

Elucidating the *Tractatus*

*Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy
of Logic and Language*

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List of Abbreviations

- CL *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters: Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, ed. B.McGuinness and G.H.von Wright, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)
- NB *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, ed. G.H.von Wright and G.E.M.Anscombe, trans. G.E.M.Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979)
- NDM ‘Notes Dictated to G.E.Moore in Norway, April 1914’, Appendix II of *Notebooks 1914–1916*
- NL ‘Notes on Logic, 1913’, Appendix I of *Notebooks 1914–1916*
- PG *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R.Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974)
- PI *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edition, ed. G.E.M.Anscombe and R.Rhees, trans. G.E.M.Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998)
- PR *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. R.Rhees, trans. R.Hargeaves and R.White, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975)
- PT *Prototractatus*, ed. B.F.McGuinness, T.Nyberg, and G.H.von Wright, trans. D.F.Pears and B.F.McGuinness, (London: Routledge, 1996)
- RFM *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 3rd edition, ed. G.H.von Wright and G.E.M.Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978)
- ROC *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G.E.M.Anscombe, trans. L.L.McAlister and M.Scattle, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977)
- SRLF ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, in *Philosophical Occasion 1912–1951*
- TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F.Pears and B.F.McGuinness, (London: Routledge, 1971)
- WVC *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, ed. B.F.McGuinness, trans. J.Schulte and B.F.McGuinness, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979)

1

The Single Great Problem

1. The principal aim of this book is to present an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy of logic and language. It is impossible to undertake this task of interpretation without confronting the question of the relation between Wittgenstein’s early thought and his later philosophy. In the Preface to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes:

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

It is important that Wittgenstein does not speak here of seeing his later work in the right light only ‘by contrast with’ his early work, but ‘by contrast with and against the background of my old way of thinking’. The idea that the later work should be seen ‘against the background’ of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy suggests that we should not see the former as an outright rejection of the latter. Rather, it suggests that we shall understand the later work better if we see it as something that develops out of, or has its roots in, the early work. The interpretation that follows is an attempt to make sense of this idea that the *Philosophical Investigations* is, in an important sense, a development of the ideas of the *Tractatus*.

One of the central themes of Wittgenstein’s later dialogue with his early self focuses on the relation between meaning and use. The structure of this dialogue is exemplified in the structure of the opening paragraph of the *Investigations*. On the one hand, Wittgenstein gives expression to the temptation to think of the meaning of an expression as something that is correlated with it. He extracts this idea from a passage from St Augustine’s *Confessions*, but it is an idea that clearly plays an important role in his own early thought. On the other hand, he takes the first important steps in a journey of investigation

whose ultimate aim is to liberate us from the grip that this picture of meaning has upon our thought, and redirect our attention to the application or use of words within the context of our active, everyday lives. In claiming that the later philosophy is to be understood as a development of Wittgenstein's early work, I'm suggesting, among other things, that it is a mistake simply to identify the voice of the early Wittgenstein with the Augustinian conception of meaning that he now sets out to diagnose and resist.

One of the central aims of what follows will be to present an interpretation of the early work on which both voices in the dialogue that occurs in the opening sections of the *Investigations*—the Augustinian voice and the voice that resists the temptations it expresses—are seen to have their roots in the ideas of the *Tractatus*. Thus, the move that the later Wittgenstein makes away from the idea that the meaning of a word is something that is correlated with it, and towards the idea that the meaning of a word is its use in the language-game, is, it will be argued, an evolved or transformed expression of an insight that is central to his early work. The two ideas of meaning—what he sometimes calls the 'stationary' and the 'dynamic' ideas of meaning—coexist alongside one another in the early work, but from the perspective of the later philosophy, it is the emerging recognition of the connection between the meaning of a symbol and its use in significant propositions that is one of the central achievements of the early work. The idea of use that is present in the early work is an idealized and etiolated one that reflects the early Wittgenstein's preoccupation with the concept of representation. In the later work, the conception of use is clearly much richer and more concrete; the emphasis is on our life with language, rather than on the concept of representation. Nevertheless, I will argue that we can see the later Wittgenstein as building upon his early recognition of the connection between meaning and use, and that in the long opening dialogue of the *Investigations* we see him using the developed form of this recognition to expose the illusions about meaning to which his early self fell victim.

2. Wittgenstein describes the view that he extracts from the passage from St Augustine's *Confessions* in *PI* 1 as follows: 'the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.' He goes on:

In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. (*PI* 1)

Wittgenstein describes this picture, in *PI* 2, as 'a primitive idea of the way language functions', and adds 'one can also say that it is the idea of a language

more primitive than ours.' The language of the builders that Wittgenstein describes in *PI* 2 is intended to provide an example of a language that fits this primitive idea of how language functions. The language consists of four words—'Block', 'Pillar', 'Slab', 'Beam'—and we are asked to '[c]onceive [it] as a complete primitive language' (*PI* 2).

This primitive view of language sounds, clearly, very close to ideas that Wittgenstein himself expresses in the *Tractatus*:

The simple signs in propositions are called names.

The name means an object. The object is its meaning.

The configuration of objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional sign. (*TLP* 3.202–3.21)

The affinity of these ideas to those that Wittgenstein attributes to Augustine is undeniable. However, there is a question as to the nature of the picture of meaning that is being expressed. According to one well-established interpretative tradition, the picture expresses a realist theory of meaning, which conceives the representing relation as consisting in the existence of a direct link between bits of language (words) and bits of the world (objects). On this view, language's ability to represent possible states of affairs is grounded in the links that are forged, as it were, outside the context of a proposition, between individual expressions and objects that exist prior to and independently of language.

David Pears characterizes this form of realism as follows:

In the *Tractatus* the beginning of language is the naming of objects. Objects are set in a fixed grid of possible states of affairs, which is in no way dependent on any contribution made by our minds. (Pears, 1987, p.9)

Thus, according to Pears, Wittgenstein's early view is that the possibility of factual discourse depends upon the existence of simple objects, each with its intrinsic set of possibilities for combining with other objects in states of affairs. These simple objects correspond to the simple names in a fully analysed proposition. A name is 'first . . . attached to an object in something like the way envisaged by Russell', but it continues to represent the object 'only as long as the possibilities presented by the propositions in which it occurs are real possibilities for that object' (Pears, 1987, pp.103–4). A name's possibilities for combining with other names to form propositions must mirror the intrinsic possibilities of the object for combining with other objects in states of affairs. Thus, the logical structure of language is imposed on it

from outside, 'by the ultimate structure of reality' (Pears, 1987, p.27). It is in virtue of this isomorphism between the logical structure of language and the independently constituted structure of reality that the connection between language and the world is made; the isomorphism explains language's ability to represent the world. The realist interpretation of the *Tractatus* goes on to argue that, although Wittgenstein's remarks are intended to communicate the above conception of how language is tied to the world, one of the consequences of the explanation that is thereby communicated is that the structure of the world, which language essentially mirrors, cannot be expressed in significant propositions. Significant propositions represent possible states of affairs. The structure of the world is necessarily mirrored in language, but it cannot be described in language. The structure of the world—the possibilities for objects to combine in states of affairs—cannot be described, but it makes itself manifest in the possibilities for combining names in significant propositions. Thus, we come to see that the possibility of our expressing thoughts about the world depends upon language's mirroring features of an independent reality that are shown by language but cannot be said: the attempt to say them results in nonsense.¹

3. The idea that Wittgenstein endorses this form of realism in the *Tractatus* has always had its detractors. For example, Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, Hide Ishiguro, and Brian McGuinness have all argued against the view that Wittgenstein set out, in the *Tractatus*, to provide a metaphysical basis for the logical structure of our language.² They each see Wittgenstein as engaged in a form of logical investigation whose aim is to lay bare how the expressions of our language function. Thus, Hide Ishiguro argues against the idea, central to a Pears-style reading, that Wittgenstein ever subscribed to the view that the identity of an object that a name denotes is something that is determined prior to, and independently of, the use of the name in propositions. She argues that the difference between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* does not lie in 'the presence or absence of the "use" concept but [in the fact] that the *Tractatus* concept of "use" is much less comprehensive than in the *Investigations*. That is to say, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is interested in the problem of the role expressions play in a language, which he considers only in relation to

¹ Other interpreters who find a realist theory of meaning in the *Tractatus* include Norman Malcolm (Malcolm, 1986), Max Black (Black, 1964), G.E.M. Anscombe (Anscombe, 1971), Peter Hacker (Hacker, 1986 and 1996), and Anthony Kenny (Kenny, 1973).

² See H. Ishiguro, 1969; B. McGuinness, 1981 and 1985; R. Rhees, 1960, 1963, 1966, and 1969; P. Winch, 1981 and 1987.

the truth-stating purpose of language' (Ishiguro, 1969, p.21). As Ishiguro sees it, the concept of an object, properly understood, is an intensional one, which emerges in the context of understanding the role that is played by the logical constituents of propositions, and it cannot be understood independently of this. Brian McGuinness also denies that it was ever Wittgenstein's intention to claim 'that there is something by which our grammar is determined', and argues that 'he did not try to infer features of the world from our language' (McGuinness, 2002, p.62). Like Ishiguro, McGuinness wants to see Wittgenstein as primarily concerned with the problem of making clear the logic of our language, of seeing clearly into the workings of our language, that is, as engaged in an investigation that is internal to language.³

4. The realist interpretation of the *Tractatus* has also been challenged, by a reading of Wittgenstein's early work put forward by Cora Diamond and James Conant, known as the 'resolute' reading.⁴ Diamond and Conant argue that the idea, central to the realist reading, that there are thoughts that are true, but which cannot be expressed, is contrary to the principal lesson of the *Tractatus*, namely that, tautologies aside, combinations of signs that do not express a sense are simply and straightforwardly nonsensical. Insofar as the remarks of the *Tractatus* are not tautologies and yet fail to express a sense, they are plain nonsense: nothing is communicated by means of them. The purpose of Wittgenstein's remarks, on their view, is fundamentally a therapeutic one, namely to show that what appear to be statements about the nature of language and its relation to the world are in fact 'real nonsense, plain nonsense' (Diamond, 1991a, p.181). This interpretation shares with the anti-metaphysical reading, of Rhees, Winch, Ishiguro, and McGuinness, the rejection of the idea that Wittgenstein ever engages in the sort of theorizing about the relation between language and an independent, or transcendent, reality that the so-called traditional reading claims.

It is a point of agreement among all these anti-metaphysical interpreters that, despite the striking differences in style, the early and the later philosophy are united in their rejection of the very possibility of taking what John McDowell

³ Winch makes the same point as follows: 'It is . . . inadmissible to try to account for the meanings of names by reference to their relation to something non-linguistic. What distinguishes an expression which has a meaning (and is, therefore, a name) from one which does not can only be something to do with its role in language' (Winch, 1987, p.7).

⁴ See C. Diamond, 1988 and Introduction to 1991a, pp.13–37; J. Conant, 1991 and 2002. Other resolute readers of the *Tractatus* include Tom Ricketts (Ricketts, 1996), Warren Goldfarb (Goldfarb, 1997) and Michael Kremer (Kremer, 2001).

calls 'a sideways on' perspective on language. All of them hold that Wittgenstein is always implacably opposed to the sort of metaphysical theorizing about the relation between language and the world that Pears and others hold that he rejects only in the later philosophy. However, while Rhees, Winch, Ishiguro, and McGuinness allow that Wittgenstein sets out to achieve positive insights into how our language functions, Diamond and Conant want to see Wittgenstein's aims as purely therapeutic, and to deny that Wittgenstein undertakes any positive philosophical task. Thus, although it is possible to see Diamond and Conant as continuing a well-established anti-metaphysical interpretative tradition, they are distinctive in wanting to press the idea that Wittgenstein's early philosophy is anti-theoretical, to its logical limits. The reading to be developed here belongs, like Diamond's and Conant's, to the anti-metaphysical tradition, but, in the tradition of Rhees and others, it stops short of claiming that this is incompatible with reading the work as aiming to present positive philosophical insights into the nature of language.

5. How, then, might a non-resolute, anti-metaphysical reading of Wittgenstein's early work understand the temptation that he later believes to be expressed by the picture of meaning as something that is correlated with a word? Clearly, the picture is not to be understood as the idea, central to Pears's conception of realism, that the use of a name in a proposition is dictated from the outside, by the intrinsic nature of the object that it stands for.⁵ According to the anti-metaphysical reading, Wittgenstein is already deeply committed to the idea that matters are exactly the other way round: the meaning of an expression is internally related to the role that the expression has within a system of representation in which we say things that are true or false.⁶ There is,

⁵ There are remarks in the *Notebooks* in which Wittgenstein expresses ideas along these lines, for example: 'A name designating an object thereby stands in a relation to it which is wholly determined by the logical kind of the object and which signalizes that logical kind' (*NB* p.70). However, none of these remarks survive into either the *Prototractatus* or the *Tractatus*. Although this is not on its own enough to undermine a realist reading of the *Tractatus*, it nevertheless encourages the thought that this line of thought is one that Wittgenstein rejects. He certainly appears to express quite the opposite view in both the *Prototractatus* and the *Tractatus*:

In logical syntax the meaning of a sign should never play a role. It must be possible to establish logical syntax without mentioning the *meaning* of a sign: *only* the description of expressions may be presupposed. (*PT* 3.20151; *TLP* 3.33)

⁶ For example, Ishiguro writes: '[In the *Tractatus*] it is the use of the Name which gives you the identity of the object rather than vice versa' (Ishiguro, 1969, p.34); McGuinness writes: 'Only in a proposition does a name have meaning, so that there cannot be a prepropositional act of giving a meaning to a name'; 'Reference is a function of fact-stating, not vice versa' (McGuinness, 1985/2002, p.96 and p.98, respectively).

therefore, no question of grounding the possibilities for using expressions in propositions with sense in the intrinsic structure of an independent reality. However, even with the rejection of the idea that the use of a word is grounded in, or explained by, something outside language, there is still a temptation to think that there is a vital role for the notion of meaning as something over and above the use of a word, as something that is correlated with a word, as something that we grasp in coming to understand it.⁷ It might seem, for example, that such an idea of meaning is essential in order to account for our ability to understand a new proposition in which a word occurs, without having its sense explained to us. Thus, some such idea of meaning seems to be invited by our ability to grasp the meaning of a word 'in a flash'; it seems to explain how we can then go on to use the word correctly in new propositions. The concept of a simple object that is correlated with a name emerges, I want to argue, in the context of this conception of the meaning of a word as something that we grasp and which explains our ability to understand the sense of propositions in which the word occurs, without having their sense explained to us. As both Ishiguro and McGuinness remark, the idea of the object that is the meaning of a name that emerges in this context does not correspond in any way to our ordinary notion of particular, concrete objects that constitute parts of empirical reality. In Chapter 5, I will follow their attempts to provide an interpretation of the concept of an object that dissociates it completely from the sort of realist theory of meaning that is put forward by Pears and others.⁸

Thus, I shall argue that it is not a version of realism, but the temptation to think that there is some explanatory role for the notion of meaning as something that is correlated with a word, something that comes to mind

⁷ Although Wittgenstein uses the terms '*bedeuter*' and '*Bedeutung*' to describe the relation between a name and an object, I will argue that the role that the concept of an object plays in the *Tractatus* brings it much closer to the notion of the meaning of a name than to the notion of the bearer or reference of a name. The fundamental mistake that lies behind Wittgenstein's talk of the meaning of a name as something that is correlated with it is, on this interpretation, the mistake of thinking that the meaning of a name is something that we grasp when we understand a word, whereas the use is something extended in time. It is, I want to argue, this 'stationary' conception of meaning that is at work in the *Tractatus*.

⁸ Hide Ishiguro writes: 'To suppose either that objects of the *Tractatus* are spatio-temporal things, or that they are sense data, lands us in similar difficulties. To ask what kind of familiar entities correspond to the objects of the *Tractatus* seems to lead us nowhere' (Ishiguro, 1969, p.47). Similarly, McGuinness argues that it cannot be correct to conceive of Wittgenstein's objects as 'concrete objects which may sensibly be said to exist or not exist' (McGuinness, 1981/2002, p.93). What makes it so difficult to understand Wittgenstein's concept of an object is, I want to claim, precisely that its role is closer to the idea of the meaning of a name than it is to our ordinary notion of what a name refers to, i.e. the bearer of a name.

when we say a word and understand it, that Wittgenstein succumbs to in the *Tractatus*, and which he attributes to Augustine at the opening of the *Investigations*. The later Wittgenstein sets out to liberate us from the picture, not because it expresses an attempt to ground the structure of language in the structure of an independent reality, but because it is a philosophical chimera that explains nothing, but which 'surrounds the working of language with a haze that makes clear vision impossible' (*PI* 5). Thus, when we try to clarify what the idea of meaning as something correlated with a word amounts to, it crumbles away to nothing: whatever we can point to as the correlate of a word is just another symbol; we never arrive at the "meaning". What Wittgenstein tries to show is that the idea that the meaning of a word is something that corresponds to it has its roots in a confusion between the meaning of a name and its bearer. The grip of this primitive, but ultimately empty and confused, idea of meaning on Wittgenstein's early thought is clearly very strong. However, I want to argue that the idea that the meaning of a word is the object it stands for goes against the current of some of the central innovations of Wittgenstein's early approach to the problem of understanding how language functions. It is, moreover, these innovations that remain, in a transformed version, fundamental to his later philosophy.

6. One of the difficulties for realist interpretations of the early philosophy is Wittgenstein's own early insistence that philosophy 'is not a body of doctrine' (*TLP* 4.112), but is 'purely descriptive' (*NL*, p.106).⁹ Diamond's and Conant's critiques of the traditional reading of the *Tractatus*, as I noted just now, place great emphasis on the need to take the early Wittgenstein at his anti-theoretical word, which they each interpret as incompatible with supposing that any positive philosophical insight is conveyed by his remarks. However, even those who have a less rigorous understanding of what it is to be anti-theoretical are committed to denying that Wittgenstein puts forward anything that could properly be called a theory of the relation between language and reality, which is intended to provide an explanation of language's ability to represent the world.

⁹ The tendency of such readings is to claim that Wittgenstein's philosophical practice is at odds with his explicit pronouncements on the nature of philosophy. For example, Peter Hacker writes: 'To understand Wittgenstein's brief remarks about philosophy in the *Tractatus*, it is essential to realize that its practice and its theory are at odds with each other. The official *de jure* account of philosophy is wholly different from the *de facto* practice of philosophy in the book' (Hacker, 1986, p.12).

The central idea of the form of anti-metaphysical reading that I want to develop is that Wittgenstein is engaged in a project of clarifying, rather than explaining, the workings of our language. But if Wittgenstein's insistence that he puts forward no doctrines, that he is essentially involved in a project of description or clarification, is one of the most striking continuities between the early and the later philosophy, it is also one of the most perplexing. How could Wittgenstein have taken himself, in each of these contrasting works, to be engaged in a task whose aim is, in some sense, purely clarificatory? And this question is clearly linked with another: How, on an anti-theoretical reading of Wittgenstein's philosophical aims, can his philosophy, which is allegedly free of philosophical doctrine, be understood to evolve or develop? One might argue that one of the great advantages of the traditional understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophical development is that it at least has a clear story to tell when it comes to accounting for the great discontinuity in style between Wittgenstein's two great works. The interpretive challenge that these questions pose is particularly demanding for those who accept the requirements that Diamond and Conant believe to be entailed by Wittgenstein's rejection of philosophical theory. A resolute reading of Wittgenstein's early work requires, first of all, a reading of the *Tractatus* that avoids committing Wittgenstein to any positive view of how language functions; and secondly, an account that explains, consistently with this, how Wittgenstein's philosophy evolves and changes over time.

7. The defining idea of the resolute reading of Wittgenstein's early work is that to read the *Tractatus* properly, as Wittgenstein intends us to read it, is to recognize that its sole aim is to expose philosophical nonsense as nonsense. Furthermore, it is to recognize that Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy is not mounted from the perspective of a commitment to a theory of what constitutes sense or nonsense, but is pursued piecemeal, in a way that has often been taken as distinctive of his later work. Diamond and Conant fully acknowledge the onus on them to provide a way of understanding Wittgenstein's development that avoids committing him to substantial doctrines that he either modifies or abandons completely. They claim, however, that this demand can be met.

Diamond, for example, argues that 'we see the change in Wittgenstein's view of clarity as central in the transformation that his thought underwent' (Diamond, 2004a, p.201). In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein's therapeutic task is to show that what appear to be statements about the nature of language and

its relation to the world are in fact 'real nonsense, plain nonsense' (Diamond, 1991a, p.181), and that the questions they appear to answer are not genuine questions at all. If the therapy works, then by the end of the book we have come to recognize that the task of philosophy is not the formulation of philosophical theories, but the clarification of propositions. This work of clarification is undertaken case by case, and it may either succeed in making what someone means by his words clear, or show that he in fact means nothing. On Diamond and Conant's interpretation, the *Tractatus* itself serves as an example of this process of clarification in the following way: Wittgenstein begins by making prima facie metaphysical claims about language and the world, only in order to go on to show that they are nonsense. What, in Diamond's view, differentiates the *Tractatus* from the later philosophy is the following:

[T]he questions which we supposedly renounce in the *Tractatus*, and supposedly recognize not to be questions, nevertheless shadow the kind of clarification which the *Tractatus* recommends. The book leaves us with a method that is in the shadow of the big questions we had been asking. The search for the essence of language is, in theory, *uberwinden*, overcome. But it is really still with us, in an ultimately unsatisfactory, unsatisfying conception of what it is to clarify what we say. (Diamond, 2004a, p.207)

Diamond believes that we might see the influence of questions about the essence of language on Wittgenstein's early conception of clarification as indicating that the *Tractatus* is 'unwittingly metaphysical in some respect or other' (Diamond, 2004a, p.208). Wittgenstein does not succumb to the sort of metaphysics that a Pears-style reading finds in it, namely the sort that aims to explain how language connects with a transcendent world that has its own, intrinsic logical structure. However, Wittgenstein's concern with general philosophical questions about how language functions leaves him, Diamond suggests, with a preconception of 'the general logical character of all thought and speaking and inferring' (Diamond, 2004a, p.208), which colours his early idea of how the work of clarifying propositions must be undertaken. For example, although the remarks about the truth-functional character of logic are overcome, or seen to be nonsense, Wittgenstein nevertheless retains a picture of the general character of logic which prevents him from paying 'attention to differences, to the complex reality of our propositions and our mode of inferring, or to the reality of our particular philosophical difficulties' (Diamond, 2004a, pp.208–9). Thus, Wittgenstein approaches the piecemeal

task of clarification from the perspective of a dogmatic, methodological commitment to the possibility of analysing all the propositions of ordinary language into truth-functional combinations of elementary propositions. To this extent, Wittgenstein's early work falls into a form of dogmatism that, although it is primarily methodological, can nevertheless be described as metaphysical. Wittgenstein's commitment to a particular conception of analysis shows that he has not yet succeeded in throwing off the influence of the kind of philosophy of language that the work as a whole sets out to undermine.

Diamond believes that it takes a long time for Wittgenstein to overcome the influence of the idea of a response to what she calls the 'Big Questions of the nature of language, or the conditions of sense' (Diamond, 2004a, p.209). He has to find a method of approaching the task of clarifying the sense of our words that resists our natural tendency to treat particular cases on the model of a preconceived idea of meaning, or in the light of 'some . . . general account of language' (Diamond, 2004a, p.211). The aim of the later work is not only to reject the possibility of a philosophy of language and replace it with an approach that is purely descriptive, but also to shake off the distorting influence that philosophical conceptions of language have on this descriptive task. According to Diamond, the early Wittgenstein did not intend to provide an answer to any Big Question about language, but he could not escape the influence of substantial ideas concerning the nature of language on his conception of what description would reveal. The temptation that he succumbs to is, in part at least, a temptation to value generalizations over the particular case. Diamond understands the evolution of Wittgenstein's conception of clarification in terms of his learning how to attend to the specific details of the particular case, how to proceed strictly case by case, allowing his puzzlement to be removed by the particular details without even thinking in terms of answers to Big Questions:

The real difficulty is in not thinking Big Questions; the real discovery is how not to do it. When Wittgenstein said 'Don't think, look', the hardness of looking is that of seeing the case with which we are puzzled as treatable genuinely on its own, the hardness of letting what can be said about it help, letting it satisfy us. This is at the heart of his later conception of clarification. (Diamond, 2004a, p.211)

8. There is a great deal in Diamond's account of the evolution of Wittgenstein's philosophy with which I want to agree. She is, for example, surely right when she suggests that the *Tractatus* is, despite itself, in the grip of

certain preconceptions about the essence of language, and that this prevents Wittgenstein from seeing, or even attending to, our ordinary use of language in all its richness and complexity. Equally, there is a clear sense that by the time he writes the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's approach to the task of clarification has undergone a profound change, and that he now feels himself to have found a way of approaching this task of clarification in a way that is free of philosophical prejudices or preconceptions. However, one can agree with all this while resisting the full rigours of Diamond and Conant's resolute reading. Thus, as already indicated, the general line to be taken here will be that Wittgenstein's rejection of philosophical doctrine is not incompatible, in either the early or the later philosophy, with an intention to provide what might properly be regarded as a philosophical insight into how language functions. On this view, the work of clarification that Wittgenstein undertakes is to be understood as having a positive, as well as a negative, purpose: the aim, in both the early and the later philosophy, is that we should come to see clearly into the workings of our language. This suggests that we should not approach the task of understanding the relation between the early and the later philosophy in purely methodological terms. There is, on this interpretation, also a question of the relation between the logical investigations that Wittgenstein undertakes in the early and the later work: both the approach that he takes towards it and the philosophical lessons that it achieves.

How, then, are we to account for the profound differences between the early and the later philosophy in respect both to Wittgenstein's approach to his task and to the picture of language that appears to be its outcome? I believe that we shall find the answer to these questions in a number of preconceptions which form the framework for Wittgenstein's early work, and which he makes a focus for philosophical treatment in the *Investigations*. It is these preconceptions, I shall argue, that dictate the nature of Wittgenstein's early conception of his task, and the approach that he takes to the work of clarification that he believes it calls for. These preconceptions include the idea that sense must be determinate, that there is a common essence to all representation of states of affairs, and that the meaning of a word is something that is correlated with it; together these preconceptions amount to a preconceived idea of language as an exact calculus operated according to precise rules. I want to argue, however, that even though Wittgenstein's early investigation of how language functions is directed towards this idealized picture of language, it is also the case that his ability both to recognize and to rid himself of

his early preconceptions is in large measure due to insights that he achieves in his early work *despite* their influence.¹⁰

Thus, what is achieved in the *Tractatus*—despite Wittgenstein's susceptibility to a primitive idea of meaning and to a mythological idea of a proposition and the essence of representation—is a recognition that how language functions, how a symbol symbolizes, is something that language itself makes clear: we do not need to go outside language in order to understand how it symbolizes in the way that it does.¹¹ The philosophical understanding that is achieved in the *Tractatus* centres on the recognition of the autonomy of language.¹² It is this commitment to the autonomy of language that underlies Wittgenstein's early recognition of the connection between meaning and use, and his early treatment of the nature and status of logic. I want to argue that the roots of the later philosophy lie in the ideas that emerge in connection with Wittgenstein's early commitment to the autonomy of language; these ideas are not abandoned or rejected in the later philosophy, but re-emerge, purged of the myths that govern Wittgenstein's early thought.

9. In 'Notes on Logic', Wittgenstein writes: 'In philosophy there are no deductions, *it* is purely descriptive' (NL, p.106). Wittgenstein's sense of a profound distinction between philosophy and scientific theorizing might be regarded as the fundamental starting point for his philosophical reflections. However, this guiding intuition clearly leaves a great deal undetermined. What is the purpose of a purely descriptive philosophy? And how is the task of description to be approached? In the same section of 'Notes on Logic', in a sentence that survives virtually unchanged in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein indicates at least one of the purposes of description as follows: 'A correct explanation of the logical propositions must give them a unique position as

¹⁰ In a conversation with Waismann in December 1931, Wittgenstein remarks: 'In my book I still proceeded dogmatically. Such a procedure is legitimate only if it is a matter of capturing the features of the physiognomy, as it were, of what is only just discernible—and that is my excuse. I saw something from far away and in a very indefinite manner, and I wanted to elicit from it as much as possible' (*WVC*, p.184).

¹¹ Rhees makes the point as follows: 'The question "How is the picture connected with the fact it pictures?" can only mean: "How does it have the role of a picture at all?"' (Rhees, 1966/1970, p.40).

¹² Winch also emphasizes that in the *Tractatus* language, or syntax, is 'autonomous'. He writes: 'What is not arbitrary in our notation is said . . . to depend on the essence of the *notation* (that is, on something linguistic). It is not said to be determined by the nature of any "extralinguistic objects". What is being said is that if we arbitrarily determine that a certain perceptible sign is to play a certain role, we do so *within the framework of language*' (Winch, 1987, p.12).

against all other propositions' (NL, p.107; cf. *TLP* 6.112). The use of the word 'explanation' ('*Erklärung*') here should not be taken to contradict the claim that philosophy is 'purely descriptive'. Insofar as the idea of 'correct explanation' is to be understood as a call to make the distinction between the propositions of logic and other propositions perspicuous or manifest, it is, as we shall see, something that might be achieved by description alone and need not involve anything 'hypothetical'. The remark is, nevertheless, revealing as to the nature of Wittgenstein's early conception of his philosophical task of clarification. For it shows that Wittgenstein is working with a preconceived idea of the logical structure of our language, which is expressed in the idea of 'the logical propositions', whose unique status must somehow be made apparent. It is clear that Wittgenstein himself does not consider where this idea of the logical structure of our language comes from, but that he allows it to determine how he conceives the purpose of his purely descriptive investigation of language and to dictate, at least in part, his approach to his task of clarification.

The idea that his early investigation of language is shaped by preconceptions of which he is unaware is, of course, an important theme of Wittgenstein's own later criticisms of his early work. In a remark in the *Investigations* that begins by endorsing his early view of philosophy as purely descriptive — 'It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones' — Wittgenstein ends by acknowledging that this task of description is much more difficult, the obstacles to it much greater, than we think:

These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings; *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. (*PI* 109)

It seems fair to assume that when Wittgenstein speaks here of 'an urge to misunderstand' the workings of our language, he is thinking of, among others, his own earlier self. The remark suggests that he sees his earlier self as having set out simply to describe the workings of our language, but as having been prevented from seeing what is there to be seen. Although he set out to look, not think, he now recognizes that he was subject to preconceptions or influences that frustrated his purely descriptive intentions. I suggested earlier that the idea of meaning as something that is correlated with a word is one source of such preconceptions. The idea that sense must be determinate and the idea that logic constitutes the essence of representation are, as we'll now see, another.

Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy is purely descriptive, that we have only to look and see how language functions, is central to his conception of the investigation that he undertakes in the *Tractatus*. However, it is also the case that Wittgenstein's early philosophy is dominated by a particular set of problems that together express a preconceived idea of the nature of language. The problems include the nature and status of the propositions of logic, the nature of truth and falsity, the nature of negation, and of the logical constants generally, and the nature of inference. Wittgenstein is, moreover, convinced that, at bottom, each of these problems is an aspect of what he calls in the *Notebooks* 'a single great problem':

The problem 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*, p.40)

He instructs himself not to try to treat each of these problems piecemeal:

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*, p.23)

And he identifies this 'single great problem' as follows:

My whole task consists in explaining the nature of the proposition. (*NB*, p.39)

Thus, Wittgenstein is convinced that we shall see everything clearly—the nature and status of the propositions of logic, negation, disjunction, inference, truth and falsity—when we see this one thing clearly: the nature of a proposition.¹³ It is not that we shall be able to *deduce*, say, the status of the propositions of logic, or the nature of negation, from the nature of the proposition; 'in philosophy there are no deductions'. It is rather that coming to see the nature of the proposition clearly *is, at the very same time*, coming to see negation and the status of the propositions of logic clearly: we have here, not a number of separate problems, but one great problem. If the problem is to be solved, then it must be solved all at once and in its entirety. The idea of the single great problem is that once the nature of a proposition has become

¹³ The significance of the idea of a 'single great problem' is discussed by McGuinness in McGuinness, 1974. Ricketts also recognizes the significance of this idea: '[Wittgenstein's] leading idea is that a proper understanding of the relation of sentences to reality that makes them correct or incorrect models of reality will encompass a proper understanding of the logical relationships among sentences, above all the relationship of logical consequence' (Ricketts, 2002, p.227).

clear, then everything will be clear: the nature and status of the propositions of logic, the nature of negation, of inference, and so on. Although the expression 'single great problem' does not occur in the *Tractatus*, the idea that the problems he is dealing with must be dealt with all at once and in their entirety is clearly expressed in a number of places:

The solutions of the problems of logic must be simple, since they set the standards of simplicity.

Men have always had a presentiment that there must be a realm in which the answers to questions are systematically combined—a priori—to form a self-contained system.

A realm subject to law: Simplex sigillum veri [Simplicity is the hallmark of truth]. (TLP 5.4541)

All the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.—That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness to the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety. (TLP 5.5563)

Thus, the idea that each aspect of the single great problem calls for complete clarity, by which all the problems will be seen to disappear, is closely connected with Wittgenstein's early conviction that there must be a logical order, not only in our language, but in any system of representation in which the world is represented. Wittgenstein's early conception of his task of clarification is thoroughly coloured by this conviction that there is a logical essence of all representation, which can be made clear through an investigation of the nature of a proposition. He conceives the task of the *Tractatus* to be one of revealing the logical order—the essence of representation—in virtue of which language is used to express thoughts that are true or false. The task of making perspicuous the nature of a proposition, the nature and status of the propositions of logic, of negation, and so on is seen to be identical with this task of making the logical order—i.e. the essence—of our language clear.

10. Diamond and Conant's emphasis on the rejection of general philosophical insights concerning the nature of language, and on the piecemeal nature of Wittgenstein's early approach to what he sees as philosophical illusion, have led them to a particular understanding of Wittgenstein's talk of 'the clarification of propositions' (TLP 4.112). On their view, he is to be understood as describing how a post-Tractarian philosophy, which eschews metaphysical questions, might be pursued. The *Tractatus* itself is a contribution to this task *only* to the extent that it shows specific examples of philosophical claims—e.g. 'The world is the totality of facts not things'—to be nonsense.

This is to be achieved, as we saw earlier, not by reference to any theory of sense or nonsense, but by means of the reader's gradual realization that he cannot give a sense to these words as they are combined in this sentence. However, if we accept that Wittgenstein's commitment to a conception of philosophy as purely descriptive is compatible with a concern to clarify the nature or essence of a proposition, then a different reading of TLP 4.112 is invited. We might take it as referring, not only to the future analyses of particular propositions, but also to the (a priori) task of making clear how any proposition—or, indeed, any representation of the world—expresses its sense, which, on this view of Wittgenstein's project, is the central task of the work itself.

On this alternative reading, a central part of the 'logical clarification of thoughts' that Wittgenstein speaks of is a matter of seeing clearly into the essential logical structure of any language, or system of representation, in which thoughts are expressed. Thus, Wittgenstein's conception of a philosophical work as consisting 'entirely of elucidations' is not to be understood purely as the expression of a conception of a future philosophy that is concerned with the piecemeal analysis of individual utterances. It is rather that the understanding of the nature of a proposition, which is the central concern of the *Tractatus*, is one that Wittgenstein believes will be achieved by means of clarification and description, and does not depend upon any hypothetical claim about the relation between language and a transcendent world. It is a matter of elucidating what is essential and what is arbitrary in any language in which thoughts that are true or false are expressed, of our coming to see clearly how one proposition occurs in another, of our recognizing how one proposition can be inferred from another, and so on. All of this is to be achieved simply by our examining language and making clear what language itself reveals about its workings. On this view, the *Tractatus* is neither merely an exemplar nor a prolegomenon to the activity of philosophical clarification. Rather, it is a work in which the nature of a proposition, which is already clear even though we do not see it clearly, is allowed to make itself clear to us. However, it is also the case that Wittgenstein's conception of what it is that needs to be made clear is itself completely determined by his unexamined commitment to a particular conception of a proposition and to the idea that where there is sense—where there are representations that are true or false—there too there must be perfect logical order, that is, to a conception of language as an exact calculus operated according to precise rules.

In a letter to C.K.Ogden, Wittgenstein proposed that the final sentence of TLP 4.112 be translated as follows: 'the propositions now have become

clear that they ARE clear.' This is undoubtedly tortuous grammar and it is not easy to see what Wittgenstein intended to capture by it. However, it seems to suggest that Wittgenstein believes that the *Tractatus* itself succeeds in making propositions clear: it makes clear how propositions express their sense clearly. This in turn suggests that it is correct to see the *Tractatus* as undertaking a task of clarification, which Wittgenstein takes to depend upon our achieving 'a free view over the whole single great problem'. Once the nature of a proposition has been allowed to make itself clear—once we see clearly how a proposition expresses its sense—then everything (how one proposition occurs in another, how one proposition can be inferred from another, the status of the propositions of logic) will have become clear and there will be nothing left to explain. If this is correct, then we can understand why Wittgenstein sees the activity of logical clarification of the nature of a proposition as essentially connected with the task of setting the limits to the expression of thought. It is not that Wittgenstein puts forward a theory of meaning from which the boundaries of what can be said may be deduced a priori. Rather, the logical clarification of the nature of a proposition is a process by which everything that is essential to our expressing a thought becomes clear. By the same stroke, we come to understand that, in some circumstances, the right question might not be one of the truth or falsity of what has been said, but whether a thought has been expressed. The importance of the insight into the essence of representation is, not that it will enable us to legislate concerning the boundary between sense and nonsense, but that it makes clear both the possibility and the importance of a certain sort of critical attitude towards the words we utter. It is not that Wittgenstein can tell us in advance whether words, as they are uttered on a particular occasion, do or do not express a thought, but that he wants us to come to recognize that, if our words express a thought, then we can make that thought clear. To understand the essence of a proposition is to understand what is involved in making a thought clear, and also to understand that where no clear thought has been expressed, nothing has been expressed: our words are simply nonsense.

This understanding of Wittgenstein's attitude towards the task of setting the limits to the expression of thought is in broad sympathy with the rigorously anti-theoretical approach of Diamond and Conant. However, as we saw earlier, Diamond sees it as a weakness of Wittgenstein's early work that he conceives the task of showing, in any particular case, that someone who says something metaphysical 'has failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his proposition' (*TLP* 6.53), within the framework of an implicit picture of

what a successful analysis must reveal. For Diamond, this shows that the sort of philosophy of language that Wittgenstein set out to undermine has not been fully overcome. The correct method of philosophy, as it is described in *TLP* 6.53, directs our attention away from a concern with attempting to settle traditional philosophical disputes, and towards showing that the metaphysician's words, in terms of which the dispute is expressed, have no application: we can do nothing with them. The claim is that Wittgenstein's conception of this critical task is dogmatically constrained by a particular idea of what constitutes a successful analysis of a proposition with sense, which ultimately derives from the problematic form of philosophy of language that the methodological principle expressed in *TLP* 6.53 was meant to liberate us from. On Diamond's view, the methodological principle put forward in *TLP* 6.53 emerges when we finally reject the form of philosophy of language that she believes is Wittgenstein's main target, but the influence of the old way of thinking is still to be seen in his conception of how the future work of clarification is to be pursued.

By contrast, I want to see the methodological principle of *TLP* 6.53 as simply another way of expressing the insight into the autonomy of language and the essence of a proposition that it has been the central work of the *Tractatus* to achieve. What we now see is that the correct response to the metaphysician's attempt to get outside language, or to ground language in a reality outside it, is one that is made within language. In coming to see the essence of a proposition clearly, we also come to see that the only possible form of criticism of the metaphysician's utterances—i.e. the only criticism that does not simply contradict the metaphysician's claim and thereby fall into the same trap—is one that sets out to show that no clear thought has been expressed by the words he utters, that so far nothing has been said. This methodological principle might be seen as one important expression of the insights into the workings of language that Wittgenstein achieves. That Wittgenstein's understanding of how the methodological principle is to be applied shares the dogmatism that governs his preconceived idea of the object of his logical investigation is, on this reading, exactly what we should expect.

Thus, on the interpretation to be developed here, Wittgenstein is taken to hold that the work of clarifying the nature of a proposition, which he believes to be the fundamental task of philosophy, is achieved by means of an investigation that is internal to language. It is this work of clarifying the nature of a proposition, which is achieved by the remarks that make up the *Tractatus* itself, that ultimately brings about the vital shift in our understanding of the

nature of philosophical problems—and how to deal with them—that is the climax of the work. It is essential to this anti-metaphysical interpretation of the work that we find a way of reading the remarks of the *Tractatus* on which the claim that they have a purely clarificatory or descriptive status becomes plausible. This requires, among others things, that we show that the initial impression that Wittgenstein begins the work with a statement of his fundamental ontology, which then forms the basis of his conception of the relation between language and the world, is an illusion.

Diamond and Conant take these opening remarks to be an ironic expression of a philosophical perspective on the relation between language and the world; they are intended to exemplify the sort of philosophy of language that, on their reading, Wittgenstein is out to undermine. Thus, the aim of Wittgenstein's work as a whole is ultimately to show that these remarks are plain nonsense and that the possibility of the perspective they purport to adopt is an illusion. The interpretation to be developed here will argue, by contrast, that the kind of reassessment that Wittgenstein ultimately intends us to make concerning the opening remarks is one on which we recognize that they do not have the metaphysical status we initially suppose. What we eventually come to see is that what Wittgenstein is doing in these remarks is nothing more than tracing the logical order that he has shown to be essential to language's representing states of affairs, or expressing propositions with sense, in the way that it does. Thus, the opening remarks are ultimately recognized as being simply descriptive of the logical order that is essential to our system for representing how things are in reality. As we shall see, what makes these remarks problematic is not that they ultimately purport to say something about the connection between language and an independent reality, but that the view of the logical order of language that they express embodies both the primitive idea that the meaning of a word is something that is correlated with it and an idealized picture of language as an exact calculus operated according to precise rules.

Diamond and Conant's resolute reading of Wittgenstein's early work places all the stress on the idea of exposing particular philosophical claims as nonsense. The approach that I want to develop, and which broadly follows the anti-metaphysical approach that is taken by Rhees, Winch, Ishiguro, and McGuinness, understands Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical conception of philosophy rather differently. The force of the claim that philosophy is 'purely descriptive' is to be understood, in part at least, as a call to allow language itself to reveal how it functions, that is, to reveal its nature. The aim is to

make perspicuous how logic (language) 'takes care of itself'. Wittgenstein's belief that his task is purely one of description arises from his conviction that 'I cannot need to worry about language' (*NB*, p.43): everything that is essential to how a proposition expresses its sense must be manifest in the way language functions. Thus, Wittgenstein's aim is not to give a *theory* that explains how a proposition represents reality; that is to say, 'there must not be anything hypothetical in [his] considerations' (*PI* 109). Insofar as '[t]he way language signifies is mirrored in its use' (*NB*, p.82), the task is purely one of clarification: we have only to look at the use of language in order to see how it signifies, that is, how it represents possible states of affairs, in the way that it does. It is simply by attending carefully to what is there before our eyes, Wittgenstein believes, that we shall clarify the nature of a proposition. The idea of the single great problem is that once the nature of a proposition is clear, then everything will be clear: the nature and status of the propositions of logic, the nature of negation, of inference, and so on. Wittgenstein's idea that philosophy is 'purely descriptive' amounts to the conviction that coming to see the nature of a proposition clearly is to be achieved 'not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known' (*PI* 109). The nature of a proposition must be something that language itself makes clear. However, as I suggested just now, Wittgenstein's whole conception of this central task of clarification is governed by a preconceived idea of logic and the essence of a proposition.

11. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein spends some time articulating what he later saw as the series of illusions that make up the framework of his early investigation into the workings of our language. In *PI* 133, he writes: 'Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem.' Like Diamond, I want to read this remark as bearing directly on Wittgenstein's own early work. The remark comes at the end of a long series of remarks in which Wittgenstein is principally concerned with giving a detailed diagnosis of a whole syndrome of illusions to which he believes he was subject in the *Tractatus*. He characterizes his fundamental misconception as follows:

We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. (*PI* 97)

The early Wittgenstein's idea, which we saw him express in the *Notebooks*, that he is confronting 'a single great problem' can be seen as one expression of this conception of the 'incomparable essence of language' which must be grasped in its entirety.

The idea that all the problems he confronts—the nature and status of the propositions of logic, the nature of negation, of inference, of truth and falsity—are aspects of a single problem is equivalent to the idea that by making the essence of a proposition clear, everything will become clear: to clarify the essence of a proposition is to clarify the essence of language. In the *Investigations*, he recognizes that this idea of the essence of language, or of a proposition, is itself essentially connected with the idea of a logical order that constitutes the essence of all representation. He sees that what he now describes as a conception of the proposition as ‘something remarkable’ or ‘something unique’ contains ‘the germ [of] the subliming of our whole account of logic’ (PI 94), that is, of the tendency to suppose that there must be a logical order which is ‘the basis of everything empirical’ (PI 89), and that is essential to all description or representation of states of affairs. Revealing the essence of language—the essence of representation as such—now becomes equivalent to uncovering the logical order that is essential to any system of representation in which thoughts are expressed. We become ‘dazzled by the ideal’ (PI 100) and are no longer able to recognize its status: ‘One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it’ (PI 114). The question Wittgenstein is interested in, in the *Investigations*, is where this idea comes from in the first place. How are we led to the idealized conception of a proposition and its essence—logic—that forms the framework to Wittgenstein’s early thought?

The idea of a proposition as something unique arises, Wittgenstein suggests, in ‘the forms that we use in expressing ourselves about propositions’ (PI 93). Our way of talking about propositions ‘seduces us into thinking that something extraordinary, something unique, must be achieved by [them]’ (PI 93). He goes on: ‘a *misunderstanding* makes it look as if a proposition *did* something queer’ (PI 93). Wittgenstein characterizes this ‘misunderstanding’ as the ‘tendency to assume a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts’ (PI 94). This ‘pure intermediary’ is the proposition that the propositional sign expresses, which is to be made clear through a process of analysis. The problem is not that we are here introducing an abstract entity, but that we are thinking of the proposition as a complete and exact representation of a unique or absolutely determinate possible situation or state of affairs. Thus, we have introduced the idea that at the end of analysis we shall arrive at propositional signs that are essentially or uniquely correlated with a state of affairs that either exists or fails to exist. The proposition is conceived as a unique, determinate representation of a particular possible state of affairs, a representation *as*

such. Wittgenstein himself uses this expression in the *Notebooks*: ‘However, all we want is to investigate the principles of representing *as such*’ (NB, p.23).

It is this way of talking about propositions, Wittgenstein suggests, that makes a proposition appear to be something remarkable:

“Thought must be something unique.” When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*. But this paradox (which has the form of a truism) can also be expressed this way: *Thought* can be of what is *not* the case. (PI 95)

A proposition is essentially connected with a completely determinate state of affairs that either exists or does not exist. We find Wittgenstein himself giving expression to this sense of wonder at a proposition in the *Notebooks*:

A picture can present relations that do not exist! How is that possible? (NB, p.8)

The difficulty of my theory of portrayal was that of finding a connexion between the signs on paper and a situation outside in the world. (NB, p.19)

... what is really characteristic of the relation of representing? (NB, p.21)

How does the picture present a situation? It is after all itself not the situation, which need not be the case at all. (NB, p.25)

That shadow which the picture as it were casts upon the world: How am I to get an exact grasp of it? Here is a deep mystery. It is the mystery of negation: This is not how things are, and yet we can say *how* things are *not*. (NB, p.30)

A proposition’s power to express or mean the specific state of affairs it does is independent of the state of affairs’ existing. The proposition, all by itself as it were, independently of what is the case, describes or represents a unique situation that can either exist or fail to exist: ‘Thought, language, now appear to us as the unique correlate, picture, of the world’ (PI 96). This way of talking invites the question: *How* does a proposition do that? How does a proposition achieve this extraordinary feat? How does it represent a particular state of affairs that can either exist or not exist? How is it that when we say and mean a proposition ‘we mean: *this-is-so*’? In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein is convinced that we have only to look at a proposition—i.e. at language as it is used to say how things are—to see how it represents: ‘The way in which language signifies is mirrored in its use’ (NB, p.82). However, his whole conception of what it is that he is setting out to clarify is determined by this picture of a proposition as a complete and exact representation—a unique picture or correlate—of a particular possible state of affairs. It is this preconception of the proposition as a complete and exact representation of a determinate state of

affairs that prevents Wittgenstein from being able 'simply to look and see how propositions really work' (PI 93). He believes that understanding the nature of a proposition will not involve any hypothetical consideration, but he begins what he conceives to be a task of clarification with the idea of a proposition 'as a unique correlate, picture, of the world' already in place. His conception of clarification, his idea of what is involved in 'looking into the workings of language', is now entirely determined by this preconceived idea of a proposition as a complete and exact representation of a possible state of affairs. Thus, he conceives his task to be one of revealing, by means of a process of clarification, everything that is essential to a propositional sign that is the unique correlate of a possible state of affairs, that is, of making clear the nature or essence of a proposition conceived as 'a pure intermediary between the propositional signs and the facts', as a complete and exact expression of what must be the case in order for the sentence I utter to be true.

Wittgenstein believes that the idea of the proposition as a unique or exact representation of a possible state of affairs is connected with a number of others. Thus, the idealized conception of a proposition goes along with the idea of logic as the essence of representation: logic is everything that is essential to a proposition's representation of a state of affairs. Logic is conceived as presenting 'the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be in common to both world and thought' (PI 97). Logic, the essence of all representation, must be given as soon as we are given a system of representation in which we express thoughts that are true or false: if there is representation of reality, then the whole of logic is in place. Thus, logic must be 'utterly simple' or complete. It must be prior to truth and falsity: 'no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it' (PI 97). Moreover, if logic is everything that is essential to representation, then representation is essentially in good logical order: a proposition's place in logical space—its logical relation to other propositions—must be absolutely clear and determinate. Thus, the idea that 'where there is sense there must be perfect logical order' (PI 98) brings us back once again to the idea that what is expressed by our sentences must be something that is completely determinate, that can be made completely clear through analysis. Thus, '[t]he proposition and the word that logic deals with are supposed to be something pure and clear-cut' (PI 105). The idea of the proposition as something unique is essentially connected with the idea that it must be possible to analyse the propositions of ordinary language in a way that reveals their sense with complete exactness. Thus, the idea of a pure, a priori essence of representation is essentially connected with the idea

that the logical order that is essential to language's ability to represent states of affairs, in the way that it does, is something that 'lies *beneath* the surface' (PI 92) of ordinary language, something which must be brought to light by means of a process of analysis, in which the proposition expressed by a propositional sign is made clear through a perspicuous expression of its sense.

It is not necessary, for the purposes of logic—i.e. for the purposes of clarifying the nature of a proposition and, thereby, the nature and status of the propositions of logic—that this analysis of the propositions of ordinary language should actually be carried out. However, it is essential to Wittgenstein's early, idealized conception of logic and a proposition that this analysis is possible. 'We become', Wittgenstein suggests, 'dissatisfied with what are ordinarily called "propositions", "words", "signs"' (PI 105); '[t]he idea now absorbs us, that the ideal "*must*" be found in reality' (PI 101). We are now 'unable simply to look and see how propositions really work'; we are prevented by our preconceived idea of a proposition as a complete and exact expression of the truth-conditions of the sentences that I utter—as 'a pure intermediary between the propositional *signs* and the facts'—and of the logical order that constitutes the essence of a proposition conceived as a complete and exact representation. The ostensible object of investigation—ordinary language—slips from view and our logical investigation is directed towards the idealized image of a proposition as a complete, logically determinate, representation of reality. The conception of essence that is embedded in our preconceived idea of a proposition is now projected onto ordinary language: the ideal 'must be found in reality, for we think we already see it there' (PI 101).

Thus, we come to believe that 'there must be perfect logical order even in the vaguest sentence' (PI 98). We attribute to our ordinary propositions all the properties of the ideal that we've constructed: 'We predicate of the thing what lies in the method of representing it' (PI 104). Thus, it comes 'to look as if there were something like a final analysis of our forms of language, and so a *single* completely resolved form of every expression' (PI 91). This idea of a complete analysis of ordinary propositions is connected, in turn, with the idea of ultimate indefinables that are the end point of analysis. In combination with the naive conception of meaning as something that is correlated with a word, and with a commitment to the autonomy of language, this leads in turn to the conviction that '*a name ought really to signify a simple*' (PI 39). Thus, the general outlines of some of the central elements in Wittgenstein's early attempt to achieve an overview of his single great problem—the problem of the nature of a proposition—are presented in the *Investigations* as aspects of a

single grand illusion, a preconceived idea of the essence of language, one that has its origins in our ways of talking about propositions.

12. In setting out his descriptive agenda for philosophy, it is clear that the early Wittgenstein believed that he had only to look into the workings of language in order to see there how language functions. A hypothesis cannot be to the point, insofar as it would make language's ability to represent a matter of conjecture and subject to doubt. As Wittgenstein says in the *Notebooks*, 'I cannot need to worry about language' (*NB*, p.43). Language itself must make clear how it represents, that is, what its essence consists in: 'We must recognize how language takes care of itself' (*NB*, p.43). However, as we've just seen, the early Wittgenstein is himself in the grip of a preconceived idea of the nature of a proposition that makes it impossible for him to see, or better attend to, what is there before his eyes. The idea of a proposition as a unique representation of a state of affairs, and of the perfect logical order that must lie beneath the surface of ordinary language, determines the way Wittgenstein conceives his problem and, with it, his whole approach to the task of clarification. His gradual liberation from this preconceived idea of language as an exact calculus operated according to precise rules should not be understood as a theoretical development, but as a matter of his shaking off the illusions that our ways of talking about meaning and propositions invite, and of his turning his attention to the concrete phenomena of our life with language. Once the turn towards our actual, concrete practice of employing expressions is accomplished, Wittgenstein's whole approach to the task of clarifying how our language functions undergoes a profound change. However, as I already remarked, I want to argue that underlying the changes that divide the early and the later philosophy, there is a fundamental continuity that permits us to see the latter as, in an important sense, a development of what has gone before.

On this interpretation, Wittgenstein is, from the very beginning, convinced that the task of 'trying to understand the essence of language—its function, its structure' (*PI* 92), is one that is independent of anything hypothetical: language itself makes clear how it signifies. Everything essential to language is internal to it and can be made clear by means of description alone. What he comes to realize, however, is the difficulty of carrying out this task of clarification or description free of prejudices and preconceived ideas. There are certain natural ways of thinking about language, which language itself invites, which are the source of misconceptions and misunderstandings that 'surround the working of language with a haze that makes clear vision impossible' (*PI* 5).

In his early work he falls victim to a number of these misconceptions; he is in the grip of a preconceived idea of language and the essence of representation, and tempted by the picture of meaning as something that is correlated with a word. The difficulty in resisting these philosophical pictures is, he comes to see, less an intellectual one than a problem of the will. What he finds is that the more he attends to the detail of our actual use of expressions, the more he is forced to acknowledge that the idea of complete exactness, of perfect logical order, and of 'the incomparable essence of language' (*PI* 97) are illusions: 'The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*; it was a requirement' (*PI* 107).

However, even once the illusions are abandoned, the question of how language signifies, and of the nature and status of logic, still remain. These questions are ones that Wittgenstein still believes will be answered by means of clarification alone, but now the work of clarification is to be undertaken in respect of our actual practice of using language, and in what Diamond calls 'a realistic spirit'. In a certain sense, it is the immediate object of his investigation that changes: his investigation is no longer directed at the idea of an exact calculus that underlies our use of language, but to our actual employment of language within our everyday lives. It is this change in the object of investigation that calls for a completely different approach to the one that Wittgenstein takes in the *Tractatus*. However, beneath the surface of the important and striking differences in approach, there remains, I will argue, a fundamental continuity of philosophical purpose and insight; it would, I want to claim, be almost correct to say that the *Philosophical Investigations* is a re-imagining of the most important philosophical ideas of Wittgenstein's early work, one which is purged of the illusions to which the early Wittgenstein was subject.