

WITTGENSTEIN'S  
LASTING  
SIGNIFICANCE

*Edited by*

*Max Kölbel and*

*Bernhard Weiss*

# TO PHILOSOPHY'S FOOT SOLDIERS

First published 2004

by Routledge

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

© 2004 Selection and editorial matter: Max Köhbel and Bernhard Weiss;  
individual chapters: the contributors

Typeset in Baskerville by Taylor & Francis Books Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-415-30517-9

## NONSENSE AND COSMIC EXILE

The austere reading of the *Tractatus*

Meredith Williams

A new approach to Wittgenstein's philosophy, both early and late, is emerging. This approach I shall call "the austere reading" of Wittgenstein, "austere" because its guiding interpretive claim privileges Wittgenstein's metaphilosophical remarks above all others. It is a "reading" because it involves considerable hermeneutic ingenuity to render the whole of Wittgenstein consistent with his explicit metaphilosophical commitments. An esoteric reading of the *Tractatus* and a quietist reading of the *Investigations* converge in the austere reading. The esoteric reading resonates to the allure that the mystical had for Wittgenstein as a young man. And the quietist reading harmonizes well Wittgenstein's breaking free of the pull of the mystical to return to the ordinary. An important component of this new reading is its reassessment of the degree of continuity between the early and later Wittgenstein. Goal and method of the early and late periods are held to converge not only nominally but substantively. That goal is to establish that language is in order as it is. This goal is achieved by showing that philosophical attempts to ground or justify ordinary language result in the production of nonsense in the strictest sense. If there is a difference, it is that the *Tractatus* offers an architectonic conception of philosophical theorizing and its deconstruction while the *Investigations* offers an array of overlapping reminders and arguments directed against specific forms of philosophical theorizing. Importantly on this reading, the *Tractatus* does not end philosophy by solving the fundamental problem of representationality and the *Investigations* does not develop any alternative picture of language.

In this paper I shall focus on the austere reading of the *Tractatus*, a reading that I think is mistaken but nevertheless has very real attractions. It emphasizes, correctly, the importance to Wittgenstein throughout his philosophical life of showing that the philosophical temptation to cosmic exile, to use Quine's phrase, is an illusory quest. The temptation to cosmic exile is the search for a point from which we can view the relation between language (or thought) and the world independently of our own situation in the world. The deep motivation behind philosophical theorizing is the desire to achieve such a god's eye understanding.

This drive to understanding is fed, according to the austere reading, by an intellectualized imagination that gives rise to the illusion of making sense. In reality, all philosophy, including the corpus of the *Tractatus*, is plain nonsense. The only locus of meaningfulness is ordinary language. The interest of the austere reading, it seems to me, lies with its attempt to come to terms with the drive to cosmic exile and the nature of philosophical illusion as well as to find a persuasive method for bringing philosophical theorizing to an end. Nonetheless, I shall argue, it fails both in its interpretation of Wittgenstein and in its attempt to bring philosophy to an end. But it does so in ways that illuminate an important dimension in Wittgenstein's treatment of the drive to cosmic exile.

### 1. Nonsense: the austere reading of the *Tractatus*

In these first two sections of the paper, I shall present Cora Diamond's influential argument for the austere reading with an eye to bringing out the appeal of this approach.<sup>1</sup> She has developed a striking way to read the *Tractatus* that contrasts sharply with key features of the so-called standard interpretation.<sup>2</sup> I shall begin discussion by contrasting the austere reading with the standard interpretation, but, as my argument against the austere reading will show, it is a contrast that needs to be set aside. According to the standard interpretation, the *Tractatus* as a whole presents a transcendental argument establishing the conditions necessary for the possibility of language. Those conditions are realized in the ontology of simple objects (1s and 2s) and the picture theory of meaning (3s). Ontologically, there must exist absolutely simple objects whose internal (essential) properties determine the space of possibility: that is, the space of possible combinations of objects into states of affairs. Linguistically, language must constitute a system that is isomorphic to reality in such a way that what is expressible in language mirrors what is possible in reality. The requisite isomorphism thus requires that language and reality share logical form such that the range of permissible propositions mirrors the range of possible combinations of objects. Language is a fully articulated system, such that every meaningful proposition is analyzable into a set of elementary propositions that directly mirror possible states of affairs in virtue of their shared logical form with reality (pictorial form) and their pictorial relationship to the world (constituent names denote simple objects). The conditions for meaningfulness reveal that only sentences having the requisite logical syntax and referential relation to reality are genuinely meaningful: that is, say something about the world. All other sentences, except for tautologies and contradictions (the limit of meaningfulness), are meaningless.

The paradoxical consequence of this conception is that the sentences describing and defending this theory of meaning are themselves meaningless according to the theory. To address this, Wittgenstein introduces his distinction between saying and showing. The philosophical propositions of the *Tractatus* are an attempt to say what can only be shown through what we can say successfully. Though meaningless, these philosophical propositions are illuminating in that

they lead us to a proper understanding of the conditions for meaningfulness. And since meaningless, they are to be abandoned once their elucidating work is complete. Thus, philosophy is brought to an end by solving the fundamental philosophical problem: that is, the problem of representation. Traditional metaphysics can be eliminated as plain nonsense. Epistemology is turned over to its proper science, psychology. And ethics, and the mysticism with which it is properly associated, is revealed to be of the greatest importance, and yet it too can only be shown. Diagnosis is offered along the way to show how philosophers go wrong in their misguided pursuit of philosophical theory building.

In sum, the ontology and theory of meaning lie at the core of the *Tractatus*, revealing just what problems in philosophy can be solved, which are to be allocated to the natural sciences, and which must be dissolved, their lack of meaning revealed through proper philosophical analysis. Yet these core theories result in the paradoxical consequence that they themselves are nonsensical. The doctrine of showing is enlisted to reveal how the propositions of the *Tractatus* illuminate otherwise ineffable truths. This distinguishes them from the plain nonsense that has been the stuff of traditional metaphysics and epistemology. On this standard reading, the paradoxical consequences follow from the theory of meaning and explain the importance of the saying–showing distinction to the early Wittgenstein.

Diamond argues that this story of how to read the *Tractatus* is mistaken through and through.<sup>3</sup> The heart of the *Tractatus* is not the ontology and picture theory of the 1s, 2s and 3s, but what she calls the frame which consists of the preface and the final passages, according to which we throw away the ladder we have been using and endorse a complete exit from philosophy (*T* 6.53, 6.54 and 7). These passages provide instruction for how to read this work. We are to attend to subtle clues concerning the author's intentions rather than to what I shall refer to as the corpus of the work. The task of the *Tractatus* is to deconstruct its own sentences, making plain that they are gibberish. To understand the *Tractatus* aright is to grasp that at no point does Wittgenstein endorse, provisionally or otherwise, the apparent theories of the *Tractatus*.

There are four major components to this reading.<sup>4</sup>

*The nonsense thesis* The *Tractatus* conception of nonsense is the central driving idea, not the unwelcome but unavoidable consequence of the theory of representation. And nonsense is plain nonsense, gibberish. There is no room in the *Tractatus* for distinguishing between gibberish and illuminating nonsense. The propositions of the *Tractatus* are gibberish in the way that “neither unless consider says” is gibberish. Indeed, there is no doctrine of showing in the *Tractatus*, according to which Wittgenstein tries to intimate truths about reality and language that cannot be said. Rather, Wittgenstein takes us on a journey in which we come to realize that what philosophy wants to say cannot be said because it is literally nonsensical. Recognizing this, we can exit from the philosophical project altogether. This is an esoteric journey in that few will be able to

undertake it successfully, because few can resist all temptations to an illusory understanding and because the method for climbing the ladder in order to throw it away must be “lived through,” experienced for oneself. But those few who do will come to appreciate the full adequacy of ordinary language, standing without need for philosophical support.

*Rejection of the metaphysical interpretation* In denying any distinction between plain nonsense and illuminating nonsense, the austere reading thereby repudiates the view that it is possible to say, in some sense, what our ordinary propositions show about logic and reality. There are no ineffable “truths” about the nature of language and the world; there is nothing to be shown. And so the ontology of the 1s and 2s is, as is all metaphysics, plain nonsense. Nothing is being said, shown or expressed in these passages. Once we take the charge of nonsense to be the fundamental claim in the *Tractatus*, we acquire an understanding of that puzzling claim that realism and idealism converge. They occur at different moments in the dialectic process. The focus, however, of austere readers to date has been on the metaphysical realism associated with talk of simple objects, logical form and necessity. The completed interpretation must, presumably, show that idealism is equally nonsensical.<sup>5</sup> In overcoming the dispute, we recognize that our ordinary speaking in a realistic spirit has been fully acceptable all along, having no need for philosophical buttressing or examination.

*The strong consistency thesis* The austere reading brings a consistency to the *Tractatus* that the standard interpretation cannot accommodate. In privileging Wittgenstein's methodological remarks, Diamond insists that anything short of holding the propositions of the *Tractatus* to be plain nonsense is “chickening out.”<sup>6</sup> By being resolute, we do not have to attribute an unavoidable contradiction to the very fabric of the *Tractatus*. The paradoxical character of the *Tractatus* is only apparent, arising from a failure to understand the method that Wittgenstein is using. There is no conflict internal to the *Tractatus* and so no need for a distinction between saying and showing to relieve it. The corpus consists (almost) entirely of gibberish. It must be understood then solely in methodological therapeutic terms rather than substantive explanatory terms.

*The strong continuity thesis* The austere reading highlights a deep continuity in aim and method (or point and task) between the early and late philosophy. Wittgenstein was always engaged in the project of overcoming philosophy in order to accept the ordinary. The idea that in his early period he offers a general theory of meaning that enables him to end philosophy by solving its legitimate problems, and dissolving the rest, is profoundly mistaken. He always held the same view of his aim, its method and the need to overcome philosophy. His was the therapeutic method always. It falls out of this reading that Wittgenstein was never really mistaken in his philosophical views, except perhaps in underestimating how strong the appeal is to reach cosmic exile, and so how difficult it is to

eradicare. His youthful optimism that philosophy can be put to rest once and for all, as well as his own desire for peace of mind perhaps, misled him in this calculation. This therapeutic task is directed against what Wittgenstein took to be the deep and yet profoundly mistaken motivation for philosophical enquiry: the desire to stand outside the world and language and see the relation between the two. It is against the work of a rationalized imagination, then, that the therapeutic method must be directed.<sup>7</sup>

The appeal of the austere reading is, in many ways, great, particularly in its conception of Wittgenstein's overarching goal to undermine the lure of cosmic exile by understanding how an illusion of sense can make one suspicious of the adequacy of ordinary language and explanation. But the heart of the austere reading, the nonsense thesis, is suspect both philosophically and as an interpretation. It contends that the corpus of the *Tractatus* is an imaginative entering into the game of philosophy, in which the apparent internal logic of the game itself is illusory. The corpus is revealed to be a disguised syntactic mess. Both its apparent content and logical structure are illusions of the philosophical imagination, abetted by the psychologically satisfying appearance of these letter strings as "sentences." It is to the argument for this striking thesis that we turn now.

## 2. The austere conception of nonsense

To assess the austere reading of the *Tractatus*, we need to be clear about the austere conception of nonsense, a conception that has its source, according to Diamond, in Frege. Indeed, she refers to this conception as "the Frege–Wittgenstein view of nonsense," but I'll refer to it more simply as the Fregean view.<sup>8</sup> It is a consequence of Frege's context principle, according to which the fundamental unit of meaning is the sentence or proposition. This, she suggests, is Frege's deepest philosophical insight, one that is taken over, albeit in modified form, by Wittgenstein.<sup>9</sup> The integrity of a proposition is secured by Frege's context principle. This principle states that the constituent expressions (the Logical Parts) of a proposition have a meaning (a sense and a referent) only within the context of a proposition. This is because the internal logical structure of a proposition is complex, consisting minimally of two kinds of expressions that play very different but complementary roles within the proposition. Frege uses an arithmetic analogy to describe these complementary roles. Naming expressions are those that can be substituted as arguments for variable positions within a proposition while predicate expressions are functions operating upon those arguments. Just as an arithmetic expression without arguments is incomplete or "unsaturated" and so says nothing mathematical, so a predicate expression without names can say nothing. Equally, an expression is a name only insofar as it is an argument for a predicative function. The context principle, in making the proposition the semantically smallest unit, ensures that the unity of the proposition is logically primitive. Nonsense occurs when this unity is violated, even if the natural language sentence string has all the appearance of being

syntactically well-formed. The key features that Frege provides for displaying the distinctive functionality of the sentence, as Diamond puts it, are the context principle, an explanation in terms of the subsentential argument-function structure of the proposition, and Frege's anti-psychologism and anti-naturalism which require distinguishing a mental idea or mere word (letter strings or vocables) from the logical constituents of a proposition (namely, proper names and predicative functions).

On Diamond's reading, the *Tractatus* implicitly combines an endorsement of Frege's insight with a rejection of Frege's assimilation of sentences to the logical category of proper names. For Frege, a meaningful proposition is one in which a specific name completes a predicate function to determine a specific value. That value is the True or the False. So, every meaningful proposition is determinately true or false, and differs from all other meaningful propositions that share its truth-value only in its sense. The proposition determines a truth-value in the way in which an arithmetic equation determines a numeric value. In doing so the sentence is revealed to belong to the logical category of a name referring to an object. The decisive turn for the early Wittgenstein, according to Diamond, is to accept the sentence as the fundamental semantic unit but to repudiate the arithmetic model of the sentence as name for an object (the True or the False).<sup>10</sup>

Russell is credited with directing Wittgenstein to this non-Fregean account of the functionality of the sentence. The functionality of the sentence (and so what marks it off as a distinct logical category from names and predicates) consists in its meeting two conditions: (1) The sentence is capable of comparison with reality regardless of the truth or falsity of any other sentence. This is the independence condition of the *Tractatus*: Elementary propositions are truth-functionally independent of any other elementary proposition (cf. *T* 4.211 and 5.134–5.135). (2) The sentence is capable of comparison with reality regardless of whether it is true or false (cf. *T* 2.21). This is the bipolarity condition: every meaningful sentence can be true or false. Russell's theory of definite descriptions showed Wittgenstein "a method of analysis of sentences, a way of rewriting them, that made their kind of functionality clear" (Diamond 1991: 187). Here is what Diamond sees as important in Wittgenstein's preference for Russell's way of analyzing sentences containing definite descriptions as opposed to Frege's. Frege treated definite descriptions as names; and as such, any sentence having an empty definite description could not determine a truth-value, for the variable position within the sentence remains empty. Russell, on the other hand, takes the truth-valuedness of sentences with empty definite descriptions to show that the surface grammar of the sentence does not reveal its true logical form. In the proper analysis, the definite description disappears and the sentence is shown to be straightforwardly false.

Diamond's point is not just the familiar one that Wittgenstein sought ways of showing that apparently referring expressions really function quite differently. It is rather to highlight the significance of the way in which the *Tractatus* modifies the use of Frege's key semantic concepts, sense and reference. What Russell had

done, from Wittgenstein's perspective, was to show that if sentences containing definite descriptions are true or false, their being so valued does not depend on whether the definite description has a referent or not. The general significance of Russell's treatment of definite descriptions, if I understand Diamond correctly, is that what is fundamental is the meaningfulness of the *sentence*, not the roles of its constituents. This is the lesson of the context principle: If the identification of the constituents of a sentence indicates that a meaningful sentence (that is, one that is true or false) fails to be true or false, then the constituents have been wrongly identified.<sup>11</sup> This is what the distinctive functionality of sentences consists in. A sentence just is a sign with the capacity to say something that can be true or false.<sup>12</sup> An analysis must respect that capacity. A perspicuous notation can make this transparent. It is important to note that, *pace* the standard interpretation, the picture theory of meaning plays no role at all. The argument that Diamond attributes to Wittgenstein is at best implicit in aspects of the *Tractatus*, but it is certainly not the way that the context principle, the independence thesis or the bipolarity thesis are reached on the standard interpretation. For those who seek to relate this general argument to the sentences of the *Tractatus*, a compensating advantage, perhaps, though Diamond does not make this point, is that it might shed light on why the *Tractatus* is so cryptic in its discussion of the pictorial relationship between the propositional sign and reality: "That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it" (*T*2.1511). The explanation would be that the intrinsic functionality of sentences ensures this "reaching out." A sentence just is true or false of reality. The bipolarity condition is taken to be a feature of the intrinsic functionality of the sentence.<sup>13</sup>

Nonsense is construed, then, in terms of these essential features of the proposition. A nonsensical "sentence" fails to *be* a sentence, and this can be shown through its failure to have the requisite internal logical structure or failure to be bipolar. This is a negative conception of nonsense. The standard interpretation, on Diamond's view, has mistakenly assigned a positive conception of nonsense to the *Tractatus*. Leaving aside the colloquial use of "nonsense" to express strong disagreement or the philosophical view that nonsense is outrageous falsehood and nothing more, we can contrast a positive (or substantive) account of nonsense with Diamond's negative plain nonsense.<sup>14</sup> The only kind of nonsense is syntactic nonsense. An obvious example of such nonsense is the string, "what those view Paradise 5 between of?"<sup>15</sup> This is simply a "syntactic mess" that is transparently meaningless. The substance of the Fregean view of nonsense that Diamond attributes to the *Tractatus* lies in showing that philosophical sentences like "A is an object" or "The world is all that is the case" are nonsense in just this way. They too are syntactic messes. They are not obviously nonsensical, but on the contrary seem to be syntactically well-formed meaningful propositions. The challenge is to show how such apparently well-formed sentences are nonetheless syntactic gibberish.

In order to get clearer about Diamond's negative conception of nonsense, let's consider two more familiar positive philosophical strategies for explaining

how apparently syntactically well-formed sentences are in fact nonsense. The first strategy is incompatible with the context principle. It holds that given the meanings words have, they belong to logical categories which constrain the range of sentences within which the words may occur. To take Carnap's example, "Caesar is a prime number," the name "Caesar" designates a particular individual who is a member of the logical category of person. The predicate expression "is a prime number" is applicable only to members of the logical category of number. The logical constituents of Carnap's sentence are meaningful and the sentence is syntactically well formed, yet it is nonetheless nonsense. This is because the logical categories brought into play exclude combination. There is, as Diamond is fond of putting it, a clash of categories that renders the sentence meaningless. On this view, the logical constituents of the sentence are meaningful, the sentence as a whole is syntactically acceptable, but the whole is nonsense in virtue of the clash of categories.

Diamond rejects this kind of explanation of nonsense. The fundamental mistake of this view is to take the words "Caesar" and "is a prime number" to be meaningful logical constituents *prior* to their occurrence within a sentence. But words, considered as words, are not logical parts nor do they have meaning nor do they, of themselves, implicate logical categories. The context principle states that words have the status of logical parts only given their role within a sentence. "Caesar is a prime number" might thus be quite in order if, for example, the word "Caesar" is taken to name the number 53. Taken this way it is not nonsense. But if "Caesar" is taken to be the proper name of a particular Roman general and if "is a prime number" is taken to mean what it means in a sentence like "33 is a prime number," then the sentence is nonsense. But not because there is a clash of logical categories, persons and numbers. Rather, and here is the ingenuity of the view, because the sentence is a syntactic mess when one looks more closely. Failure to recognize this is a failure to keep distinct mere words (letter strings or vocables) and logical parts. The upshot of this is that we don't count a word-string as a sentence at all if it isn't meaningful. An analogy will help.

Suppose we have an old-fashioned cog and spring clock. The cogs, springs and other structural components are all connected in such a way that the hands of the clock move to keep time. These components are clock components in virtue of the functional roles that they each play. These functional roles can, of course, only be identified within the context of the clock-system as a whole. This is a familiar point, but it is one that is crucially exploited in Diamond's account of negative nonsense. Suppose we now remove some of the structural components from this clock – say, a cog and a spring – and we replace these components with components from another machine – say, a camshaft and a spark plug from a car. Thus, we have placed a valve and a gas igniter in the place where a cog and a spring were. We now have a machine mess, for which it would be a mistake to say that the structural components nonetheless carry their functions with them. They have no functions. They are not, then, valves or gas igniters.

Analogously, considering the words of a sentence to be its structural components which achieve the status of being meaningful logical parts only provided they play an appropriate functional role within the sentence as a whole. When we construct a sentence with words whose normal functional role cannot be met within the new sentence, unless we assign a non-standard or non-normal role to these words, the sentence that is produced is a syntactic mess. It looks like a sentence, but the words of which it is composed are no more its *logical parts* than the structural components of a machine mess realize the functional roles (of their typical machine environment) within their new environment. The words are not really words any more than the spark plug or the camshaft is a gas igniter or a valve. They are illusions of sentences; they are gibberish.

Note two important caveats to Diamond's position. First, whether a sentence is syntactic mess must be determined by close examination of that particular sentence in order to assess whether its constituents have meaning or not. This is crucial since we can assign meanings to words other than their normal or ordinary meanings. Second, we perceive the nonsense of the sentence by taking a second closer look at the sentence itself, not by discovering its deep underlying logical form.<sup>16</sup> This is not a matter of surface illusion of meaningfulness disguising deep underlying illogicality. The nonsense sentence is not an attempt to think the illogical. Rather, it is a string of words that are a mess in the way that our earlier string "what those view Paradise 5 between of" is a mess. It doesn't look that way at first because we are taken in by its similarity to quite familiar and acceptable sentences of ordinary language. This is a psychological point about our relation to what is linguistically familiar, and not a logical point about what can be thought. Diamond's conclusion is that anything that can be said is thereby logically in order. There is no such thing as an illogical thought. Her claim is that we reach this understanding not by drawing a principled positive line between what is meaningful and what is not, but by coming to see that certain sentence strings aren't sentences at all, and so we haven't said anything at all when we utter these strings. The view turns on a denial that individual words (as letter strings or vocables) are logical parts (roughly, the structure-function distinction) or are meaningful in isolation (tied to substantive logical categories). This is taken to be the consequence of endorsing the context principle. This concludes the discussion of Diamond's general account of nonsense.

The next stage of her project is to show that this negative conception of nonsense is the central driving idea behind the *Tractatus*. The corpus of this work consists of plain nonsense. With the exception of the frame, the entire work is a syntactic mess. This, of course, is meant to be an indictment of traditional philosophy. Philosophical sentences are meaningless jumbles of words. They are no more sentences than "that what those view Paradise 5 between of" is. This interpretative hypothesis sets the research program for the austere reader, which is to provide the detailed examination of the sentences of the *Tractatus*, showing that they are indeed gibberish. The real question becomes, how does one establish that apparently well-formed sentences in a natural language are not

sentences at all? Not by way of a robust conception of logical categories that clash when combined. And not by way of a privileged form of analysis that can be held to reveal the true underlying logical form of natural language sentences. There is only surface grammar. Philosophical "sentences" must be shown to fail to achieve the distinctive functionality of sentences. This can only be done by showing that the words of the candidate sentence are not genuinely logical parts. This calls for close examination of particular sentences. This is the work of what Diamond calls the transitional passages of the *Tractatus*.

Transition talk is a tool enabling the reader to appreciate how whole strings of apparently connected and contentful sentences are nonetheless nonsense. We can see this through the examination of a paradigmatic philosophical sentence, "A is an object." In *T* 4.126–4.1272, Wittgenstein argues that "A is an object" is not a meaningful sentence. The bipolarity condition for sentencehood is violated because if this sentence is meaningful, it is necessarily true. This is because its being true is a necessary condition of its being meaningful, since the name expression "A" must refer to object A if "A" is to be a meaningful constituent. Yet a necessarily true sentence is one that cannot be false, and so it violates the condition of bipolarity. Philosophical "object" talk is really a way of introducing existential quantification. A perspicuous analysis of the sentence reveals this transparently: "(Ex)A" is transparent nonsense.<sup>17</sup> To make this kind of argument, we must accept that the direction of semantic explanation is from the sentence to its constituents. Analysis is governed by this order of explanation. Analysis doesn't discover some deeper hidden logical form. Rather, analysis makes perspicuous the precise way in which a linguistic string realizes the argument-function subsentential structure or fails to do so. In establishing that philosophical sentences, namely sentences that are about what we say in the ordinary course of our lives or in doing science or mathematics, are meaningless, Wittgenstein thereby shows that we cannot but speak our home language. This is not an acquiescence in our home language on pragmatic grounds, as, say, Quine argues. That suggests that there is a problem with our so acquiescing, that we cannot find the theoretical grounds for our acceptance of our ordinary ways of talking. It is the attempt to picture, as John McDowell (1994: 34) puts it, "the system's adjustments to the world from sideways on," a position in which we try to look outside language, in Quinean cosmic exile. For the austere reader, what the nonsense thesis shows is that attempts to explain, justify or doubt the legitimacy of the way we speak are gibberish.

The great attractiveness of the austere reading, it seems to me, is to be found in just this treatment of our "acquiescence" in ordinary language. It is not pragmatic resignation resulting from the failure to achieve the final objective view. Rather, it is shown to be perfectly in order as it is. Attractive and important though this claim is, I don't believe that it is achieved in the *Tractatus* and not in the way envisioned by the austere reader. For the austere reader, showing that "A is an object" is nonsensical impugns the meaningfulness of all sentences apparently concerned with an ontology of objects. The thought is that close

examination of the 1s, 2s and much of 3s will reveal that the occurrences of the latter string “object” cannot function as logical constituents of the “propositions” within which the expression occurs; and so the sentences in which tokens of “object” occur will be revealed to be plain nonsense. The transition talk of *T* 4.126–4.1272 is taken to show the reader how to see through the illusion of substantential logical structure to the reality of word salads. Certainly the diagnosis of the way in which “A is an object” fails to be a sentence at all is in the *Tractatus*. What is in question is whether Wittgenstein uses it to show the sentences that purport to describe an ontology of simple objects and the picture theory of meaning are word salads.

And that, Diamond urges, is the point of the *Tractatus*. The attempt to find in the *Tractatus* a metaphysical necessity that underwrites the success of our language in saying something is “chickening out.” Wittgenstein aims to free us from precisely this illusion. We do not need to find our language anchored in necessity, since there can be no such thing as violating the logic of language (1991: 194–5). Nothing underlies or explains the necessity implicit in our ordinary sentences. Thus, Diamond concludes:

The very idea of the philosophical perspective from which we consider as sayable or unsayable necessities that underlie ordinary being so, or possibilities as themselves objective features of reality, sayably or unsayably: that very perspective itself is the illusion, created by sentences like “A is an object,” which we do not see to be simply nonsense, plain nonsense.

(1991: 197)

Any attempt to say or show something about a necessary structure underlying language, of its very nature, violates the conditions for being a sentence. “What those view Paradise 5 between of” obviously violates the conditions for being a sentence, but so do “There must be simple objects,” “The space of possibilities determines the limit of the sayable,” “Logical form is determined by the intrinsic properties of simple objects,” and any other purported ontological statement, albeit not so obviously. Wittgenstein neither says it nor shows it, but uses the ontological statements of the 2s as the lures that lead us to recognize, in the end, their failure to mean anything at all because they fail to be sentences. “Wittgenstein’s philosophy throughout his life,” as Diamond summarizes this point,

is directed against certain ways of imagining necessity. Throughout his life, his treatment of logic aims at letting us see necessity where it does lie, in the use of ordinary sentences. The trouble with chickening out . . . is that it holds on to exactly the kind of imagination of necessity, necessarily imaged as fact, that Wittgenstein aimed to free us from.

(1991: 195)

### 3. Criticism of the austere reading

I shall develop the internal problems in three connected stages, corresponding to the first three components of the austere reading – the nonsense thesis, the repudiation of the metaphysical interpretation, and the strong consistency thesis. The point is to show that the task Wittgenstein sets himself, as understood by Diamond and others, namely to establish that the corpus is a syntactic mess, fails to realize the philosophical goal attributed to the *Tractatus*, namely to show that ordinary language is in order as it is, that logic takes care of itself. The nonsense thesis cannot be made to do the work assigned it. I hope to show that this is for reasons that support the claim that ineliminable paradox lies at the heart of the *Tractatus*. That paradox is a commitment to saying what must also be denied, with strong philosophical reasons for doing both. The standard interpretation tries to remove the paradox by exploiting the saying–showing distinction. This only moves the problem, a point the austere reader emphasizes by charging the standard interpreter with being irresolute or chickening out. But as I shall show, the austere reader cannot remove the paradox either. Once again it is moved rather than removed, not by exploiting the saying–showing distinction (though a version of this distinction re-emerges as well), but by moving the substantive philosophical commitments outside the text itself to be drawn upon in the frame and transition moments of the *Tractatus*. That paradox must be tolerated or even relished on any reading of the *Tractatus*; I shall argue, is indicative of a deep discontinuity between the early and later work. This central feature of the *Tractatus* is what Wittgenstein later comes to see as a clear mark of being in the grip of a picture.

#### Nonsense thesis

Again, according to Diamond, the corpus of the *Tractatus* is plain nonsense. It gives the illusion of intelligibility; perhaps in the way that incoherent dreams can seem significant to the dreamer.<sup>18</sup> Yet the general argument for the nonsense thesis and the particular diagnoses for the nonsensicality of propositions of the *Tractatus* involve explanatory notions and methods that are part and parcel of the *Tractatus* itself (on the standard interpretation) and rely on the intelligibility of at least some passages from the corpus. As we have seen in the previous section, the general argument that Diamond imputes to Wittgenstein is held to illuminate features that arise from the semantic primacy of the sentence, which is taken to require that sentences have substantential argument-function structure and that sentences are individually bipolar. This is precisely where the difficulty for the austere reading arises.

On this reading, as for the standard interpretation, Wittgenstein is committed to the logical articulation of language, the bipolar condition for meaningfulness, Russellian analysis, and crucially the claim that the argument-function structure is logically primitive. The general account of negative nonsense draws on these features, and the particular diagnosis of philosophical



sentences uses these features as integral to the arguments showing these sentences to be word salads. In other words, Diamond does not get nonsense from nothing any more than other advocates of the sense–nonsense divide. The difference, then, must lie with the reasons attributed to Wittgenstein for this endorsement and in how they are used in the relevant transitional passages where diagnosis occurs.<sup>19</sup> The logical positivists rely on the principle of verifiability to draw the line; Frege, or at least some Fregeans, draw upon a substantive notion of logical category; the *Tractatus*, on the standard interpretation, relies on the picture theory of meaning. Can the austere reader justify the charge of nonsense without some (implicit) theory of meaning or language? I do not see how.

To assess this, we will turn to the treatment of the transitional passages, for these passages provide the grounds for judging apparently well-ordered philosophical sentences to be word salads. The austere reading sees these passages as rungs up the ladder. There are two ways to treat them. They can be taken to offer sound arguments against metaphysical enticement, in which case they are indeed meaningful sentences. Or they themselves have only an illusory meaningfulness, which is seen through as one progresses higher up the ladder in the escape from philosophical theorizing. These two possibilities pose a dilemma for the austere reading. If the transitional passages are meaningful, then the nonsense thesis is seriously compromised. Indeed, it is reduced to the claim that certain philosophical sentences can be shown to be nonsense relative to a certain (philosophical) conception of language, namely, the modified Frege–Russell picture. The charge of nonsense, then, does not fall out of a philosophically innocuous set of considerations.

This relocates the debate between the austere reading and traditional readings. It becomes a debate concerning the grounds for subscribing to some aspects of the Frege–Russell picture while rejecting other aspects. Are the grounds the picture theory and the ontology of simple objects, as the standard interpretation has it? Or are the grounds to be found outside the *Tractatus* in Frege’s characterization of the context principle and its implications, as Diamond has it? Or are they, perhaps, to be found in the later passages that focus on the application of logic? This turns the debate, both interpretive and philosophical, to the grounds for the picture of language as a logically articulated structure. It is not the nonsense thesis, then, but the adequacy of the metaphysical interpretation that is the focus. Such a debate may lead to a revisionist treatment of the *Tractatus*, but not necessarily to an austere one. If the passages, on the other hand, are themselves plain nonsense, then there is no argument or rational defense for the austere reading. This leads to an esoteric reading of the *Tractatus* that closes it to rational scrutiny and invites insight into Wittgenstein’s intentions. At this point, external evidence becomes crucial in assessing the austere reading. In either case, the claim for a *strong* continuity between the early and late philosophy is forfeited. Let’s now pursue the dilemma the austere reading faces.

### ***The first horn: the rejection of the metaphysical interpretation***

If the transitional passages offer diagnoses for the errors made in making certain metaphysical claims, then they cannot be plain nonsense. These arguments draw essentially upon a modified Frege–Russell picture of language. Moreover, the particular arguments and diagnoses of philosophical nonsense, as constructed by the austere reader, can be used just as effectively within the standard interpretation. The important point is this: The same picture of language, as a fully logically articulated structure, is implicated in both the standard and austere interpretation, even though the grounds for commitment to this picture are not the same. This narrows the gulf between the standard interpretation and the austere reading. Further, Diamond’s transitional talk is talk about what can only be shown on the standard interpretation. So, what is the difference in the use of these arguments? For the standard interpretation, the distinction between saying and showing is crucial and is supported by the picture theory of meaning, which requires an ontology of simple objects. For the austere reading, there is no such distinction and the conditions for meaningfulness are inherent in sentences in virtue of sentences having a distinctive functionality. This distinctive functionality just is Frege’s context principle, properly understood.

Let’s return to the paradigm example of philosophical nonsense, the sentence “A is an object.” This sentence fails to be meaningful, it will be recalled, because it violates the bipolar condition. The diagnosis is that the expression “is an object” appears to be a predicate, but is really a way of expressing the existential quantifier. Its proper analysis is “(Ex)X” which is a sign salad. My point is not that the bipolar condition should be rejected (or affirmed). Rather, it is that it stands in need of justification, a conception or theory of language that requires it. That justification, as I have pointed out, cannot come from within the *Tractatus*, the place that the standard interpretation looks. The justification must be external to the *Tractatus*. The austere reading hasn’t eliminated a theory of language to justify the divide between the meaningful and the nonsensical. Rather, it has relocated that theory even though in stating the “external” theory the austere reader must say things that are also “said” in the *Tractatus*. The paradox returns.

Diamond prefers a somewhat different strategy for establishing the nonsensicality of philosophical sentences, one that calls for trying to *assign* a meaning to the constituent expressions.<sup>20</sup> If one cannot do so, then the sentence is revealed to be a word salad and the constituents are only word strings and not logical parts. How does one know whether one can assign meanings or not to the constituent expressions? Once again, let us consider “Caesar is a prime number.” This sentence is nonsense, according to Diamond, not because the expressions are tied to ontologically distinct logical categories that clash, but because we can’t mean what we ordinarily mean by these expressions and put them together in this way. But perhaps we are looking too narrowly at this sentence. Suppose we were members of a Pythagorean society, believing that the essence of all

things is captured by numbers. Within such a society, there may be nothing nonsensical about saying that Caesar is a prime number. If we do not work with a robust notion of logical categories, why should this sentence be ruled out as nonsensical? Diamond's argument must be that the philosopher has not created a context within which his sentences can be meaningful.

Let us return to "A is an object." There seems to be a straightforward way to render this intelligible, by bringing out the alternatives with which this sentence might be contrasted. This is the strategy Wittgenstein employs in the *Philosophical Investigations* when criticizing the idea that analysis of a sentence will reveal its intrinsic logical form (cf. *PI* §§ 19–20). "A is an object" is a second-order sentence that contrasts with "A is a relation or property or an event." This is not, however, the rationale of the *Tractatus*. The early Wittgenstein rejects this because there he rejects the theory of types, but this is a philosophically motivated rationale. Both the general argument for the negative conception of nonsense and particular arguments intended to show the nonsensicality of philosophical sentences draw on substantive philosophical commitments and theories, the rationale for which must lie outside the *Tractatus*. The paradox has not been eliminated, only relocated. This is the first objection.

The justification for the modified Frege–Russell picture, on the standard interpretation, is given in terms of the picture theory and the realist ontology with which it is associated. All adherents of the austere reading repudiate precisely this justification. The real target of the austere reading, then, may not be all philosophy, but the metaphysical realism of the 1s, 2s and 3s. This suggests that much of the *Tractatus* is meaningful, but it needs to be reinterpreted in a way that respects the rejection of realism. But repudiation of the metaphysical interpretation is not tantamount to an endorsement of the austere reading. There are other revisionist interpretations of the *Tractatus* that also reject the metaphysical interpretation (cf. McGinn 1999). Indeed, much in Diamond's interpretation aligns quite naturally with the revisionist interpretation offered by H. Ishiguro in her 1969 paper "Use and Reference of Names."<sup>21</sup> In that paper Ishiguro argues that the *Tractatus* develops a substitutionalist theory of quantification rather than an objectual theory. The domain of objects does not set the criteria for the correct use of names. Quite the reverse. The substitution rules for names fix the identity conditions for objects. But this interpretation engages in a philosophical debate concerning the order of explanation between inference/substitution rules, on the one hand, and representation/reference, on the other. Opting for the former is not an exit from philosophy even though it rejects the reification of Tractarian "objects." The rejection of the metaphysical interpretation, one of the most interesting issues brought to light by Diamond and others, does not require endorsing the nonsense thesis, the strong consistency thesis or the strong continuity thesis. Indeed, the arguments supporting this militate against the nonsense thesis, and so undermine strict consistency. This is the second objection.

If, however, we respect the demands of the metaphilosophy as understood by the austere reading, we must treat the transitional passages along with the 1s, 2s and 3s as nonsense. But then in what way can they be transitional aids to the reader? It would seem that we must allow that they are illuminating in some way. If so, we have reintroduced the idea of a contrast between plain nonsense and illuminating nonsense. The doctrine of showing is not eliminated; it is moved. What is shown are not deep truths about reality but deep truths about language. Consider the following claims made by Diamond that support this:

So, for Wittgenstein, the sign for what is the case (or is not the case) is the sentence, a sign to whose functional character it belongs that no sentence's truth or falsity can rob it of its capacity for comparison with reality.

(Diamond 1991: 200)

The logical relations of sentences to each other enter the way we tell what sentence our sentence is, what expressions, how combined. The whole of logic is internal to the logical character of every referring expression.

(1991: 201)

Presumably these sentences are nonsense, for they violate the bipolar condition. They attempt to say what cannot be false if they are true. Yet surely Diamond intends them to substantiate her claim about what Wittgenstein rejects in Frege and to show us something about what it is for logic to take care of itself. These are things that cannot be said, and yet they show that "the whole of logic is internal to any referring expression" (p. 201). This aligns the *Tractatus* more closely with inferentialist theories of meaning rather than representationalist theories. But once again we have a revisionist treatment of the *Tractatus*, one that is as much at odds with privileging the metaphilosophy as the standard interpretation. This is the third objection.

In sum, if the transitional passages are allowed to be meaningful, then they require an alternative justification for the logical articulation of language; or they involve a revisionist interpretation of the *Tractatus*' theory of meaning; or they require the contrast between saying and showing. To preserve what is distinctive of the austere reading, namely the nonsense thesis, the austere reader cannot allow that any of the passages of the corpus are meaningful. All are strict nonsense. Identification of the transitional passages must then arise from the instructions provided for how to read the *Tractatus*. On those instructions a proper reading is obtained only when one recognizes the nonsensicality of all the sentences of the corpus. In short, the instructions commit the reader to finding strong consistency in the *Tractatus* as a whole. This should involve giving up any commitment to the Frege–Russell picture of language.

*The second horn: the strong consistency thesis*

Strict adherence to the nonsense thesis yields the strong consistency thesis. This is not a surprising result since finding the corpus to be nonsense is the criterion for having read the work correctly: that is, in accordance with the metaphilosophical instructions of the frame. Transitional passages, then, are those that are especially useful in bringing the reader to a recognition of nonsense. These passages themselves, in turn, are revealed to be nonsense. This indeed is the claim of the penultimate passage of the *Tractatus*. There are no conflicting elements within the *Tractatus*. That the standard interpretation finds the work inherently paradoxical is a criticism of that approach. The appearance of conflict is a measure of how deeply enthralled the reader is to philosophical illusions. The appearance of conflict should become, not an intellectual problem, but a spur to recognizing that the propositions in conflict are nonsense. Reading the *Tractatus* is thus an activity, not a source of knowledge about the structure of language and reality. The metaphilosophical remarks trump content.

This requires the austere reader to approach the transitional passages in a new way. They are neither meaningful, implicating a Frege–Russell picture of language, nor are they illuminating in some special way, as this retains the saying–showing distinction. The analyses developed in the transitional passages do not show something about the structure of language that justifies the reader in rejecting the metaphysical hypotheses as nonsense. Rather, they are *effettive* in changing the views of philosophers, in bringing them to stop theorizing. That is the point of the *Tractatus*.

Diamond offers what I shall call a romantic defense of strong consistency. Why should the metaphilosophical remarks to the effect that philosophy is nonsense be allowed to trump all other considerations? Indeed, this seems to reverse the proper relation between the content of a philosopher's writings and his remarks on what he takes himself to be doing. A philosopher's methodological remarks in general are evaluated in relation to what he actually argues. But when it comes to Wittgenstein, given his own passionate commitment to devaluing much of professional philosophy as the engagement in nonsensical puzzles, his metaphilosophy is allowed to take on a greater significance than is warranted. As Diamond puts it, "You are to understand not the propositions but the author. Take that directive to you as reader" (2000: 155). It is more important to believe *him* than to assess the content of what he says. The aim is to grasp Wittgenstein's true intentions. When we come to understand these intentions correctly, Diamond maintains, we can see that Wittgenstein never fundamentally changes his views nor alters his method. The illusion of conflict, mistake or change in Wittgenstein's writings results from his demanding and poorly understood method of submitting to the philosophical imagination in order to free oneself from philosophical fantasy. It is this conception of what Wittgenstein is doing that leads one to describe the austere reading as an esoteric or gnostic reading.

As a hermeneutic strategy for defending the austere reading, this approach is proof against argument. Perhaps this is why Diamond admits that she does not know how such an interpretation can be evaluated.<sup>22</sup> In privileging the metaphilosophical remarks, we are to construe the frame as providing instructions for reading the *Tractatus* such that the nonsense thesis is borne out. That is a requirement of reading it aright. The point of transitional talk is to bring one to recognize the nonsense that the philosophical will and imagination has created. Since all the propositions of the corpus are nonsense, they have neither content nor logical structure. Strictly, then, any appeal to internal support for an interpretation is utterly moot. Taking Wittgenstein's intentions to be the key to interpretation invites the search for external evidence from other writings, conversations and lecture notes. Here there is much that tells against the austere reading.<sup>23</sup>

Yet simply to call this strategy esoteric isn't to say that wasn't what Wittgenstein was doing. The passage on which the austere reader places great weight is the penultimate passage of the *Tractatus*:

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

Here Wittgenstein does ask the reader to understand *him*, and in doing so to recognize his propositions as nonsense. The key to interpreting this passage lies with Wittgenstein's relation to the paradoxical core of the *Tractatus*. Romanticized strong consistency removes paradox at the cost of an esoteric reading. There is, however, an alternative defense of strong consistency that is compatible with the corpus, but does not involve an endorsement of the nonsense thesis. This alternative involves seeing an argumentative strategy in the *Tractatus* that is crucial to the later philosophy. That is the distinctive form of *reductio ad absurdum* argument one finds in several places in the *Investigations*, notably the paradox of interpretation argument and the private language argument. These are arguments directed against philosophical theories that reveal a special kind of contradiction within the theory itself. W. Goldfarb has suggested that the *Tractatus* as a whole can be viewed as developing such a *reductio ad absurdum* argument directed against the modified Frege–Russell picture of language. This way of resolving the apparent inconsistency of the *Tractatus* transforms it from a transcendental argument for the necessary conditions for representation into a *reductio* of itself.<sup>24</sup> The rejection of the corpus is based on the emergence of contradiction, not because the sentences are syntactic word salads. Moreover, the *reductio* reading leads to a repudiation of the very principles the austere reader uses in constructing arguments against the meaningfulness of particular philosophical sentences. On this reading, all of the passages used by the austere reading to support the nonsense thesis and the therapeutic aim of the work are equally well accounted for. This neutralizes the evidence between the two interpretations.

What the dilemma shows is how problematic the nonsense thesis is for the austere reading. What should be clear by now is that the argumentative strategy Diamond and others want to draw between nonsense and meaningfulness requires a theory of meaning (or language). Granted that word salads are indeed nonsense, the challenge is to show that sentences in apparently good standing really are word salads, and for this a theory of meaningfulness (if not a theory of meanings) is required. The first horn of the dilemma reveals this. The need for a theory of meaning is avoided only by running into the second horn of the dilemma, which turns the thesis into something ineffable but recognized by those who successfully maneuver the *Tractatus*: Neither strategy is a return to ordinary language or shows how language takes care of itself. Indeed, the very expression “nonsense” has become a term of art far removed from anything like our ordinary usage. To give up a theory of meaning or meaningfulness is to give up the centrality of the nonsense thesis in combating philosophical theorizing.

#### 4. Conclusion

What implications do these arguments against the nonsense thesis have for the strong continuity thesis? Certainly, at a high enough level of abstraction, one can maintain a continuity of goal and method whether one accepts the austere reading, a revisionist reading, or the standard interpretation. In both the early and late periods, Wittgenstein sought to bring philosophical theorizing to an end and to do so (in part) through dissolving problems and diagnosing philosophical error. Such shallow continuity of goal and method is compatible with the claim that the later philosophy marks a decisive break with the earlier conception both methodologically and theoretically. The austere reading purports to expose a more robust continuity than is supported by this thin description. This strong continuity requires that Wittgenstein’s aim and substantive philosophical task in both periods remain the same. That aim is to show that ordinary language is in order as it is, and does not require philosophical theorizing, justification or explanation. And the task, the actual work to be done to realize this aim, is to show that philosophical attempts to ground, justify or explain ordinary language result in plain nonsense (word salads). This is a radical dissolution of philosophical problems and theories. The salient difference, the austere reader concurs, is that the *Tractatus* realizes these in an architectonic way whereas the *Investigations* engages in a heterogeneous piecemeal way of arguing. Yet this difference, I maintain, undermines the claim to continuity in task.

The architectonic structure of the *Tractatus*, even on the austere reading, extends both to its conception of traditional philosophical problems and solutions as well as to how that tradition is to be dismantled. The problem of representationality is seen as the deep problem of traditional philosophy, the development of which culminates with the (apparent) theories of the *Tractatus*. In diagnosing certain pivotal philosophical statements as gibberish (such as “A is an

object”), the way is prepared for taking down entire systems of propositions that constitute a “theory” of objects or meaning. These are not the propositions of ordinary language, but philosophical sentences that aim to specify the necessary conditions for the possibility of representation *tout court*. The grounds that reveal each of these sentences to be a syntactic mess are the context principle and what is involved in assigning meaning to the constituents of a sentence. As I argue above, both the philosophic tradition and the means for unraveling it are committed to the logical articulation of language, the primacy of assertoric form, and some form of the analytic–synthetic distinction. These commitments are repudiated in the later philosophy. Thus, even if Wittgenstein’s goal throughout his philosophical career remained the same – to establish the adequacy of language by showing philosophical theorizing to be nonsensical – the task he sets for himself cannot remain the same. The argumentative strategy of the *Tractatus* is not that of the *Investigations*, and it is this claim that is at the heart of the strong continuity thesis.

This is not just the difference of replacing an architectonic conception of the task with a piecemeal one. It involves a critique of the very tools used in constructing the *Tractatus* theory and mounding its deconstruction. The Frege–Russell picture of language, the use of analysis, the conception of logic, the bipolarity condition, and the conception of philosophical theories all change and come under attack either explicitly or implicitly. While Wittgenstein does not repudiate Russellian analysis *tout court* – the later Wittgenstein allows that it can have particular successes (as with identity or definite descriptions) – the important explanatory role given logical form and so analysis is repudiated. The bipolarity condition is identified as a truism, a reflection of the fact that the predicates “true” and “false” are introduced with the notion of a proposition (*PI* §136). This is not a discovery about propositions and their relation to the world or the primacy of assertoric form, but rather points to the fact that these expressions are introduced and learned together.

There is a further, deeper reason for discontinuity. The opening passages of the *Investigations* reverse the *Tractatus* judgment, it seems to me, concerning the pictorial relationship (reference) and the significance of learning. In the *Tractatus*, the pictorial relationship is unproblematic and learning is irrelevant. The reason for this is that the problem of representationality is taken to be the fundamental problem for philosophy in the early period. The key to addressing that problem is the context principle and the explanatory role assigned logical form. The *Investigations* criticizes the philosophical significance accorded these. Wittgenstein’s particular criticisms are tied to his view that the explanatory and argumentative work to be done by the context principle and logical form are blind to the problem of normative similarity: that is, of what constitutes sameness in the application of an expression or of going on in the same way. In sum, then, the task of the *Tractatus*, its argumentative tools for realizing this task, and the Fregean theory of language that guides the deconstructive work according to the austere reading are all challenged in the later work.

Let me conclude by turning to the key claim that binds many to the austere reading. It concerns Wittgenstein's relation to paradox and so nonsense. The fact that the ostensible theory of the *Tractatus* leads to paradox of such a deep and abiding sort that it leads Wittgenstein to say, in the penultimate passage, that "anyone who understands me eventually recognizes [my propositions] as nonsensical" (T 6.54) requires one to look for a way of freeing Wittgenstein from the charge of contradiction. We now have three ways to interpret T 6.54 and three ways to understand Wittgenstein's relation to the paradoxical core of the *Tractatus*. The standard interpretation construes T 6.54 as Wittgenstein's acknowledgement that his theory of meaning undercuts the meaningfulness of the sentences used to state that theory. Here Wittgenstein tolerates paradox, using the doctrine of showing to ameliorate its irrationality. The austere interpretation construes the passage as the key to understanding the *Tractatus* as a whole. Paradox is no part of the *Tractatus*, but is an illusion created by the meaningless word strings that constitute the corpus of the text. The *reductio* interpretation makes paradox the point of the work, which is to repudiate the entire picture of language on the grounds that it is self-defeating. Does Wittgenstein tolerate paradox as an unavoidable consequence of a necessarily correct theory of meaning? Does he show that paradox is an illusion generated by nonsensical word salads that are nonetheless psychologically congenial? Or does he use paradox as a critical tool for attacking the very picture of language that is in play in the first two accounts (albeit in different ways)? We must conclude that some version of the standard interpretation is correct, although I shall offer a different way of understanding the early Wittgenstein's tolerance for contradiction. This first requires seeing what lessons we have learned from the austere reading.

The price for achieving strong consistency by way of the nonsense thesis is the gnostic interpretation of the corpus. This price is clearly too high since it leaves philosophical understanding, even of a diagnostic sort, behind in favor of esoteric insight. Avoiding the esoteric interpretation results in relocating, but not eliminating, contradiction, and so strong consistency is not achieved. But though the reading fails, Diamond and others bring fresh insights to the work. They raise serious questions about taking the metaphysical realism of the early passages at face value. And they highlight the way in which the work is dialectical one rather than a linear construction of a theory of language. But the lesson to be drawn from this, it seems to me, is not that the penultimate T 6.54 is the key to interpreting the *Tractatus*. Rather, T 5.64, I would argue, is the pivotal passage for understanding the dialectical structure of the *Tractatus*:

Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.

What Wittgenstein seeks to show, it seems to me, is that whether we begin with realist premises or idealist premises, given the constraints imposed by the

new logic, we are led to the same picture of language and its relation to the world, a picture that requires the primacy of assertion, the logical articulation of language, and its sharing an isomorphic structure with the world. In other words, it is not the primary task of the *Tractatus* to show philosophical sentences to be word salads, but to reveal what the structure of language and reality must be no matter with which metaphysical premises one begins. The repudiation of both realism and solipsism (idealism) derives from understanding how the two coincide. The method is dialectical, the conclusion is that language takes care of itself, and the superstitious picture that drives the argument is the subliming of the new logic.

This leaves, of course, inconsistency at the heart of the *Tractatus*. This result, according to the austere reader, diminishes Wittgenstein's philosophical genius and is unacceptable. But it is a mistake to draw this inference, and we can see this in the way in which Wittgenstein characterizes the phenomenology of philosophical puzzlement and conviction in the *Investigations*. In this later work, Wittgenstein comes to identify tolerating contradiction as indicative of being in the grip of a picture. Being in the grip of a philosophical picture is not a mistake, he insists, but rather is akin to superstition (PI 110). The chemist who believes in the transubstantiation of wine and bread into the blood and flesh of Christ is not being stupid or failing to note certain empirical facts about the chemical composition of wine and bread (cf. *On Certainty* 239, 336). Similarly for the philosopher who is committed to a particular picture of language or mind. The religious believer and the philosopher are wrong, but they are not making mistakes of intelligence.

### Notes

- 1 Cora Diamond (1991), especially "Frege and Nonsense," "What Nonsense Might Be," "Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*," and (2000). For other defenses of the austere reading, see (Conant 1989 and 1992) and (Goldfarb 1997); and Part II of (Crary and Read 2000).
- 2 A disclaimer or qualification is needed here. What is called "the standard interpretation" is abstracted from the details of particular interpretations of the *Tractatus*, which can vary significantly. Those repeatedly identified with the standard interpretation are (Fogelin 1976); (Hacker 1972); (Pears 1987); and (Stenius 1960).
- 3 In what follows in this paragraph, I shall be presenting a reconstruction of what I see as the key ideas to be found in (Diamond 1991 and 2000).
- 4 I shall present these components as theses, but it must be noted that Diamond and other austere readers would repudiate the language of "thesis" in connection with their interpretation. It suggests that the interpretation is more theoretical than its advocates intend. Diamond stresses Wittgenstein's view that philosophy properly pursued is an activity, not a set of theses. Nonetheless, I find it useful to identify the primary components of the austere reading in this manner. I trust that it will not distort my characterization of Diamond's position.
- 5 Cf. (Sullivan 1996).
- 6 (Diamond 1991: 194). Goldfarb (1997: 64), following a suggestion by T. Ricketts, recommends calling this the resolute interpretation.
- 7 This characterization of the *Tractatus* and its relation to the later philosophy leads some to characterize this as the "therapeutic interpretation." See McGinn (1999).

But, understandable though this suggestion is, it is misleading. There are reasons to prefer calling it the austere reading. A therapeutic overcoming of philosophy is fully compatible with having robust philosophical theories from which the diagnoses of error are derived. If classic psychoanalytic therapy for neurosis is our model for this conception of philosophical activity, then both general theory and a specific account of the origins and character of the neurosis from which the patient suffers are part and parcel of the therapeutic process. What Diamond envisions for the *Tractatus* are not the therapeutic relief from (traditional) philosophy but an exit from philosophy, both traditional and Tractarian, altogether. The austere reading is a radical interpretation of the *Tractatus*, more so than its being therapeutic would suggest. One has only to think of how the logical positivists appropriated the *Tractatus*, reading into it an articulation of their own criterion for cognitive meaningfulness, the principle of verifiability. This criterion was used therapeutically by the positivists to eliminate metaphysics as nonsense, a task pursued by analyzing the underlying structure of metaphysical propositions and thus revealing their failure to satisfy the conditions of meaningfulness. Wittgenstein is well known for his own distancing of himself from the logical positivists, a fact that serves to support Diamond's reading.

8 Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be" (1991). I make no attempt to assess the correctness of Diamond's interpretation of Frege. The focus in this paper is solely on her interpretation of Wittgenstein.

9 Diamond 1991: "Throwing Away the Ladder," section I.

10 Also, see Hacker's (2001: "Frege and the Early Wittgenstein") discussion of this same point.

11 Diamond is getting at something very important here. It is an issue that is at the heart of the debate between inferentialist and representationalist theories of meaning. Though Diamond does not note this, she in effect is attributing an inferentialist conception of meaningfulness to the *Tractatus*. I will discuss this further in Section 3. Here I wish to point out that in doing so, she has (perhaps unintentionally and/or unwittingly) found a continuity between the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*. In holding that the sentence is explanatorily more fundamental than its constituent parts, she thereby implies that subsentential structure is semantically a late-comer. Diamond doesn't note this because she holds that logical syntax and Russellian analysis are crucial to the *Tractatus*. Insofar as they are crucial, this undermines the continuity with the *Investigations*, for both notions are under attack there. But insofar as we take the sentence to be semantically fundamental, then we can identify a continuity with the early passages of the *Investigations*. The point of the builders' game, it seems to me, is just to show that what is fundamental to meaningfulness is normative structure which is realized in the use of the simple holophrastic expressions of the game. Syntactic complexity is not as fundamental. This idea could be seen to be continuous with a notion of the intrinsic functionality of sentences. Of course, this is not what Diamond has in mind since she takes the *Tractatus* distinction between sense and reference to remain wedded to an ideal of the logical articulation of language.

12 Goldfarb refers to this conception of the functionality of sentences – that it is essential to their nature that they be true or false – as the contrastive theory of meaning. He takes the explanation for this to lie with Wittgenstein's conception of logic, whereas Diamond identifies it with his modified conception of sense. There is an interesting difference in these two ways of putting the matter. For Wittgenstein, a proposition is a propositional sign (a sentence) in its projective relation to the world (T 3.112). What it represents through such a projection is its sense. Propositions have a sense, but, *pace* Frege, no reference. To say that their truth-valuedness is internal to sentences is to say that they cannot but stand in a projective relation to the world. To say that logic explains the essential bipolarity of sentences is to say that the logical form of sentences (revealed through proper analysis) is that of saying something true

or false. The difference is between holding that the truth-valuedness of sentences is a matter of the sentential sign standing in a projective relation to the world (that is, being applied); or holding that it is a matter of the logical form of sentences: that is, their subsentential logical structure. I'll return to the significance of this difference in the two accounts later. For now, we note the difference and continue with Diamond's argument that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are plain nonsense.

13 Such an explanation may seem wanting in the way that Frege's explanation of the unity of the proposition is wanting. To hold that the predicate expression is unsaturated or incomplete does seem only to name the problem and not to solve it (as Davidson (1984) objects). That is my view of how Wittgenstein came to view the *Tractatus*' appeal to the pictorial relationship. The emptiness of this explanation shows that the treatment of reference in the *Tractatus* is its Achilles' heel. This is why Wittgenstein begins with an examination of the relation between words and objects in the *Investigations*.

14 See Diamond (1991) "Frege and Nonsense" and, especially, "What Nonsense Might Be."

15 Here I use Diamond's recommended recipe for constructing nonsensical syntactic strings: string together the first words of successive pages of a book. These words are derived from (1991: 164–71).

16 See Diamond, "Frege and Nonsense" (1991), 86ff.

17 Warren Goldfarb (1997), who endorses aspects of the austere reading, builds on the argument found in the *Tractatus*. Insofar as 'A is an object' is taken as meaningful (and so having the form '(Ex)x is A'), it brings with it a conception of metaphysical necessity. But as a statement purporting to describe that metaphysical necessity, the sentence "(Ex)x is A" only contingently obtains relative to some higher order metaphysical position. A sentence having this logical structure could only be part of a higher order language describing the relation between linguistic expressions and objects in its object domain. One can see that the final stage of this argument is quite close to Quine's argument for the inscrutability of reference that he develops in his (1969). Quine argues that a regress of ontological theories is unavoidable because ontology cannot be specified within the object language itself. The only response available to us, according to Quine, is pragmatic, namely to acquiesce in our home language. The austere reader, in contrast, concludes that in showing that the sentence 'A is an object' is meaningless, Wittgenstein has shown that we cannot but speak our home language. To attempt otherwise is to speak gibberish.

18 Wittgenstein does sometimes speak of the illusory intelligibility of dreams. See, for example, L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, eds (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967):

197 I tell myself "Of course that's a ..." and give myself a nonsensical explanation, which at the moment seems to me to make sense. (Like in a dream.)

19 Passages identified as transitional include T 3.323, 4.0621, 4.063 from (1991: "Throwing Away the Ladder"); and T 4.5, 5, 5.473, 5.4733, 6.42, 6.421, 6.43 from (2000). Goldfarb in his support of Diamond's interpretation identifies a fourth: T 5.525. What distinguishes these passages from the others? T 3.323 makes a claim about the occurrence of semantic ambiguity in ordinary language, citing the three uses of the word "is" (as the copula, as a sign for identity and as an expression for existence). This passage makes Frege's point that "the same word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different symbols." T 4.0621 and T 4.063 are discussions of Wittgenstein's treatment of negation, particularly that the negation sign does not signify anything. The senses of both "p" and "¬p" are the same. Negation must be understood in terms of the inherent bipolarity of "p" itself. T 4.126–4.1272

are especially noted by defenders of the austere reading. These are the passages, discussed above, which show why the sentence "A is an object" is nonsensical. The passages from the 5s identify the source of nonsense (of at least some nonsensical sentences) with our failure "to give a meaning to some of [the] constituents" of the proposition. The example Wittgenstein uses in these passages is the sentence "Socrates is identical." It is nonsense because we have not given adjectival meaning to "identical." Though the sign "identical" appears to function adjectivally to identify a property of Socrates, that is an illusion of the surface structure only. Again, a perspicuous symbolism can reveal this: "a =" is transparently nonsensical. The 6s concern ethics, which Diamond along with others takes to be the real point of the *Tractatus*. She cites Wittgenstein's remark to that effect in a letter to L. von Ficker: "my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have not written. For the Ethical is delimited from within, as it were, by my book" (Luckhardt 1979: 94).

20 See Diamond 1991: 99–104).

21 Also see (McGuinness 1981). For criticism from the perspective of the standard interpretation, see (Pears 1987: Ch. 5).

22 Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" (2000: 165).

23 P. M. S. Hacker has presented the external problems for the austere reading quite forcefully and fully in "Was He Trying to Whistle It?" and "When the Whistling had to Stop" in his (2001), "Some Remarks on Logical Form," Wittgenstein's 1929 paper questioning the independence thesis, and much of Part I of the *Investigations*; Wittgenstein's critical scrutiny of the explanatory roles for reference, sense, logical form and analysis, become profoundly obscure if not unintelligible. "Some Remarks on Logical Form" raises problems for the thesis that the meaningfulness of any elementary proposition is independent of the truth or falsity of any other proposition. Predicates of gradation are identified as important exceptions to the theory of the *Tractatus*. Much of Part I of the *Investigations* is presented as a criticism of ideas held in the *Tractatus*, ideas that the austere reading denies were ever endorsed. Wittgenstein decries his own errors in correspondence and conversation. Correspondence, notes on conversations, journal entries support the standard interpretation's central claim that there is an important discontinuity in Wittgenstein's development.

24 This transformation, it should be noted, involves attributing to the *Tractatus* an argumentative strategy that is used repeatedly in the *Investigations*. The paradox of interpretation argument (beetle in the box argument), all can be construed as anti-transcendental arguments. They each bring out contradictory features of philosophical theories. Not just any contradiction, however. Rather, the very phenomena the theories were introduced to explain are rendered impossible by the theory itself. They are self-defeating theories. The *radical* interpretation of the *Tractatus* turns it into such a self-defeating theory. The very theory that best (or only) explains the limits of thought in a principled way self-destructs. The moral to be drawn is that such limits cannot be specified. There is no principled distinction between nonsense and what is meaningful. That is, it seems to me, just the argument of the later work. To import this strategy into the *Tractatus* is anachronistic. It achieves a spurious continuity by reading the aims and argumentative strategies of the later work into the earlier. The *Tractatus*, as we can see from the emphasis placed on the nonsense thesis by the austere reading, takes nonsense seriously in a way that is missing in the *Investigations*. Appeals to nonsense in the *Investigations* are not principled and universally applicable, but *ad hoc* and directed to specific remarks. I develop this fully in "Method and Metaphilosophy in the *Philosophical Investigations*" (unpublished manuscript).

## References

- Conant, J. (1989) "Must We Show What We Cannot Say" in R. Fleming and M. Payne (eds) *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press.
- (1992) "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense" in T. Cohen, P. Guyer and H. Putnam (eds) *Pursuits of Reason*, Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press.
- Craty, A. and R. Read (eds) (2000) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.
- Davidson, D. (1984) "Truth and Meaning" in D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diamond, C. (1991) *The Realistic Spirit*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (2000) "Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" in Alice Craty and Rupert Read (eds) *The New Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.
- Fogelin, R. (1976) *Wittgenstein*, London: Routledge.
- Goldfarb, W. (1997) "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's The Realistic Spirit," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 22: 57–73.
- Hacker, P. M. S. (1972) *Insight and Illusion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (2001) *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ishiguro, H. (1969) "Use and Reference of Names" in Peter Winch (ed.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, London: Humanities Press.
- Luckhardt, G. C. (ed.) (1979) *Wittgenstein Sources and Perspectives*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McGinn, M. (1999) "Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (October): 491–513.
- McGuinness, B. (1981) "The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*" in I. Block (ed.) *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pears, D. (1987) *The False Prison*, vol. I, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1969) "Ontological Relativity," in W. V. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sternius, E. (1960) *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sullivan, P. (1996) "The 'Truth' in Solipsism and Wittgenstein's Rejection of the A Priori," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4: 195–219.