get it, so did Wittgenstein seek to treat every problem piecemeal. Early Wittgenstein indeed faced many questions, but there was for him only one answer (as regards logic).

Now what is this singular thing, this so-called all embracing logic? It is the general concept of the proposition: "[it] carries with it also a completely general concept of the co-ordination of *Satz* and *Sachverhalt*: The solution to all my questions must be *utterly simple*" (NB 1979: 7; amended translation).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the

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connecting job. They get combined in such an *infinitely* fine way that ultimately there is no longer any question of *several* things having come together.

20 Cf.: "In giving the general form of a proposition you are explaining what kind of ways of putting together the symbols of thing and relations will correspond to (be analogous to) the things having those relations *in reality*. In doing thus you are saying what is meant by saying that a proposition is true; and you must do it *once for all*" (NB 1979: 113; emphases mine).

solution to all of Wittgenstein's early problems would not have been utterly simple if the answer to, say, questions of negation had not *at once* been the answer to questions of what renders a *Satz* a picture of the world.

"The description of the most general propositional form is the description of the one and only general primitive sign [*Urzeichen*] in logic" (TLP: 5.472). The answer to the kinds of questions that Wittgenstein raises in PI: 92 (see above) is this: the one and only primitive sign [*Urzeichen*] in logic. But then notice what all this single sign embraces, that is, *is*. Logic, then, as early Wittgenstein wanted to have it, is not only a matter of how elementary propositions together make up compound entities; logic is *at once* a matter of elementary propositions being a picture of the world. To grasp the incomparable essence of language, of thought—the *a priori* order of possibilities, *is* to describe the most general propositional form. In other words, there is nothing involved in a proposition's possibility of being a picture of the world that is not *at once* involved in a proposition's possibility of getting combined with other propositions to make up more complex propositions—and so the other way round: *that* is what it is for logic to be utterly simple, to be in the hands of one and only *Urzeichen*.

## 5. Conant's second List

As *each* of the italicized expressions on Conant's second list indicates a conjuring trick, a dogmatic moment, early Wittgenstein must have felt upon his dogmatic nose again and again. But how could this have taken place if *each* such a moment must bear a certain relation to at least something else in Wittgenstein's early philosophy? Let us try to see what is going on here.

Take, for instance, Conant's item nr. 1 (list 1):

1. A proposition is able to represent a state of affairs because it pictures it

in combination with item nr. 4 on his second list:

4. A proposition *must* be complex.

Now why must a proposition be complex? In TLP: 4.032, Wittgenstein writes: "It is only in so far as a proposition is logically articulated that it is a picture of a situation".<sup>21</sup> This passage gives us an answer to our question: it must be complex

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21 I take this articulatedness of the proposition for what Conant means with a proposition



for otherwise it is not a picture. But now, if a proposition must be complex or else it is not a picture, why then, as Conant wants to have it, should early Wittgenstein have been so insistent on the proposition being complex if all that talk about the proposition being a picture is among the sorts of things that we are asked to overcome? Obviously, Conant's item nr. 4 on his second list ought not to have any bearing to whatever item on his first list. Indeed, *no* item on his second list ought to have its origin in any item that Conant has figuring on his first list, thus in things that early Wittgenstein already recognized as what should be overcome. But this not only means that each requirement on Conant's second list must bear a relation to some other metaphysical moment *on this same list*; it also means that any notion on his second list ought to have a meaning that is not dependent on anything that Conant has figuring on his first list (or rather *means* to have figuring there). Thus, a notion as the elementary proposition, which figures on Conant's second list, ought, qua meaning, to have been deprived of the meaning of all such items that Conant has figuring on his first list. It ought to have been deprived of what Wittgenstein calls "essential features without which the proposition could not express its sense" (TLP: 3.34). But such deprivations give rise to questions as to *what* Wittgenstein was actually requiring, when he required any of the items on Conant's second list in which, for instance, the notion of a proposition turns up. Wittgenstein says that "The general propositional form is the essence of a proposition" (TLP: 5.471); he also says that "To give the essence of a proposition means to give the essence of all propositions, and thus the essence of the world" (TLP: 5.4711), and that "The description of the most general propositional form is the description of the one and only general primitive sign [*Urzeichen*] in logic" (TLP: 5.472). In other words, if the elementary proposition in Conant's second list is a thing deprived of a proposition's essentials features, it must (boringly) be deprived of the essence of a proposition, which is the general form of proposition. But why then should Wittgenstein have committed himself to anything as Conant's nr. 13: "There is a general form of proposition and all propositions have this form"?

Because, according to Conant, there is anything as logical analysis: a procedure that reveals what the general form of proposition is – *by taking propositions one by one* (cf. items 9, 10, 11, and 12).

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being complex. I also take it for what Wittgenstein means with the proposition being composite, in, e.g., the following remark: "A completely generalized proposition is like every other proposition composite" (TLP: 5.5261). If Conant has something different in mind with his notion of complex, then, I simply must have missed "the particular local formulation" of the *Tractatus* behind his efforts here "to achieve a higher level of generality"; and, indeed, I had better stop my present consideration at once.

But, according to Wittgenstein, "it is clear that whatever we can say *in advance* about the form of all propositions, we must be able to say *all at once*" (TLP: 5.47; original emphases). At another place he speaks in this regard of what he calls "our fundamental principle":

Our fundamental principle is that whenever a question can be decided by logic at all it must be possible to decide it without more ado.

(And if we get into a position where we have to look at the world for an answer to such a problem, that shows that we are on a completely wrong track.) (TLP: 5.551)

According to Conant's second list, however, we can uncover what the general form of proposition is by looking at the world, thus by looking at things that are accidental features, that is, possibilities among other possibilities, namely, *special* forms that propositions obtain on account of the application that we make of them.<sup>22</sup> These forms stand in opposition to what, in the *Tractatus*, is not itself a possibility among other possibilities, namely, the very *essence* of the proposition: Logic. It much seems, then, that Conant has either deprived Wittgenstein's notion of the general form of proposition of its original *point*, or is, to use Wittgenstein's own words here, "on a completely wrong track".

## 6. Conclusion

Conant cuts Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into two pieces, with one piece for its readers to overcome (items on list nr. 1), and with another piece for Wittgenstein to hold fast myopically (items on list nr. 2). But Wittgenstein's blindness did not come piecemeal. His blindness ultimately concerned the singular point that he did not see how there could be anything as a *possible* sign (TLP: 5.473), which is one possibility among other possibilities in logic, *without* logic itself *not* being a possibility among other possibilities. In other words, early Wittgenstein did not see how there could be anything as a "Zeichensystem" (TLP: 5.475), i.e. one possible system of signs among other such possibilities, without these possibilities having contact<sup>23</sup> with something that is not itself such a system but make up the *a priori* order of possibilities: Logic. Conant says that "The second

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<sup>22</sup> Cf.: "The *application* of logic decides what elementary propositions are" (TLP: 5.557), "It is only together with its logico-syntactical employment that the sign determines a form" (TLP: 3.327; my translation).

<sup>23</sup> In TLP: 5.557 (which I consider as one of the most important passages of the *Tractatus*), Wittgenstein writes: "Aber die Logik muß sich mit ihrer Anwendung *berühren*" (emphasis mine).



list illustrates the extent to which, from the standpoint of his later thinking, there was an entire metaphysics of language tacitly embodied in his earlier method of clarification". But the irony is that Wittgenstein did not see how language is possible without metaphysics, that is, without logic being the *a priori* order of the world. That his readers should do anything so curious as to *überwinden* certain Tractarian matters, namely, *sentences*, is something that is internally related to these matters themselves, and to these matters *only*. That is, it is precisely owing to Wittgenstein's notion of Logic that he included a passage in his book about the task of overcoming what was written in it. Thus, that we should finally come out of the *Tractatus* *only* with a certain method is because it is the *only* correct method of philosophy, and *that* it is the only correct method has everything to do with Wittgenstein's early conception of Logic, that is, with his sentences in his book that do not speak *about* Logic but *bezeichnen* 'super-concepts'. Shortly after his return to Cambridge, Wittgenstein wrote the following statement:

I might say: if the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already.<sup>24</sup>

Wittgenstein continues this remark with the following words: "Anything that can be reached with a ladder does not *interest* me" (my emphasis). Indeed, Wittgenstein *had* ceased to be interested in it – but not on account of this or that, but precisely on account of his having lost all interest in grasping anything as the *incomparable* essence of language, that is, of logic. In other words, Tractarian Logic was in the melting point in 1930s. It was not in the *melting pot* in the *Tractatus*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> CV 1998: 10.

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Roger White for his helpful comments and suggestions on a draft of this paper.