

The Enchantment of Words

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

DENIS McMANUS

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Dedicated to my mother and to the memory of my father

Why think of this thought as *about* this fact? The problem that the argument exposes is not that we cannot answer our question; rather, which question we ought to ask is undetermined. The 'epistemological gloss' suggests that the perspective from which the fit of a proposition to the world might be described is one which the user of the proposition cannot occupy. But the deeper point that that gloss overlooks is that the perspective does not make sense, that there is no such perspective.

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The Method of the *Tractatus*

One of the basic ideas informing my reading of the *Tractatus* is that Wittgenstein believed he could make good on the claim that philosophical problems emerge out of sign/symbol confusions; that idea was introduced and illustrated in Section 3.5, will be elaborated on in Chapter 6's discussion of what Wittgenstein believes notations can do for us philosophically, and will be returned to repeatedly throughout the rest of the book. This chapter will set out some of the other basic ideas that inform my reading. These include an understanding of what it is to elucidate nonsense (Sects. 4.3–4.8) and an understanding of what is at stake in Wittgenstein's talk of 'internal properties' and 'internal relations' (Sects. 4.9–4.10). But I will look first at that cluster of commitments that have become known as 'resolution'.

4.1 RESOLUTION: AN INITIAL SKETCH

Given the range of literary forms that philosophy has employed over the centuries, the *Tractatus* is not *that* strange; certainly we recognize it as a philosophical text, presenting perplexing but recognizably philosophical claims. Consequently, 6.54's claim that Wittgenstein's propositions ought to be recognized as nonsense seems to run counter to our entire experience of engaging with the book: 'How can the book that I have just *read* be nonsense?' The view of the *Tractatus* which has been, certainly until recently, most popular (developed by, for example, Norman Malcolm and Peter Hacker) deals with this problem by suggesting that when Wittgenstein talks of that work's propositions as 'nonsense', his point is that his philosophical 'message' is one 'which *strictu sensu* cannot be said' (Hacker 2001*a*, p. 19). That message can still be thought of as embodying a set of metaphysical views, for example, but part of that message is that these views are, somehow, inexpressible.

This view has acquired the labels 'traditional' and 'orthodox' in recent years due to the promotion of an alternative view by, in particular, Cora Diamond and James Conant.¹ An early criticism of the *Tractatus*, understood 'traditionally',

¹ Cf., e.g., Diamond 1991, chs. 1–6, 2000*a*, and 2000*b*; Conant 1991*a*, 1991*b*, 1993, 2000, and 2002; Conant and Diamond 2004. While the present and following sections indicate some of what I take from Conant and Diamond's work, I am sure that their influence on my reading extends further, though in ways it is hard for me to pin down. I do not know what a considered and comprehensive picture of the *Tractatus* would be like for them and I strongly suspect it would

was made by Frank Ramsey: 'what we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either'.² Conant and Diamond maintain that Wittgenstein recognized that, and renounced as unintelligible the idea of *views* which '*strictu sensu* cannot be said'. In arguing that when Wittgenstein said that we should come to recognize his propositions as nonsense, he meant 'real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to an ineffable truth' (Diamond 1991, p. 181),³ this view styles itself as 'resolute', as refusing to 'chicken out': 'when Wittgenstein calls something nonsensical he implies that it has really and truly got no articulable content' (Diamond 2000*b*, p. 155).⁴ Rather than trying to intimate ineffable metaphysical truths, the *Tractatus* does no more than reveal our susceptibility to certain illusions:

[W]e are drawn into the illusion of occupying a certain sort of perspective. . . . From this perspective, we take ourselves to be able to survey the possibilities which undergird how things are with us, holding our necessities in place. From this perspective, we contemplate the laws of logic as they are, as well as the possibility of their being otherwise. We take ourselves to be occupying a perspective from which we can view the laws of logic from sideways on. The only 'insight' the work imparts therefore is one about the reader himself: that he is prone to such illusions. (Conant 1991*a*, p. 157)⁵

Critics of this approach believe that only a kind of wilfulness or self-deception on the part of resolute readers allows them to believe that they can make sense of the proposal that Wittgenstein's propositions are nonsensical in just the same way as pure gibberish—such as 'piggle wiggle tiggler' (Diamond 2000*b*, p. 151)—is. Criticism of resolution can be seen to condense around four main charges.⁶

First, traditionalists claim that resolute readings of the *Tractatus* are incompatible with so many claims that its author makes that it cannot possibly capture the meaning of that book. Resolute readers respond that, in a work that is

be importantly different from the picture I offer here; indeed a sympathetic reader for another press asked why I associated my own reading with theirs. I do sometimes criticise their views in what follows, but I still think that their work remains the most important influence on my own thought on the *Tractatus*.

² Quoted in Hacker 2000, p. 355.

³ Cf. also Conant 1993, p. 216.

⁴ The reading in question has also been labelled 'therapeutic' (McGinn 1999), 'deconstructive' (Hacker 2000), simply 'American' (Hacker 2003), and, in the light of Crary and Read's 2000 collection, simply 'new' (though Crary and Read themselves use that term to denote a broader approach which also takes in Wittgenstein's later work).

⁵ There is debate over quite who can claim to be the originator of the 'resolute' interpretation; pieces of work which are clearly important, either as anticipations or as forerunners, include Ishiguro 1969; McGuinness 1981; Winch 1987; Goldfarb, unpublished *a* (for discussion of these pieces, cf. Goldfarb, unpublished *b*); Burton Dreben was also an important influence on the development of this view through his teaching at Harvard and Boston universities. Other significant contributions to the 'resolute' literature include Floyd 1998 and 2002; Friedlander 2001; Goldfarb 1997*a*; Kremer 2001, 2002, and 2004; Ostrow 2002; Ricketts 1985 and 1996; Witherspoon 2000; and other pieces included in Crary and Read 2000.

⁶ There are others, and I will address some of them below (cf., e.g., n. 11 below, Sect. 4.9, and Ch. 10 n. 16 and Sect. A.10); but the ones I present here are, I think, the most important.

to be 'thrown away' having been seen to be made up of propositions that are nonsensical, 'the claims that its author makes' have to be viewed with circumspection: some—perhaps many—of these claims are *meant* to be 'thrown away'.⁷ Critics have, in turn, responded by pointing also to remarks of Wittgenstein's which seem to articulate the views of the author of the *Tractatus* and to embody substantial metaphysical claims but which are made *outside* the 'frame' that 6.54 provides; most of these have come in the form of retrospective comments that Wittgenstein makes.⁸ Resolute readers have responded by arguing that these remarks are cases of Wittgenstein subsequently recognizing that he had particular philosophical commitments;⁹ thus the claim that the *Tractatus* was not designed to impart any substantial metaphysical message may yet be harmonized with Wittgenstein's later remarks about having held metaphysical commitments when he wrote that book: the proposal is that these commitments were unwitting commitments of the early Wittgenstein that he later recognized as such.

Needless to say, neither of the resolute rejoinders set out in the preceding paragraph are adequate as they stand: both need to be made good through a detailed reading of the relevant texts. I present my own attempt to do that in what follows.¹⁰

Secondly, there is the undeniable 'phenomenological' fact that reading the *Tractatus* is not at all like reading a book of meaningless gibberish. This complaint is superficially the easiest for resolute readers to respond to. Although resolute readers insist that nonsensical philosophical propositions are actually strings of signs to which no content has been assigned and are, in this respect, no different from gibberish, their interpretation positively *requires* that the phenomenology of reading the *Tractatus* not be that of reading gibberish. Their point is that, on reading the work, our confusions conjure up a pseudo-understanding; a person who is philosophically confused succumbs to an *illusion* of understanding, and, as a result, reading philosophical propositions (Wittgenstein's included) does *not feel* like reading 'piggle wiggle tiggler'.

None the less, what I think this criticism rightly points to is a failure on the part of the resolute to give a detailed account of just what reading the *Tractatus* does involve. This failure also prompts the third complaint, which McGinn captures well: 'if the ladder . . . turns out to be an illusion, how have we got anywhere by climbing it?' (1999, p. 496). An aspect of that question might be developed by asking, in particular, how strings of pure nonsense can constitute a chain of reasoning, how they can constitute a 'ladder' that is 'climbed' by thinking through arguments. To deny that that is crucial to what reading the *Tractatus* involves would seem to require that the book is a body of squiggles that merely *causes* the philosopher to stop saying what he says, something that acts on us, as

⁷ Cf., e.g., Conant 2000, p. 215.

⁸ Hacker 2000 and Proops 2001 have both followed this path.

⁹ Cf. Conant and Diamond 2004, sect. 5.

¹⁰ The second rejoinder comes to the fore in Sects. 9.4 and 11.9 and Appendix A.

Sullivan puts it, 'like a blow on the head' (2003, p. 196). Sections 4.3–4.8 will set out the basis of a response to this third complaint, and throw new light on the second.

Finally, there is the worry that Hacker expresses when he declares that the resolute perspective 'dismiss[es] the philosophical insights' of 'this great book' (Hacker 2000, p. 359). One often encounters the view that resolute readings are ingenious and fit well some of the book's 'framing' metaphilosophical remarks (6.54, in particular), but that they leave much of the rest of the book—the 'content' of the book—unilluminated.¹¹ Resolute readings are often depicted as unsatisfactorily *thin*, as very abstract, 'strategic' accounts of how the book ought to work, as opposed to detailed readings of the text as we find it. So Sullivan, for example, sums up his reaction to the core ideas of this reading as 'Well, yes, so far. And now . . . ?' (2002, p. 44). Perhaps in response to this pressure from Sullivan, Conant and Diamond have recently stated:

To be a resolute reader is to be committed at most to a certain programmatic conception of the lines along which [the details of the book] are to be worked out. (Conant and Diamond 2004, p. 47)

The viability of that programmatic conception will depend on the possibility of those details being worked out. My book presents one way in which this might be attempted. In case it needs stating, my aim is not resolution for resolution's sake; rather, I believe that the reading that emerges is broadly in line with what Wittgenstein says and does, and is of philosophical interest.

4.2 RESOLUTION: A SHARPER SPECIFICATION

One effect of the controversy that resolute readings have sparked has been an effort to delimit more precisely just what a resolute reading of the *Tractatus* is. Sullivan (2002) has suggested that, to the extent that there is a unifying core to resolution, it is constituted by two particular commitments. The first is an 'austere' conception of nonsense, according to which 'nonsense is a failure to make sense [and not] a matter of making the *wrong kind* of sense' (p. 45): to say that a string of signs is 'nonsensical' is to say that 'no meaning has been given to one or more of the component signs as they occur in that string . . . and *not*, as one might be tempted to think, that the meanings that *have* been assigned to the various components of the string will not cohere' (p. 45). The second commitment is a "full-hearted recognition" that when Wittgenstein describes his own

¹¹ Another criticism I will mention here is that, by presenting the *Tractatus* as 'real nonsense, plain nonsense', the resolute 'surprisingly disregard the fact that in the preface Wittgenstein speaks of *the thoughts* expressed in the book [and] asserts that their *truth* is "unassailable and definitive"' (Hacker 2000, p. 360). This complaint strikes me as placing inordinate weight on turns of phrase that can easily be interpreted differently: on my own (broadly resolute) view, Wittgenstein certainly has a view—'thoughts'—about philosophy that he thinks is right—that those thoughts 'are true'.

propositions as "nonsense" [he means] that they fail to make sense' (p. 45). A 'full-hearted recognition' contrasts with 'half-hearted' views that would depict those propositions as making the 'wrong kind of sense'. As illustrations of what the resolute think that 'half-heartedness' looks like, Sullivan quotes (at p. 45) Kremer and Goldfarb: half-heartedness might be a matter of seeing Wittgenstein's propositions as 'something like propositions', as 'quasi-truths' (Kremer 2001, p. 41) or as sentences which, 'while nonsensical, somehow gesture at something that is going on, some inexpressible state of affairs or true but inexpressible thought' (Goldfarb 1997a, p. 61).

According to Conant and Diamond, on the other hand, the following two other 'interrelated features . . . suffice to make a reading "resolute"':

The first is that it does not take those propositions of the *Tractatus* about which Wittgenstein said, at 6.54, that they are to be recognized as 'nonsensical' to convey ineffable insights. The second feature is a rejection of the idea that what such recognition requires on the part of a reader of the *Tractatus* is the application of a theory of meaning that has been advanced in the body of the work—a theory that specifies the conditions under which a sentence makes sense and the conditions under which it does not. (2004, p. 47)

To indicate roughly how these taxonomic claims relate, Conant and Diamond's first feature illustrates Sullivan's second, and his first (at least, according to Conant and Diamond (p. 48)) is a corollary of their second.

But neither of these characterizations seems quite adequate to me. These attempts to find the 'core', the 'heart', of what motivates resolute readings seem to leave out another hazily specified concern: namely, their sense that the early Wittgenstein shared the later Wittgenstein's view that philosophical problems ought to be dissolved rather than solved, that the appropriate response to a philosophical problem is *not* the formulation of a substantial philosophical theory about the nature of the world, thought, or language, but instead an identification of *confusions* that have left us facing this apparent—but *only apparent*—problem.¹²

I take my own reading to have both of Conant and Diamond's features, the first of the commitments that Sullivan picks out, and the 'hazy' commitment that I have suggested needs to figure somewhere in an account of 'resolution'. The situation is less straightforward, however, with the second commitment that Sullivan picks out: I do not see Wittgenstein's propositions as gesturing at 'some inexpressible state of affairs or true but inexpressible thought' (and thus my reading has the first of Conant and Diamond's features), but I do take them to be 'something like propositions', as 'somehow gesturing at something that is going on', and even as 'quasi-truths'. Having said that, I take my position to be in the spirit of the resolute approach, and my willingness to use the formulations just

¹² Conant has recently made clear in conversation that he sees the omission of this broader commitment as a mistake. Sullivan's reason for doing so is, I suspect, the belief that resolution's 'core' commitments are actually compatible with the idea that the *Tractatus* 'presents a philosophical system of the world, and thought about the world' (Sullivan 2004, p. 32).

mentioned is one which, I will argue, the resolute can share if they broaden their diet of examples of nonsense; Sections 4.3–4.8 explore the crucial issues here.

Why embrace these commitments? Again, rather than summarize the whole resolute literature, I will make a few comments here, and point in the direction of some further support to be found elsewhere in the book.

An argument in favour of Conant and Diamond's first commitment that has received a lot of attention seems to be less than convincing. This is the argument that there is something hopelessly confused in the idea of ineffable truths: 'traditionalist' readers are taken to say something of the form, 'Wittgenstein conveys to us that p and that p is unsayable', and such a reading treats Wittgenstein, as Kremer puts it, 'as a bumbling fool' (2001, p. 45). Proops (2001) and Sullivan (2002) have both argued recently that the recognition of ineffable truths does not exhaust the possible range of 'insights' that might be thought ineffable but conveyed through the *Tractatus* or through the revision of our symbolism that it envisages: the argument presented, for example, would not bear on insight into 'features of a proposition, of a state of affairs, of language, of reality, the world' (Sullivan 2002, p. 50).¹³

I will offer my own account of why the notion of the ineffable is to be 'thrown away': it is not because 'the unsayable' is, in some way, an inherently confused notion; rather, in the particular cases in which we resort to this notion, we do so out of confusion. I do, none the less, think that Wittgenstein's use of the notion of 'the unsayable' is meant to unsettle us, to make us wonder about the route that has led us to the point at which we believe we run into 'the unsayable'. I will argue that Wittgenstein's demonstration of how we come to reach for 'the unsayable' is something that is meant to help us see the confusion in whose grip we are thinking.

There are two principal reasons why Conant and Diamond's second commitment appeals to me. First, I know of no theory of meaning that has been proposed as articulated within the *Tractatus*, and as providing the reason why Wittgenstein's own 'propositions' and those of other philosophers are nonsensical, that strikes me as plausible—as, for instance, resting on premisses that are more compelling than our own initial conviction that those apparent 'propositions' make sense. (Many theories have been offered, and I cannot examine all of them here. I will, however, examine an example in Sect. 4.9.) Secondly, I believe that I am offering here a sensible story about the *Tractatus* that does not need to ascribe to it such a theory of meaning.

Turning to the features that Sullivan picks out, if one embraces the first, then there is a clear case for embracing the second, it being an application of the

¹³ Conant and Diamond have recently insisted that their view 'need not require throwing away the idea of showing *per se*' (2004, p. 65); this leaves open the possibility that some species of say/show distinction might be preserved and, with it perhaps, some notion of 'the ineffable'; but what they have in mind is not clear to me. I make explicit my own view of this distinction in Sects. 15.1–15.3.

austere conception of nonsense to Wittgenstein's own supposedly nonsensical 'propositions' (though I will argue below that we must be careful quite how we interpret this second feature). As for the first, it appeals because Wittgenstein does seem to go out of his way to defend such a view of nonsense.¹⁴ A trickier question is: Can Wittgenstein endorse this view without recourse to a substantive philosophical theory of meaning? While Sullivan argues that it is 'an immediate consequence of [a] contextualism about meaning' (p. 45), I am inclined to agree with Kremer that this 'view' is a 'pre-theoretical, common-sense' notion (2001, p. 43): when one talks nonsense, one produces signs but says nothing. My commitment to Sullivan's first feature is a matter of trying to demonstrate that, for Wittgenstein, we invoke other, less 'common-sensical' 'forms of nonsense' only when confused.

My added 'hazy' commitment seems to me to be consistent with Wittgenstein's rejection of an '*a priori* order of things' (5.634, quoted in Sect. 1.1) and to be a corollary of the combination of the austere conception of nonsense and Wittgenstein's claim in 4.003:

Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but nonsensical.

He continues: 'We cannot . . . answer questions of this kind at all'; if such 'questions' don't actually pose questions, then there are no questions there to be answered; these 'deepest problems are really *no* problems'.

4.3 ELUCIDATING NONSENSE

Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense.

(CV64 (1947))

The different specifications of 'resolution' that the previous section examined all present 'resolution' as not only a programmatic 'conception' of how to read the *Tractatus*, but also as essentially a conception of how *not* to read the book. So what are the other basic notions upon which my positive reading draws?

In the light of TLP 4.003, and 6.54's laying down of the further challenge of understanding how Wittgenstein's own propositions can be nonsensical too, any reading needs to consider carefully what Wittgenstein understands 'nonsense' to be. According to the 'austere conception', nonsense is an absence of sense, rather than the presence of the 'wrong kind of sense'. But Wittgenstein tells us more

¹⁴ Cf. TLP 5.473 and NB 1, quoted in Sect. 3.5.

about the particular kind of nonsense to which philosophers are given: conflation of sign and symbol give rise to 'the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full)' (3.324). I will argue that this metaphilosophical claim, which was introduced above in Sect. 3.5, can be taken seriously: if we follow Wittgenstein's guidance, we can see how fundamental philosophical concerns arise out of sign/symbol conflation and how Wittgenstein's own propositions 'elucidate' confusions with their roots in such conflations. This brings or to another basic 'plank' in my account, namely, an understanding of what such an 'elucidation of nonsense' involves.

Every reader of the *Tractatus* faces the question of what it is to understand a book whose contents are supposedly nonsensical. For example, Conant asks of 'traditional readers': 'how is nonsense able to convey an insight into ineffable features of reality?' (1991a, p. 153). But the 'resolute' approach faces the third traditionalist criticism set out in Section 4.1; Hacker echoes McGinn's sentiment:

[W]e can hardly claim that a 'ladder' consisting of mere gibberish can lead anywhere. (Hacker 2001a, pp. 15–16)¹⁵

And how can such a 'ladder' be 'climbed' by thinking through arguments, as the *Tractatus* surely is?

Conant claims that 'the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus* depends on the reader's provisionally taking himself to be participating in the traditional philosophical activity of establishing theses through a procedure of reasoned argument', though the reader must ultimately "recognize" that he has only been going through the motions of "inferring" (apparent) conclusions from (apparent) "premises" (2000, pp. 196–7). The challenge for the resolute is twofold: first, to give a sense to the 'successful' going through of those motions (to be contrasted with that in which I nod my head as I move my finger down the page, muttering 'Yes, I see', when in fact I have no idea what is going on) without going back on either the belief that 'entailment is a relation between sentences only in so far as they are meaningful' (Witherspoon 2000, p. 348)¹⁶ or the claim that the 'premises' and 'conclusions' 'really and truly [have] no articulable content'; secondly, to explain why 'going through' such 'motions' might get one somewhere!

For Wittgenstein, nonsense is a failure to recognize when we have conflated different symbols as a result of similarity between the signs that express them. But talking nonsense is not always something that leads to perdition, or something that one does without the possibility of control. In explaining this view, I will explain a corollary of the sign/symbol conflation view of nonsense that resolute

¹⁵ As Stephen Mulhall has formulated the point, 'If there's nothing there, how can it bear even provisional weight?' (private communication). Cf. also Reid 1998, pp. 107–8.

¹⁶ Cf. also Diamond 2000a, p. 273: 'Any grasp which I have of [sentences'] logical relations is inseparable from my grasp of the sentences themselves, of each as a sentence saying that such-and-such is the case. . . . If I can take a sentence to stand in logical relations to other sentences, then I can understand that sentence.'

readers have either overlooked or mistakenly taken to lead to irresolution; it is that, in a perfectly reasonable sense, items of nonsense have an identity and a logic. If anything, their problem is having *too much* of both. And in another sense, of course, it is not 'their problem' at all. One can 'cross' propositions to generate nonsense in this way if one wants to: for example, as we will see, Lewis Carroll does it. But one thing that does distinguish the production of philosophical nonsense is that the 'crossing' of propositions that it involves is carried out *unwittingly*. I will suggest that Wittgenstein wittingly follows out the pseudo-logic of these confusions in order to reveal that that is indeed what they are.

The debate over how to read this nonsensical book with understanding has been conspicuously short of examples; I will offer a series of examples, drawn from Carroll, which demonstrate that there are varieties of nonsense with which that debate has failed to reckon. Such items of nonsense can, in recognizable ways, be understood and form steps in arguments that are, in recognizable ways, valid; but neither of these feats turns on our thinking of these items of nonsense as intimating ineffable claims of some sort. It is the work of the rest of the book to show how, by analogy, these examples, and the conception of 'the elucidation of nonsense' that they suggest, might help us understand what it is to understand the *Tractatus*.

4.4 BROADENING OUR 'DIET OF EXAMPLES'

It is not unusual for the name of Lewis Carroll to come up in discussions of the *Tractatus*; *Jabberwocky* is clearly one of our favourite examples of nonsense.¹⁷ But it is not the kind of example at which I want to look.¹⁸

When Alice passes through the looking-glass, she is surprised to find that the flowers there talk. But the 'explanation' is simple:

'In most gardens,' the Tiger-lily said, 'they make the beds so soft—so that the flowers are always asleep.' (1992 [1872], p. 120)

Now in one sense this is a simple play on words, a pun on 'beds'. But what is funny about this, what makes it a joke that one can 'get', is that we can understand Carroll's extrapolation: if we imagine (if that is the word) flowers in their beds as like people in theirs, the reason that the flowers don't talk must be because they are asleep. In one sense, Carroll presents us with nonsense. But it is nonsense with a logic in the sense that it can be followed—someone who has understood the preceding few sentences has done just that—and indeed elaborated upon: for example, bed-wetting is clearly applauded among plants . . . To understand such nonsense—to get the joke—is to be able to follow the pseudo-logic of such nonsense.

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Kremer 2001, p. 39.

¹⁸ Pitcher (1967) does look at the kinds of examples I will consider, though without connecting them to Wittgenstein's early philosophy.

Other examples require analysis before one can see what is happening (not, thankfully, before one can enjoy them). In the course of her strange day in Wonderland, Alice remarks:

How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle! (1992 [1865], p. 11)

At this point, Carroll tells us:

[Alice] began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed into any of them.

'I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said, 'for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little. . . . I'll try if I know all the things I used to know.'

Alice proceeds to test herself, gets answers that she is sure are wrong, sadly concludes 'I must be Mabel after all', and then resolves:

[I]f I'm Mabel, I'll stay down here! It'll be no use their putting their heads down here and saying 'Come up again, dear!' I shall only look up and say 'Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up; if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else.

Alice's words here are both nonsensical and comprehensible. We can make explicit our understanding—the understanding that we have by virtue of having 'got' the humour of the passage—by analysing what she says through the borrowings and connotations of sense that make up the fabric of her utterances, the borrowings and connotations appreciated by those who 'get' Carroll's humour. What Alice says runs together two senses of 'being a different person'. On the one hand, she notes that she feels different; on the other, she knows a number of other people (such as Ada and Mabel), a number of 'different people'. At this point, two perfectly good lines of reasoning merge courtesy of a common sign, 'different person': '[I]f I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I?'

'Different person' figures in two more or less distinct sets of claims: on the one hand, 'I am the same person I always was', 'He's a different person now', etc.; on the other, 'Is that the same person in these two pictures?', 'These books are both by someone called Lewis but they were two different people', etc. These sets of claims themselves feature in two more or less distinct sets of chains of reasoning. Carroll's humour makes vivid the fact that these two sets don't coincide, in that there seems to be a sense in which being 'a different person' does not make one 'a different person'! Getting the joke is seeing this and following the extrapolation: if I imagine (again that may not be the word we want, but it will do) my way into Alice's confusion, I can ask myself 'How *would* one try to determine whether one had changed into someone else?'. I continue my extrapolation

when I conclude, 'Well, one would see if one had their most salient features', and ask 'How old am I and how old are they?', 'Is my hair like theirs?', and 'Do I know what they know?' These are all 'intelligible questions' in the sense that we know of contexts in which their being posed can be understood. But, of course, in those contexts, our asking of these questions might lead us to the conclusion, 'I'm very *like* Mabel'. In Wonderland, it can lead us to conclude 'I *am* Mabel'!!

4.5 UNDERSTANDING NONSENSE AND ITS LOGIC

Carroll's work is full of examples like these. The guests at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party are trapped at 6 o'clock because he and Time are no longer on good terms after the Mad Hatter 'murdered the time' when singing a song (1992 [1865], p. 61). And this makes a kind of sense: after all, how would *you* react if someone tried to murder you? Again, an overlap of signs (here embedded within a broader culture of personifying Time—'Time has been cruel to him', for example) allows Carroll to give us a nonsense with a logic, a nonsense which one can, in a recognizable sense, understand and which, in a recognizable sense, is capable of being inferred from other items of nonsense.

Such items of nonsense possess these features by virtue of borrowing sense from elsewhere. Part of what that borrowing is is their standing in pseudo-logical relations with other nonsensical 'propositions' that borrow their sense from corresponding sources. An aspect of what it would be for someone not to get Carroll's humour would be their failure to see how conclusions that his characters draw 'follow' from their premisses, despite the fact that the arguments in question are also nonsensical—patently so to those who *do* understand. As a result, one can offer reasons why certain nonsensical claims should naturally 'follow' from others. Consider one more example. The White King marvels at Alice's eye-sight when she tells him that she saw nobody on the road: 'Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!' (1992 [1872], p. 165). When the Messenger is next to arrive, the King concludes that 'Nobody walks slower than you':

'I do my best,' the Messenger said in a sullen tone. 'I'm sure nobody walks much faster than I do!'

'He can't do that,' said the King, 'or else he'd have been here first.' (pp. 166–7)

There is an obvious sense in which the White King is *right* when he draws this conclusion: it follows in that it would follow if 'Nobody' figured in these propositions as a name; the humour—and the confusion—arises because that is not what 'Nobody' is in English, though its surface grammar can suggest to us that it is. (An important point to which Sect. 5.4 will return is that though the White King's response to the Messenger is, in a recognizable sense, right, it remains, in a recognizable sense, nonsense: it is an elaboration on—the talking of *more*—nonsense.)

In this example too, a confusion arises out of an overlapping of signs, though of a different sort from that of our earlier examples. Our earlier examples featured different symbols being expressed by a common sign ('bed', 'different person', and 'murder'). In the case of 'Nobody', the root of our confusion—and of the joke—is that we have very different kinds of symbol being expressed by signs that look similar and look to play similar roles in sentences. 'Nobody' *looks like* a referring expression; one can substitute it for 'the man' in the sentence 'The man jumped into the water' and generate a meaningful sentence. As a result, we may then find ourselves asking, 'To what does "Nobody" refer?'

The significance of the examples that I have presented in this and the preceding sections is that they combine features that the debate over nonsense in the *Tractatus* has taken to be incompatible. In each example, we confront, it seems to me, something that can perfectly reasonably be described as 'nonsensical', as capable of being 'understood', as capable of figuring in 'arguments', and hence as 'possessing a logic'; but at the same time, these items of nonsense can perfectly reasonably be described as 'real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of'—and, crucially, which no one, when they recognize what they have before them, is likely to be tempted to think of—'as corresponding to an ineffable truth' (Diamond 1991, p. 181).

4.6 AN INTERLUDE: 'UNDERSTANDING' AND UNDERSTANDING, 'LOGIC' AND LOGIC

In the preceding sections, I have sometimes used scare-quotes for terms like 'follow' when used in connection with the Carrollian examples of nonsense; but I have also talked of the White King being *right* when he draws his nonsensical conclusion and have done so without using scare-quotes; similarly, I have sometimes talked of these examples as having a logic and sometimes a pseudo-logic. A form of what I take to be an unwarranted 'hyper-resolution' would see these 'inconsistencies' as problematic, and as symptomatic of a failure on my part to recognize that it is 'irresolute' to believe in forms of nonsense that are not 'pure gibberish'. This section will explain why I think such 'hyper-resolution' is mistaken.

There is clearly a point to asking of the forms of 'comprehensibility' and 'logic' illustrated by the items of nonsense that I have presented, 'But is it *real* comprehensibility?' and 'Is it *real* logic?' My response to these questions is that, in clear, distinct senses, we should answer them 'Yes' and 'No'. One would deny that the King's conclusion followed if one thought that someone might believe that the King was saying something unconfused within which a particular inferential step can be made; but one would affirm that it followed if one was helping someone to see how the confusion and the humour involved works. For example, one might

spell out the premisses from which 'Nobody walks slower than the Messenger' *would* follow if 'Nobody' were a name, and from which 'Nobody walks *faster* than the Messenger' *wouldn't*.

Consider the question, 'Is it *real* nonsense?' In the face of the apparent patterns of inference just considered, hyper-resolution might drive one to insist that these items of supposed nonsense must have a sense after all. But again, I think we should answer our strident either/or question 'Yes and no'. One would deny that someone had understood these items if he took them not to involve any confusion; there is no such thing as understanding them if that is what 'understanding them' involves. But one might assert that one can indeed understand them if confronted with someone who does not recognize the kinds of understanding which the previous paragraph illustrated. In the light of the sense that there is to be made of these items of nonsense, not only hyper-resolution, but also the not unreasonable policy that 'sense' and 'understanding' are correlate notions, might prompt one to insist that these particular items of 'nonsense' actually do have a sense; but a remaining, good reason for shying away from such a conclusion is how different the relevant forms of understanding are. In the above examples, it is a matter of getting the joke; it differs from our ordinary grasp of a proposition as much as someone who 'gets' Carroll's remarks on 'sleeping flowers' differs from someone who hears them as an explanation of plant behaviour.

To be reminded of the forms of nonsense discussed here is to see why one ought to feel pulled in both directions in the face of questions like 'Is it *real* comprehensibility?', '*real* logic?' or '*real* nonsense?' My point is that, when we look at particular cases, our sense that these questions must have straight forward 'Yes' or 'No' answers fades. The challenge set out in Section 4.3, and upon which those questions elaborate, rests on black-and-white, either/or intuitions about sense, nonsense, understanding, inference, and logic which have not been seriously tested by examples. In the face of the sensitivity to case and context I have described, I will continue to use scare-quotes for 'following' (and the like) sometimes and sometimes not, to speak of logic sometimes and sometimes of pseudo-logic, in the hope that my choice on each occasion helps.

4.7 SIGN/SYMBOL CONFLATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONFUSION

The examples that I have given combine properties that the recent debate over the *Tractatus* has tended to treat as incompatible. But one might still wonder what those kinds of example have to do with philosophy.

The White King case will ring bells with anyone familiar with Frege's work: part of his achievement was to let us see how expressions like 'Something', 'Nobody',

and 'Anywhere' differ from referring expressions.¹⁹ No one has ever seriously thought that 'Somebody' refers to a strange person. It would be almost as crude a thought that leads us to say that 'Something' refers to a fuzzy thing, 'Anywhere' a fuzzy place, and 'Nobody' a person-shaped hole. But the notion that the right question to ask—if one wants to understand how such expressions 'work'—is 'To what do these expressions refer?' has proved far more popular; the history of logic prior to Frege provides us with a set of sophisticated responses to this very question.²⁰ Though a lot less funny than Carroll, they exploit the same conflation of senses by treating as a referring expression what is in fact the 'name' of a variable; where the tradition in question differs from Carroll is in 'exploiting' this conflation *unwittingly*; for him, it yields a joke; for them, it reveals a problem, a possible research programme.

The notion that something akin to confusions of this sort informs philosophical thinking more broadly is not such an outlandish one. To take an example, philosophers may not have thought, with the Mad Hatter, that 'time' referred to a *person*; but the same 'power of language to make everything look the same' that makes that 'thought' possible (*CV* 19 (1931)) may perhaps allow more subtle absurdities to enter in to our thinking in the form of the presumption that 'time'—and perhaps 'space' too—refers to a *thing*. (A first bulwark against the absurdity of the notion is the acknowledgement that they are rather special or unusual things.²¹) What also helps, no doubt, is the place that the word 'thing' has in remarks such as 'There is no such thing as . . .', from which one can generate the question 'Are you saying that there is no such thing as time?' We don't want to say 'Yes', but does that mean that time *is* indeed a *thing*? Similarly, part of the fabric of scepticism about the external world is, arguably, a treating of 'the world' as if it referred to a (very, very large) thing: by generalizing particular doubts about our knowledge of particular 'external objects', we generate doubts about our knowledge of 'the realm of external objects' and come to imagine ourselves reaching out for, and failing to lay our hands on, that realm in the way we may reach out for, and fail to lay our hands on, an object within that realm. So it doesn't seem wildly implausible to suggest that some of philosophy's problems are profoundly informed, perhaps even *constituted*, by certain such images, images that those in the grip of those problems do not recognize.

But has anyone ever believed that philosophy as a whole could be marked by such confusions? The answer is 'Yes', that someone being the author of the *Tractatus*, who believed that conflating sign and symbol gives rise to 'the most fundamental confusions' and that 'the whole of philosophy is full' of precisely such

¹⁹ Cf. Sect. 2.2.

²⁰ Russell's 'denoting concepts', e.g., could be seen as standing in this tradition (cf. Russell 1937 [1903], § 56), as could some of the debate over abstract ideas in the empiricist tradition.

²¹ Cf. Sect. 5.2's discussion of the 'direction' of time's 'flow'.

confusions (3.324). My interpretation uses this opinion as a guiding principle in reading the *Tractatus*.

4.8 THE *TRACTATUS* AS ELUCIDATING NONSENSE

I will argue that the *Tractatus* 'elucidates' a con-formist image of language, thought, and world; like Carroll's humour, what such 'elucidations' do is work through what is in fact a confused logic, a double-think that characterizes this confused image's borrowings of sense;²² these elucidations demonstrate how we must look at language, thought, and world in order for the con-formist image to *seem* to make sense, but with the ultimate intent of demonstrating that it doesn't. Wittgenstein presents his own philosophy as 'not a theory but an activity', its result being 'not a number of "philosophical propositions"', but to make propositions clear' (4.112); we cannot answer our philosophical questions because they are nonsensical; instead, all we can do is 'establish [*feststellen*] their nonsensicality', and the activity by which we do that is, I suggest, that of elucidation as set out here.

The particular form of confusion that Wittgenstein focuses on in his early work is one which creates an illusion of bodies of fact: facts about how objects and possible facts relate, how names and objects relate, how the subject and the world relate, etc. He argues that, if we are to avoid an 'accidental' logic, these 'relations' must be 'internal'. This is an odd turn of phrase. In one sense, it doesn't sound like the denial of the existence of a body of facts at all; rather, it sounds like the noting of a different *kind* of fact. But the intent of the qualification 'internal' seems to be that it taketh away what the word 'relation' giveth.

The con-formist image demands, for example, that the 'substance of the world' (2.021) be 'objects' characterized by certain internal properties and internal relations. To offer up an explanation of the sort we desire, an explanation of *how* and *why* the propositions that make sense *do* make sense, that these objects possess such properties and relations, must constitute a body of facts. But, at the same time, that explanation must not leave the 'intelligibility' of particular items of thought and talk a mere contingent matter of fact that could have been otherwise, because '[i]n logic nothing is accidental' (2.012): 'Nothing in the province of logic can be merely possible' (2.0121). That the relevant properties and relations are 'internal' sums up the required squaring of that circle. What these 'conclusions' flag is that con-formism requires us to bounce between two incompatible

²² Just in case this needs saying, I see no more than an analogy between the work of Carroll and that of Wittgenstein; I do recognize significant differences: e.g., despite Wittgenstein's later proposal that it ought to be possible to write 'a serious and good philosophical work . . . that would consist entirely of jokes' (Malcolm 1984, p. 29), one has to concede that, no matter how good a mood one is in, the *Tractatus* is not that funny. (For braver souls who are inclined to push the analogy further, *PI* § 111's connection of the 'depth of philosophy' with the depth of 'grammatical jokes' might perhaps be a starting-point.)

perspectives: its explanatory pretensions require a body of facts whose happening to hold explains which propositions make sense; but the requirement that that set of propositions not be 'accidentally' so means that their intelligibility cannot depend on a body of facts.

To extend our analogy with Carrollian nonsense, imagine trying to convince the White King that he is confused. Suppose we say to him, 'Nobody is in the wood behind us'. If that is true, would that mean that Alice was wrong in saying that she saw 'Nobody on the road'? No, because 'Nobody is on the road' would also still be true. So what would our two claims being true reveal? We *might* conclude that Nobody is a very special person: unlike the rest of us, but like some saints apparently,²³ he can be in more than one place at a time. But arriving at such a conclusion might also awaken suspicion that, at some point, we have confused ourselves.

My suggestion, which the next section will explain, is that Wittgenstein's 'deduction' of 'internal properties'—properties that are unlike properties—and 'internal relations'—relations that are unlike relations (4.122)—is meant to perform a similar signalling function. The ultimate point of 'deducing' such claims is not to tell us how the things in question are related—how matters stand with the supposedly intelligible issues under consideration—but to reveal confusions that make us think that we have got a hold of intelligible issues, about these 'things' being 'related' in any way or indeed 'not related' at all. Building on my discussion of elucidation, I will suggest that such assertions are part of an elucidation of nonsense, following through its pseudo-logic and helping us to recognize it as nonsense.

4.9 THE QUESTIONABLE STATUS OF ASSERTIONS ABOUT INTERNAL RELATIONS

But what reasons are there for thinking that the *Tractatus's* assertions that invoke internal relations and internal properties are indeed moves *within* confused thinking? The concluding sections of this chapter will set out my answer to that question. (In what follows, I take the points I make about 'internal relations' to hold also of 'internal properties', and vice versa.)

It is deeply implausible to think that when, in 6.54, Wittgenstein declares that 'my propositions' are nonsensical, he means every proposition in the book. Hacker has argued that resolute approaches to the *Tractatus* face a peculiar problem here, that such approaches 'cherry-pick' some propositions of the book as to be 'thrown away' while treating others as straightforwardly meant, and that this 'cherry-picking' is somehow problematic (2000, p. 360). But it seems to me that *any* interpretation that takes some of the book's propositions as nonsensical will

²³ On the phenomenon of 'bilocation', cf. Gray 2004.

have to make such choices, because some of the *Tractatus's* claims seem to be straightforwardly empirical,²⁴ and no commentator has suggested that Wittgenstein saw claims of that kind as nonsensical.²⁵

So some kind of distinction must be drawn. Hacker himself seems to draw such a distinction, and to some extent, I would endorse the way he draws it: I think he is right that the propositions that invoke internal relations are central cases of those that are to be 'thrown away'. But I will argue that his reasons for coming to this conclusion are the wrong reasons.

Hacker argues that, in 'exclud[ing] ascriptions of internal properties and relations from well-formed propositions with a sense', Wittgenstein 'rel[ies] upon the principle of bipolarity' (2001*a*, p. 19). This is the proposal 'that it is of the essence of a proposition with sense . . . to be capable of being true *and* capable of being false' (p. 16; cf. also, e.g., 1996*b*, p. 28, and 2000, p. 355). Hacker's view here strikes me as problematic. The bipolarity principle is a cataclysmic claim for philosophers to accept, since, if one accepts it, one must immediately rule out the possibility of necessary truth and necessary falsehood,²⁶ the specific forms of truth and falsehood that philosophers have taken to distinguish their professional area of interest. Presented with a principle that rules out such forms, it must surely be tempting for philosophers to think, 'So much the worse for that principle'.²⁷ If such a dismissal is to be avoided, the bipolarity principle had better be well-grounded. But according to Hacker, the principle 'was rooted in *Wesensschau*' (1996*a*, p. 19), an intuition about the essence of propositions and what they represent. Setting aside the obvious worry that what we intuit here is itself presumably a necessary truth, and hence not bipolar, on Hacker's construal, one has been given the core of Wittgenstein's case for perhaps his most distinctive and most contentious claim—that philosophical claims are nonsensical—when one has been presented with the seemingly question-begging bipolarity principle and invited to experience the intuition that that principle is true. This seems implausible.²⁸ I will offer a different interpretation.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., the first sentence of 3.031, the second sentence of 3.323, the second sentence of 4.002, the first paragraph of 4.003, and the third and the last two sentences of 5.02.

²⁵ Sects. 10.2–10.3 will comment on why, on my broadly resolute reading, it is perfectly natural for nonsensical elucidations to be interwoven with perfectly 'sensible' observations.

²⁶ Cf. Hacker 2001*a*, p. 27.

²⁷ In his 2001*a*, Hacker acknowledges that if we are to be persuaded that the bipolarity principle does reveal necessary truths to be 'illegitimate pseudo-propositions', rather than their 'simply [being] counter-examples to the bipolarity principle, [then] reasons must be given for their illegitimacy' (p. 18). But in the next-but-one paragraph in which we are told to expect to find a reason why ascriptions of internal relations are not 'simply counter-examples', I can find no reason given other than the bipolarity principle itself.

²⁸ It is true that this is not the whole case as Hacker understands it: e.g., the *Tractatus's* account of logical truths and logical falsehoods shows that the impression that they constitute counter-examples to that principle is only superficial. The crucial cases that remain, however, are philosophical propositions; Hacker tells us that these attempt to say what can only be shown; but the reason he gives for why the matters in question cannot be said is, again, the bipolarity principle.

If, as I have suggested, our arrival at 'internal relation' assertions is meant to signal to us that all is not quite well with our thinking, then we would have to believe that all is not quite well with such assertions. At *TLP* 4.122, Wittgenstein defines 'internal relations' through a contrast with 'proper (external) relations'; so what is 'improper' about 'internal relations'? I will pick out five considerations that suggest that Wittgenstein's remarks about 'internal relations' are problematic, that they are, as it were, asking to be 'thrown away'.²⁹

The first two we have already met in Section 3.4: the arguments set out in Sections 3.1–3.3 turn on the notion that there are, so to speak, no more propositions left using which the holding of internal relations could, in principle, be expressed, and there is something misleading in the image of the holding of an internal relation as something expressible through a statement *about* the relata and the relation, since one has no grasp of the relata or relation, nor indeed of the sense of the 'assertion' that those relata are so related, if one has not already recognized the 'truth' of this 'assertion'. Section 3.4 discussed these considerations as possible grounds for thinking that the holding of internal relations must 'show itself'. I want to suggest instead that they also provide grounds for thinking that, in reaching these 'conclusions', our thinking has somehow gone awry. To take the first, let us simply remind ourselves that the *Tractatus* itself seems to *state* these 'facts' for the stating of which there are supposedly no more propositions. The second requires that one is confused if one thinks that one knows what objects, say, are *and then* learns from Wittgenstein that they are internally related to the facts in which they can figure; what is problematic about that is that this is indeed, I think, how we do initially read the remarks in question, as *telling us something about* objects; we take ourselves to have already some rough sense of what those are.

²⁹ Conant resists the idea that one can give a criterion by reference to which one can declare certain propositions *unsinnig* (2000, pp. 216–17): on the face of it, the austere conception of nonsense alone implies that one cannot be given a reason why propositions of a particular form—say, 'those that assert that something possesses an internal property'—are nonsensical, because that would require that one be able to identify what such a proposition says in order to then rule it out as lacking sense. Conant goes on to suggest that the status of a remark in the *Tractatus* depends on 'the sort(s) of aspects it presents to [the reader], and that will depend on *her*—on the use(s) to which she is drawn to put it in the course of her ascent [of the ladder]' (p. 217). This strikes me as only a half-truth. Certainly, one cannot declare that a *sentence* is in itself *unsinnig* or not because as a mere sign—'the sign is arbitrary'—it can always be assigned a sense. But we can say something about how particular remarks are designed to explore, and perhaps invite us further into, what are, in fact, confusions; the considerations I am about to offer above are reasons for thinking that this is what Wittgenstein's remarks about 'internal relations' do. Now the effect that such remarks can have (and can be expected by Wittgenstein to have) depends upon their reader being able to follow the pseudo-logic that they articulate and being susceptible to the sign/symbol confusions thus elucidated; what this requires is that the reader speak a certain language with particular sign/symbol associations. (Cf. Sect. 10.4 for further discussion of this point.) But insisting on the kind of radical relativity of the status of Tractarian remarks to particular readers, upon which Conant wants to insist, strikes me, following up on my analogy with Carroll, as analogous to insisting that one cannot say which passages of the *Alice* books are meant to be funny because, in other languages, those same sentences could be used to express other, unfunny thoughts.

The third consideration is a historical one: Wittgenstein was working in a philosophical climate in which the notion of 'internal relations' was being criticized on all sides. An important feature of the break that Moore and Russell attempted to make from their idealist predecessors was a disagreement over the nature of relations. In the course of that controversy, Moore offered in *Principia Ethica* (which we know Wittgenstein read at least in part (*CL* 13)) an argument concerning 'organic wholes' that was intended to undermine the notion of 'internal relations':

When we think of the part *itself*, we mean just *that which* we assert, in this case, to *have* the predicate that it is part of the whole; and the mere assertion that *it* is a part of the whole involves that it should itself be distinct from that which we assert of it. Otherwise we contradict ourselves since we assert that, not *it*, but something else—namely *it* together with that which we assert of it—has the predicate which we assert of it. (G. E. Moore 1903, p. 33)

Quite what the import of this argument is, is not a straightforward matter,³⁰ though its guiding thought overlaps, I am sure, the thoughts I set out below; I cite it here simply to show that doubts about whether one can make sense of the notion of an internal relation would have been familiar to Wittgenstein. Indeed, these were shared by the idealists whom Moore took himself, in advancing this argument, to be criticizing. Bradley, for example, denied the reality of *all* relations, internal and external.³¹ What sympathy he had for talk of internal relations—they are 'truer by far than "external" relations' (1914, p. 312)—lay in their *manifest* instability: 'internal relations . . . point towards a higher consummation beyond themselves' (pp. 239–40), a 'pointing' to which I will return.

Our fourth consideration turns, like the second above and the fifth to come, on how Wittgenstein himself defines internal relations, as those in which it is 'unthinkable' their relata might not stand (4.123): the very idiom of 'object', 'property', and 'relation' seems to impose upon its subject-matter a 'logical space' with which *internal* properties and *internal* relations are incompatible: so, for example, what 'the relation' giveth, the qualifying 'internal' taketh away. Wittgenstein observes:

Here to the shifting use of the words 'property' and 'relation' there corresponds the shifting use of the word 'object'. (4.123)

One might gloss a claim like 'Object *a* has property *p*' as saying that the possibility that *a* might not have *p* is not realized. But when *p* is an internal property of *a*, 'Object *a* has property *p*' cannot be understood as saying that 'the possibility that *a* might not have *p* is not realized' because *there is no such other possibility*. To say that it is raining is to deny that it is not raining. But when *p* is an

³⁰ Cf. Baldwin 1990, pp. 23–4; Hylton 1990, pp. 122–3.

³¹ Cf. Bradley 1897, p. 513, and 1914, pp. 239–40.

internal property of *a*, 'Object *a* has property *p*' does *not* deny that 'Object *a* does not have property *p*', because the latter 'sentence' makes no sense. (As Sect. 2.7 discussed, 'logical truths' have the same puzzling feature.)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 4.123's definition uses the notion of the 'unthinkable' in a now familiarly problematic way: we are *told what* is 'unthinkable': namely, that the relata of such a relation might not stand in that relation to one another (4.123). Similarly, what one is saying when one says that a property is 'internal' is that something makes no sense: *namely* (!), its bearer lacking that property. At 3.031, we read: 'The truth is, we could not say of an "unlogical" world how it would look.' But if that is so, then we cannot say what it is that a property's being 'internal' rules out; yet it is by reference to what is ruled out that this 'internal property' has been defined: to grasp the 'internality' of a property is to grasp that a particular state of affairs—that in which the bearer does not bear that property—is ungraspable.

So what is someone who, like Wittgenstein, asserts the holding of an internal relation doing? I will develop a proposal that emerges from our second and third considerations, that such assertions would represent an item of news for the confused: the person who hears an 'internal relation' assertion as telling him something has to be confused, and that is what someone who asserts such assertions is getting at.³² These assertions are moves *within* a person's confusion, Carrollian elaborations or elucidations of those confusions designed to draw that person's attention to those confusions as such.

4.10 THE ASSERTION OF THE HOLDING OF INTERNAL RELATIONS AS A MOVE WITHIN CONFUSIONS

Consider some examples of what I want to suggest the assertion of the holding of internal relations might be like. In the *Wizard of Oz*, the Straw Man imagines being able to tell us 'why the ocean's near the shore'. Is there something here that he needs to learn? There is, but it is not what he thinks it is. What he really needs to learn—what 'getting a brain' might let him see—is that there isn't a why—and not because it's a *mystery* or because the ocean sometimes *isn't* near the shore! Consider the 'researcher' who, having spent many hours down by the track investigating why it is that the Russians so often win a race, goes on to try to answer using the same methods the similar-sounding question, 'Why does the person who crosses the line first *always* win?'³³ Finally, a similar example from Searle:

³² There is a sense in which someone who was not themselves confused might 'learn from the assertion of an internal relation': what they would learn, though, would be something about how people can be confused. They would learn not 'what the assertion says', but of a confusion to which it stands as a response (not a question to which it stands as an answer). They might say: 'I hadn't thought of people confusing themselves in that way.'

³³ In McManus 2004*a* I develop this example further.

If you are told that a scientific study has shown that touchdowns actually only count 5.99999999 points, you know that somebody is seriously confused. (1992, p. 62)

It would be misleading to say that the confusion here is that the 'scientists' in question got the wrong answer; rather, they have confused themselves into imagining that there is a question here that might be answered scientifically; not that it is somehow *beyond* the powers of science to understand 'such matters'; rather, one might instead say that there are no 'such matters', because the 'issue' that our 'scientists' wish to explore is itself unreal: it—and they—are confused. One might imagine someone arriving at the answer, 'On average, 30', to the question, 'How many points do New England score each time Tom Brady plays?'. But that does not mean that there is a comparable issue to be investigated expressed by the similar-sounding sentence, 'How many points do New England score each time they score a touchdown?'

One might say that our 'scientists' have mistakenly taken the relation between scoring a touchdown and getting six points as an *external* relation. One might then correct them by saying that that relation is instead an internal one. But they (and we) must take such an assertion in the right way: to understand the point of asserting the 'holding' of this 'internal relation' is to be able to see the confusion to which this assertion responds. Otherwise such an assertion may suggest that the scientists have answered a question incorrectly, that the wrong answer is that a particular external relation holds when the right answer is that a particular internal relation holds. But their root problem is their asking their question in the first place. They need to learn not 'how things are' (externally *or* internally, one might say), but how a misunderstanding brought them to imagine that they dimly saw 'how things are', a matter on which one might hold views, correct or incorrect. And the assertion that these matters are 'internally related' is first and foremost not a statement about 'how the things in question are', but an indication of a confusion on the part of the person who wants to know.

My proposal does not presuppose that a sensible question must be a scientific question or a question of contingent fact. What is crucial to my proposal is that those who might be addressed by asserting that an internal relation holds have *conflated* questions of different kinds. Relatedly, one might well say that it is a matter of external relation that a touchdown is worth six points, because the rule might be changed to make them worth more or less. But Searle's 'scientists' are confused, in that when they consider 'the possibility that a touchdown might not be worth six points', they imagine something changing on the field of play, not in the rule book, something that players might bring about, rather than administrators. Inasmuch as there are views one could hold on an issue that might be expressed in the same terms, Searle's 'scientists' do not recognize the *kind* of views they are. There is certainly nothing nonsensical about 'investigating', 'making discoveries about', or 'stating' the rules of a game; the confusion of Searle's 'scientists' is that they don't realize that this is, at best, what they are doing. One

might say that 'what they need to learn' lies not out on the football field but in the rule book; but it is the nature of their confusion that they would regard anything that one might find in the rule book as simply irrelevant to their issue (just as, to anticipate a little, philosophers who puzzle over metaphysical issues would never take 'what they need to learn' to lie in the ways we use words). What Searle's 'scientists' really need to learn is that and how they are confused. Going by their confused understanding of what an 'answer' to their 'question' looks like, might be arrived at and defended, there is no 'answer'; nor does our supposed 'answer' (invoking 'internal relations') answer that 'question'.³⁴

The next chapter begins the process of showing how this understanding of what someone might be doing in asserting the holding of internal relations can be applied to the author of the *Tractatus*.

³⁴ My examples might be seen as conflating rules with facts; but there is a corresponding possibility that one might mistake a fact for a rule: imagine someone emerging from confusion with the words 'Oh, I thought referees weren't *allowed* to award penalties against Manchester United!'

5

The Picture Analogy

The solution of philosophical problems can be compared with a gift in a fairy tale: in the magic castle it appears enchanted and if you look at it outside in daylight it is nothing but an ordinary bit of iron.

(CV13–14 (1931))

As his initial remarks on objects and facts come to a close, Wittgenstein declares: '[w]e make to ourselves pictures of facts' (2.1). Subsumed by this claim is another, which has been taken as the basis of a 'picture theory of the proposition': '[t]he proposition is a picture of reality' (4.01). Prima facie, such a theory is not very appealing. If we are puzzled by how language represents, will our puzzles be solved by the proposal that language represents in the same way that pictures represent? There are two obvious objections. First of all, how alike are linguistic and pictorial representation anyway? Secondly, and more worryingly, how does pictorial representation work in the first place? Pictorial representation is not philosophically unproblematic either, facing problems that parallel those concerning linguistic representation that may initially have inspired hope for 'a picture theory of representation'. If so, Wittgenstein may simply seem to be seeking to assimilate one problematic form of representation to another.¹

Ascribing a 'picture theory' of representation to the *Tractatus* is, I believe, a mistake anyway. My view is that Wittgenstein uses the analogy between pictures and propositions not as part of an explanation of how meaning or thought is possible, but rather in questioning whether we have assigned sense to that very 'possibility', whether we really understand what it is that we think needs to be 'accounted for' here, the supposed philosophical problem that needs to be 'solved'. By thinking through the analogy, we will see emerge some of the internal relations whose deduction in the *Tractatus* Chapter 3 explained. But as the oxymoronic quality of 'internal relation' suggests, we need to see beyond these claims; the picture analogy also helps us to do that, and thus to see what this 'seeing beyond' amounts to. What we see is our confusion in believing that we have assigned a sense to the idea of representation 'being possible' in the first place, as well as the sign/symbol confluences that create that confusion.

¹ These general remarks cannot, and are not meant to, substitute for a proper evaluation of 'picture theories' that have been ascribed to the *Tractatus*; that is a task for another occasion.