Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* at 100

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Resolution Re-examined

Thomas Ricketts

Study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has flourished as never before over the last three decades. This increased interest in early Wittgenstein is in significant measure due to the controversy sparked by Cora Diamond's 1988 paper 'Throwing Away the Ladder' (Diamond 1991b). The *Tractatus* had been—and still is—viewed by many commentators as the articulation of an austere logical atomist metaphysics accompanied by an account of how language and thinking must be constituted in order to represent a logical atomist world. Notoriously, in the penultimate remark of the book, 6.54, Wittgenstein says that the reader who understands him recognizes the sentences[1] of the book setting all this forth to be nonsensical. The sentences of the book must then be a special sort of nonsense, nonsense capable of conveying what turns out to an ineffable account of reality and representation. Diamond's paper forthrightly rejected this approach, insisting that in the end, the body of the book is to be recognized to be plain, Jabberwocky-style nonsense that, as

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such, communicates no philosophical theory. Diamond thus appeared to many to deprive the *Tractatus* of any philosophical point.

I originally called Diamond's approach a *resolute* approach to the *Tractatus*, for the way that she takes the word 'nonsensical' at face value.[2] Philosophers still tend, I believe, to view resolute interpretations to be distinguished by what they deny about the book rather than by any positive interpretation they present. I think this is wrong. Some resolute approaches have been sufficiently developed that we have a good idea of the shape of a resolute interpretation with considerable positive content. I have in mind here the work of James Conant, Michael Kremer, Oskari Kuusela, and above all Diamond herself. Although these interpreters do not agree on all points, I hold them to have presented largely convergent interpretations of the *Tractatus*. I want here to depict what the *Tractatus* as a whole looks like from the perspective of their interpretive work.[3] I will then, from a sympathetic perspective, consider two challenges the approach faces. For the remainder of this essay, I restrict the word 'resolute' to *Tractatus* interpretations like the ones advanced by the philosophers just mentioned.[4]

1   The Emergence of Resolution

To begin, it will be useful to consider in a bit more detail the sort of *Tractatus* interpretation against which Diamond was reacting when she introduced the resolute approach. I call such interpretations *ontology-oriented* interpretations.[5] I take David Pears, Peter Hacker, Max Black, and Norman Malcolm to be its classic exponents. The logical atomism of ontology-oriented interpretations is a metaphysics of possibility. The facts constituting reality are determined by combinations of simple objects into states of things. Intrinsic to a simple object are its possibilities to be related to other simple objects to constitute states of things. These possibilities are independent of thought and language. The world is the totality of the possibilities which are realized.

Tractarian names are correlated with the simple objects and absorb from them their possibilities of combination into elementary sentences. An elementary sentence presents that possible state of things whose

obtaining would be a matter of the objects of the state of things being related to each other as their names are in the sentence. The correlation between Tractarian names and simple objects thus is the crucial semantic relation between language and reality that constitutes sentences as true or false.

Other sentences are truth-functions of elementary ones, which with the exception of tautologies and contradictions are either true or false and both possibly true and possibly false. The *Tractatus* calls these *significant sentences* (sentences with sense [*sinnvoller Satz*]).[6] Any apparently factual sentence that is neither significant nor a tautology nor a contradiction is nonsense. This includes any that purport to state substantive necessary truths, for instance the sentence

'A is a simple object,' where 'A' is a Tractarian name of a simple object.

This view of the *Tractatus* is problematic on its face. Neither the sentences articulating the logical atomist metaphysics nor those presenting the accompanying account of representation put forward contingent factual truths. If true, they are non-tautological necessary truths. The view of sentences the *Tractatus* presents, applied to its sentences articulating the logical atomist metaphysics and the accompanying account of representation, classifies those sentences as nonsense. The philosophy of the *Tractatus* is in this way self-undermining so that it apparently presents no stable philosophical view.

The kind of ontology-oriented approach I have in mind makes use of the book's distinction between saying and showing to alleviate the book's incoherence. There are two ways in which significant sentences express what they do: they say things and they also show things. Showing and saying are mutually exclusive. There is no significant sentence that says that A is an object. That A is an object is, however, shown in the logical syntactic use of the symbol 'A' in significant sentences. The sentences of the *Tractatus* that the reader is to recognize as nonsense are abortive attempts to say, or to extrapolate from, what sentences show. They fail, but by falling into nonsense, they manage to call attention to the ineffable truths that are shown.

I noted the explanatory primacy that the ontology-oriented approach places on the correlation of Tractarian names with simple objects. At 3.3, the *Tractatus* lays down a context principle for these names:

> Only sentences have sense; only in the context of a sentence does a name have meaning.[7]

Nevertheless, the ontology-oriented approach must posit a preliminary use of names outside of sentences in correlating them with simple objects to suit them for use in sentences. Several philosophers objected that this preliminary use of names is incompatible with the context principle. [8] Diamond agrees with this objection, but in 'Throwing Away the Ladder,' she invokes the context principle to mount a different and more pointed objection. To understand it, let's consider more closely how the say-show distinction can be used to alleviate the self-undermining incoherence of the *Tractatus* just noted.

Logical form is what any significant sentence must have in common with reality to portray it, truly or falsely. 4.12 tells us that, although sentences can represent [*darstellen*] all of reality, they cannot represent logical form.

4.1211 gives examples:

> Thus a sentence '*fa*' shows that in its sense the object *a* occurs, two sentences '*fa*' and '*ga*' that they are both about the same object.

For Wittgenstein, the concept *object* is not a real concept, an external concept, under which an object may or may not fall. It is a formal concept. Hence, the real sign for the formal concept is a variable whose values are the totality of objects. 4.1272 says:

> So wherever the word 'object' ('thing', 'entity') is rightly used [in colloquial language], it is expressed in begriffsschrift [logical notation] by the variable name.…

> Wherever it is used otherwise, i.e., as a real concept-word, there arise nonsensical pseudo-sentences.

To understand this last point, consider the sentence 'An object fell.' This factual sentence goes over into begriffsschrift as '$(\exists x)(x \text{ fell})$'. In contrast, 'A book fell' goes over into '$(\exists x)(x \text{ is a book } \& \text{ x fell})$'. The

difference between these translations illustrates what it is to use 'object' sensibly in 'An object fell' to signify a formal concept, not a real concept, as 'book' and 'fell' do in the second sentence.

This use of 'object' in a sentence that is as regards surface grammar parallel to one in which 'book' is used as a predicate may seduce us to use 'object' in the sentence 'A is an object,' in the attempt to say what 'A fell' shows, namely, A's being an object. The interpreter Diamond opposes maintains that the word 'object' in its use to signify a formal concept does not semantically fit into the position of a real predicate introduced by the copula 'is.' This semantic clash deprives 'A is an object' of sense. To talk here of a semantic clash presupposes that the word 'object' occurs with the same significance in both 'An object fell' and in 'A is an object.'[9] Precisely because 'object' occurs in this sentence with the same meaning it has in 'An object fell,' the use of 'A is an object' in the right dialectical setting can convey something unsayable. The person who in such a setting has grasped what the use of 'A' shows in sentences like 'A fell,' can then throw way the nonsensical sentence while holding on to the unsayable feature of A toward which the use of the nonsensical sentence gestures.

Diamond argues that the context principle rules out semantic anomaly, for it is only within a significant sentence that a name or expression occurs with its particular sense-characterizing meaning, citing 5.473 in defense of her view:

> Logic must take care of itself.

> A *possible* sign must also be able to signify…. ('Socrates is identical' means nothing because there is no property which is called 'identical'. The sentence is nonsensical because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol is in itself impermissible.)

On Diamond's view then, all nonsense is plain nonsense. 'A is an object' is nonsense, because in it the word 'object' has been given no adjectival meaning. It is nonsense in the same way as 'The slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe' is. And plain nonsense does not gesture toward anything. This austere view of nonsense is the first characteristic of resolute interpretations.[10]

2   Clarification and the Prospects for a Begriffsschrift

At the opening of 'Throwing Away the Ladder' Diamond observes that over his entire career, Wittgenstein held that philosophy is *not* a matter of propounding and defending theses. The second sentence of Wittgenstein's foreword denies that the *Tractatus* is a textbook. 4.111 states that philosophy is not a natural science. 4.112 then remarks:

> The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.
>
> Philosophy is not a theory [*Lehre*] but an activity.
>
> A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.
>
> The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical sentences', but to make sentences clear [*sondern das Klarwerden von Sätzen*].
>
> ….

Here we have a second characteristic of resolute interpretations: philosophy, properly speaking, is an activity; the *Tractatus* does not aim to set forth a philosophical theory. In particular, if the *Tractatus* propounds no theory, then it propounds no theory of the sentence that implies that the sentences of that very theory are themselves nonsensical. Hence, applications of the word 'nonsensical' are not grounded in a Tractarian account of sense. The use of the term in the *Tractatus* is continuous with its use in everyday life, when, using the general logical linguistic abilities everyone has, a person pronounces someone's utterance to be nonsense on the ground that she has found no way to make sense of it. This means that applications of 'nonsensical' must be made piecemeal, on a case-by-case basis.[11]

We now have to consider how the Tractatus conceives of clarification, the means it offers for clarifying sentences, and the ends that clarification is to serve. The 3.32s offer some guidance here.

Symbols are those parts of sentences that characterize their sense. 3.32 distinguishes signs and symbols: 'A sign is what can be sensibly perceived of a symbol.' It is the phonological, orthographic, or typographic appearance of a symbol. Two different symbols may present the same perceptible appearance. For example, 'bank' is the sign both of a symbol signifying a kind of financial institution and of one signifying the land bordering a river.[12] 3.323 observes:

> In everyday language it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways—and therefore belongs to different symbols—or that two words, which signify in different ways, are superficially applied in the same way.

He proceeds to present several examples of these two kinds of equivocation. To illustrate the first kind of ambiguity, Wittgenstein notes that 'is' is sometimes used as a copula ('Socrates is wise'), sometimes as the identity sign ('Sir Walter Scott is the author of *Waverly*'), and sometimes as an expression of existence ('There is a student living in the apartment over mine'). For an example of the second kind of ambiguity, Wittgenstein offers 'exists' and 'goes.' While these are, grammatically speaking, both intransitive verbs, they signify in very different ways. 3.324 asserts that ambiguities surrounding the sign-symbol distinction give rise 'to the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full).' 3.325 advises that to avoid errors arising from these confusions, we must use a notation [*Zeichensprache*] governed by '*logical* grammar' that blocks them. Wittgenstein indicates what he has in mind in a final parenthetical remark: 'The begriffsschrift[13] of Frege and Russell is such a language, which, however, does still not exclude all mistakes.'

The general idea here is this. Equivocation both in the use of individual signs and equivocation in the surface grammar of sentences leads us into confusion. This confusion can manifest itself in attempts to express ourselves by use of nonsensical sentences—sentences containing signs that have been given no meaning in that sentential context. The earlier discussion of 'A is an object' included an example of this sort of critique. That case also illustrates the utility of a begriffsschrift in recognizing confusion here. Once we recognize '(∃x)(x fell)' to say what 'An object

fell' says, the difference between the way that 'object' signifies in 'An object fell,' and the way 'book' signifies in 'A book fell' becomes evident. Use of a begriffsschrift is to enable us to give full, unequivocal expression to the senses of significant colloquial sentences. This is the clarifying activity of philosophy[14]. The begriffsschrift will provide no paraphrase for some apparently significant sentences. The absence of a begriffsschrift paraphrase of such a sentence should prompt a closer examination to look for signs that have not been given a use in that linguistic context comparable to the uses they have in other linguistic contexts. I take this use of a begriffsschrift to exemplify 'the correct method of philosophy' discussed in 6.53.[15]

So far as I have gone, this program for clarification is unpersuasively thin. The *Tractatus* provides no begriffsschrift. It provides no guidelines for evaluating whether a proposed 'sign-language' is governed by logical grammar. What the *Tractatus* does provide is the general sentence-form: sentences are truth-functions of independent elementary sentences—they are the result of iterated application of the N-operator (generalized joint denial) to elementary sentences. Is the general sentence-form sufficient to give substance to the Tractarian program of clarification?

On the face of matters, it does not. First, the general sentence-form is too unspecific. At each stage in the construction of a sentence, there are two steps. The first step is the specification of a group of sentences in terms of previously constructed sentences. The second step is the application of the N-operator to this group. It is the first step that is egregiously formally underspecified. Perhaps though Wittgenstein's formal inexplicitness in describing the means for construction of sentences from elementary sentences doesn't matter for understanding the Tractarian view of how clarification is achieved. After all, as Göran Sundholm remarked, 'The author of the *Tractatus*… constitutes the finest example of a philosopher whose technical, formal capacities do not reach the outstanding level of his logico-philosophical thinking.'[16] So, let's put these concerns to one side. There are more serious problems facing the resolute interpreter.

On the view of clarification we are considering, the activity of making sentences clear centrally involves paraphrasing them by begriffsschrift sentences that make explicit what truth-function of which elementary

sentences paraphrases a given colloquial sentence. Wittgenstein, however, studiously refrains from saying anything specific about the forms of Tractarian names and the forms of elementary sentences. So, to have a credible interpretation, resolute interpreters need to say something about how the activity of analysis reaches elementary sentences[17] To this end, I proposed an account of Tractarian analysis in 'Analysis, Independence, Simplicity, and the General Sentence-form.'[18]

Wittgenstein's views on analysis are illuminated by the one example he presents of Tractarian analysis that goes down to the level of elementary sentences. I have in mind a discussion from Wittgenstein's 1929 paper, 'Some Remarks on Logical Form:'

> One might think—and I thought so not long ago—that a statement expressing the degree of a quality could be analyzed into a logical product of simple statements of quantity and a supplementing statement. As I could describe the contents of my pocket by saying 'It contains a penny, a shilling, two keys, and nothing else.' This 'and nothing else.' is the supplementary statement which completes the description.[19]

Wittgenstein goes on to consider statements assigning degrees of brightness to possibly luminous items in terms of objects he calls brightness units. To fix ideas, suppose there are five degrees of brightness, and so five brightness units. A possibly luminous item may have none, some, or all five of the brightness units. Any statement assigning a particular brightness unit to an item is independent of statements assigning any other brightness unit to the thing. The statement that item A has exactly 3 degrees of brightness can now be paraphrased by the familiar quantificational paraphrase of 'There are exactly three different brightness units that A has.' On this analysis, any statement assigning A any degree of brightness quantificationally contradicts the statement assigning A any other degree of brightness.[20]

The brightness-units Wittgenstein discusses are unfamiliar items. The only ground for introducing them is to analyze ascriptions of degrees of brightness as truth-functions of independent elementary sentences. I hold that Wittgenstein takes this attitude toward Tractarian objects generally. Analysis is guided only by the implications and contradictions

manifest among colloquial significant sentences, and it has available only the resources of the general sentence-form to capture or otherwise accommodate these apparent logical relationships. At the level of elementary sentences, these resources are the interlocking differences among forms of objects/Tractarian names on the one hand, and forms of states of things/elementary sentences, on the other. Finally, within a form of object, there is the number of objects of that form.

We should not then expect the vocabulary of elementary sentences to be familiar vocabulary. Rather, our understanding of elementary sentences is exhausted in our understanding how the identification of colloquial sentences with particular truth-functions of elementary sentences represents logical relationships manifest among colloquial sentences. So, we have no grasp on what the different forms of objects are, except via the interlocking contrasts among those forms that give different forms of elementary sentences different roles in representing manifest logical relationships. The same holds for our grasp on the multiplicity of objects within a form. As a result, forms and objects cannot be known individually, but only collectively, as features of a system:

If objects are given, then with them *all* objects are given.

If elementary propositions are given, then with them *all* elementary sentences are given. (5.524)

I take 5.557 to support this view of analysis:

The *application* of logic decides what elementary sentences there are.

What lies in its application, logic cannot anticipate.

It is clear that logic may not conflict with its application.

But logic must have contact with its application.

Therefore logic and its application may not overlap one another.

If I cannot give elementary sentences *a priori* then it must lead to obvious nonsense to try to give them.

Here the application of logic is analysis, and logic is what is fixed by the general sentence form. The general sentence-form, in contrast to the forms of elementary sentences, does not emerge within the activity of clarification. It is available in advance of this activity to guide it, because what drives analysis is the representation of logical relationships among colloquial significant sentences in terms of truth-functions of independent elementary sentences. Without the general sentence-form, we simply have no idea how to begin to go about constructing a begriffsschrift. Furthermore, the general sentence-form is the only thing available in advance of the activity of analysis:

One could say: the one logical constant is what which *all* sentences, according to their nature, have in common with one another.

That however is the general sentence-form. (5.47d-e)

The general sentence form is the essence [*Wesen*] of sentences. (5.471)

This view of analysis fits with a 1931 remark recorded by Waismann:

There is another mistake, which … also pervades my whole book, and that is that there are questions the answer to which will be found at a later date.… Thus I used to believe, for example, that it is the task of logical analysis to discover the elementary propositions.… Yet I did think that the elementary propositions could be specified at a later date. … The wrong conception I want to object to in this connection is the following, that we can hit upon something that we today cannot yet see, that we can *discover* something wholly new.[21]

Note, however, the construction of a Tractarian begriffsschrift will be an arduous undertaking, especially considering its holistic character. I believe that 1919 Wittgenstein thought such construction to be a difficult, but humanly feasible, enterprise.[22] The preceding 1931 quotation indicates as much. Still, he must have anticipated that it would

be some time before a Tractarian begriffsschrift would be available for clarificatory use.

3   The General Sentence-Form

The resolute interpreter does not throw away the general sentence-form in recognizing Wittgenstein's sentences to be nonsensical. Diamond says:

> The metaphysics of the *Tractatus*—metaphysics not ironical and not cancelled—is in the requirements which are internal to the character of language as language, in their being a general form of sentence, in all sentences having this form.[23]

> Conant and Diamond say:

> Resolute readers hold that [1919] Wittgenstein … did not take the procedure of clarification … to depend on anything more than the logical capacities that are part of speaking and thinking. …The activity of clarification did not, as he conceived of it, depend on doctrines about the nature of language. The activity of truth-functional analysis was taken by him not to depend on any theory of language put forward in the book; similarly with the use of translation into a 'concept-script' in which logical equivocation was impossible.[24]

The general sentence-form is both specific and unintuitive in its demand that every significant sentence be a truth-function of independent elementary sentences. On an irresolute interpretation of the *Tractatus* there is no problem here, since the general sentence-form is built into the account of sentences that the book advances. Resolute interpreters reject any such account. But they must offer something in its place. It is not enough at this juncture simply to appeal to general logical and linguistic abilities without saying something about how they lead to the general form. Nor is it sufficient to note that Wittgenstein later takes the idea that every significant sentence is a truth-function of elementary sentences to be a dogmatic assumption.[25] If 1919 Wittgenstein did not view this

idea as a philosophical thesis, how did he then view the general sentence-form? Let me frame the question another way. After throwing away the ladder, Wittgenstein's understanding reader retains the general sentence-form and may use it in devising a begriffsschrift. How does the *Tractatus*, on a resolute interpretation, lead the understanding reader to acknowledge the general sentence-form?[26]

   To begin, I want to put issues surrounding resolution to one side and to review some attractive features of the view of sentences and logic contained in the *Tractatus* which motivate acknowledgment of the general sentence-form.

   Early Russell takes truth and falsity to be indefinable properties of non-linguistic and non-mental propositions toward which minds may take up various propositional attitudes. By the time Wittgenstein arrives in Cambridge in 1911, Russell has abandoned his earlier view in favor of a multiple relation theory of judgment and seeks to characterize the truth of a judgment in terms of a correspondence between judgments, themselves facts, and other facts. His failure to work out a satisfactory account of this correspondence spurs Wittgenstein to do better. The result is Wittgenstein's view of sentences as pictures.

   Wittgenstein first compares sentences and pictures in his September 29, 1914, notebook entry:

> The general concept of a sentence brings with it a quite general concept of the co-ordination of sentence and situation [*Sachverhalt*]: the solution to all my questions must be *extremely* simple.

> In a sentence a world is put together experimentally. (As when in the law-court in Paris a traffic accident is represented with dolls, etc.)

> This must yield the nature [*Wesen*] of truth straightway (if I were not blind).[27]

   Let's consider Wittgenstein's well-known example. In the courtroom there is a board with two pairs of lines representing a particular Parisian intersection. Each of the four cars present in the intersection at the time of a collision is correlated with a wooden block. By arranging the four

blocks on the board, witnesses and lawyers truly or falsely represent the relative spatial positions of the four cars in the moments leading up to the accident.

What makes this a transparent case of a representation of something's being the case? Wittgenstein writes in the December 25, 1914, notebook entry:

> The possibility of the sentence is, of course, based on the principle of signs GOING PROXY for [*vertreten*] objects.

> Thus in the sentence something has *something else* as its proxy.

> But there is also the *common cement.*[28]

There is the correlation of blocks and cars. The common cement is the shared possibilities of spatial arrangement of the blocks on the board and the cars in the intersection. Given a correlation of the individual blocks with the individual cars, any possible arrangement of the blocks matches a unique possible arrangement of the cars, and vice versa. So, we can take possible arrangements of the blocks to present, to model, the same possible arrangements of the cars. The sharing of possibilities makes it intrinsic to an actual arrangement of the blocks that it presents a possible arrangement of the cars. The model in this way contains the possibility of the situation it represents. Moreover, a model is true if the arrangement of blocks in the model matches the arrangement of the corresponding cars, and false otherwise. Thus, truth and falsity are intrinsic to the model. Finally, as the blocks and the cars are distinct, the arrangement of the blocks in a model is independent of the actual arrangement of the cars. In these ways, picturing makes intelligible how the courtroom model has the features of a significant sentence. So, Wittgenstein generalizes the pictorial character of the courtroom model to sentences, with logical form taking over the role of the common cement.

Wittgenstein's interest in truth and representation arises from his interest in logic. In his second letter to Russell (June 22, 1911), he writes: 'Logic must turn out to be a TOTALLY different kind than any other

science,' and he subsequently seeks to understand this total difference (See 6.13.).

As pictures, significant sentences represent possible situations in a single logical space. Each sentence is logically related to every other, if only by the relation of independence. Compound sentences are built up from elementary sentences by use of logical constants. Immediately following the remark from the December 25, 1914, notebook entry quoted two paragraphs back, Wittgenstein propounds his *Grundgedanke*:

> My fundamental thought is that logical constants are not proxies [*nicht vertreten*]. That the logic of facts cannot have anything as its proxy.[29]

He made much the same point in 'Notes on Logic':

> Molecular propositions contain nothing beyond what is contained in their atoms; they add no material information above that contained in their atoms.[30]

All the symbols that go proxy for anything in a sentence occur in its elementary components.

Elementary sentences are the minimal units of sense, each of which is a picture presenting the holding of a state of things (see 4.0311 and 4.21).[31] Sentences generally are expressions of agreement and disagreement with the truth-possibilities of elementary sentences from which they are constructed—they are truth-functions of elementary sentences (4.4).[32] There are two extreme cases of truth-functions. The first are tautologies that agree with every truth-possibility. The second are contradictions that disagree with every truth-possibility. Making no discriminations among the possibilities, Wittgenstein calls them both senseless [*sinnlos*].

We can now appreciate how Wittgenstein views the consequence relation over significant sentences. The truth-possibilities of elementary sentences with which a sentence agrees are its truth-grounds (5.101). The truth of a sentence A follows from the truth of a sentence B just case all the truth-grounds of B are also truth-grounds of A (5.11-5.12). A's following from B is thus intrinsic to the sense of these significant sentences and so must be reflected in any expression of these senses (3.341). 5.13

says, 'That the truth of one sentence follows from the truth of other sentences is something we see from the structure of the sentences.'[33] The closest we can come to setting forth this consequence relation is by the tautology 'If B then A' (see 6.1201). In this way, logic is internal to language and its use to say what is the case. There is no domain of logical facts; there are no sentences of logic apart from tautologies (6.1).

The general sentence-form is the distillate of the story of sentences and logic I have just sketched,[34] a story extractable from the *Tractatus*. As his retrospective remarks on the *Tractatus* in *Philosophical Investigations* §§89-107 indicate, Wittgenstein takes himself to have come to *see* the general form in the sentences of his language, if he looks beneath appearances into the matter itself.[35] §97 tells us that logic is the essence of thinking which

> … presents an order: namely the a priori order of the world; that is, the order of *possibilities*, which the world and thinking must have in common. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty may attach to it. —It must rather be of the purest crystal.

§102 says:

> The strict and clear rules for the logical construction of sentences appear to us as something in the background—hidden in the medium of understanding. I already see them (even though through a medium), for I do understand the sign, I mean something by it.

§103 stands back, commenting:

> The ideal, as we conceive of it, is unshakable. You can't step outside it. You must always turn back. … How come? The idea is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.

§107 adds: 'For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not something I had *discovered*: it was a requirement.' Retrospectively viewed, the

Tractatus was designed to outfit its readers with the glasses and to get them to impose the requirement. My suggestion is then that Wittgenstein intends a more elaborate version of the story I sketched to lead the understanding reader of the *Tractatus* to see the general sentence-form in the sentences of her own language.[36] I call this seeing the *recognition of the general sentence-form as such*, and think of it as a sort of aspect-shift.

It might be objected that recognition of the general sentence-form as such is a matter of the acceptance of a philosophical thesis. After all, *Tractatus* 6, after displaying the general-sentence-form, comments: 'This [the variable given above] is the general form of sentences.' Diamond maintains that the word 'sentences' is problematic in this context.[37] On the surface, the word is being used here as a predicate to circumscribe a group of things. Indeed, 'sentence' is frequently used colloquially and unproblematically as a predicate, for example, in the sentence 'There are twenty-two sentences on this page.' Diamond urges, however, that in the context of logical discussions, *sentence* is a formal concept. It is signified in a begriffsschrift by a variable whose values are all sentences; that variable is the general sentence-form. She argues that some colloquial sentences employ such a variable, for example: 'Everything (every sentence) Trump said at his rally is false.' In their begriffsschrift paraphrases, the word 'sentence' will be supplanted by the form-series variable that *Tractatus* 6 identifies to be the general sentence-form.[38] There is no way to use the variable signifying the formal concept *sentence* to identify the values of that variable as sentences. No straightforward predicative use of 'sentence' can do so either.

Nevertheless, use of 'sentence' as an apparent predicate pervades the story that elicits recognition of the general sentence-form as such. Diamond sees Wittgenstein as employing an elucidatory strategy like Frege employs for the distinction between objects and concepts. The discussion of sentences and logic designed to lead us to the general sentence-form uses 'sentence' as a predicate and treats generalizations over sentences as familiar quantificational generalizations. Part of recognizing the general sentence-form as such is to see that there is no use of the general sentence-form as a variable to supplant the use of the word 'sentence' in this discussion so that the word 'sentence' has been given no meaning in it. Understanding the variable which is the general-form and

its use in paraphrasing colloquial sentences gives the understanding reader the essence of sentences, so to speak, and enables her happily to discard these discussions as confused nonsense without any lingering sense of something left unsaid or unsayable.[39]

I thus maintain that grappling with a story which turns out to be nonsensical leads the understanding reader to recognize the general sentence-form as such, and that this recognition survives that reader's realization that the story is nonsense. There is nothing here that is *ipso facto* incompatible with a resolute reading. As Diamond explains:

> My point then is that the *Tractatus*, in its understanding of itself as addressed to those who are in the grip of philosophical nonsense, and in its understanding of the kind of demands it makes on its readers, supposes a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it.[40]

In the present case, there are two factors that enable the understanding reader to hold on to the general sentence-form after realizing the story that elicited its recognition as such to be nonsensical.

The first factor is brought out by Diamond's remarks about the story's use of 'sentence.' The attempt to make sense of this story in light of the logical distinctions the *Tractatus* instills reveals the story's generalizations to be spurious. Logic provides no generality that operates at that abstract level—there is no such abstract level. Here there is, however, a lacuna to be filled. Diamond's discussion of the use of 'sentence' in elucidations of the general sentence-form relies on the distinction between external and formal properties. Moreover, I too have mentioned logical distinctions that the *Tractatus* has conveyed. Diamond's discussion and mine both raise the question of the role of the say-show distinction in the dialectic that each finds in the *Tractatus*. Most commentators in explaining this distinction contrast *what* sentences say with *what* they show, using in both cases clauses of indirect discourse. The *Tractatus* itself in places presents the say-show distinction in this way. (For example, see 4.1211 and 4.1212.) Any resolute understanding of saying and showing will have to be non-contrastive: there are not two species of content, sayable

content and the ineffable content that can only be shown, as ontology-oriented interpretations maintain. I know of two non-contrastive interpretations of the say-show distinction, Michael Kremer's and Jean-Philippe Narboux's.[41] I will not here discuss how either of these might be pressed into service to fill this lacuna.

The second factor appears in reflection on the collapse of the *Tractatus* story about sentences into nonsense. I think that reflecting on this collapse led Wittgenstein, and should lead his understanding reader, to appreciate that the urge to tell the story is yet a further abortive attempt to take care of logic. The understanding reader's recognition of the general sentence-form in the sentences of her language reveals how logic is already present in colloquial language as it is. In this way recognition of the general sentence-form as such releases the understanding reader from the compulsion to tell the story.[42] I thus take my account of the recognition of the general sentence-form as such to be compatible with a resolute interpretation. I suspect that any resolute reading that holds on to the general sentence-form will have to say something similar here.

In the foreword to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declares that his book definitively solves the problems of philosophy in their essentials. The resolute interpreter takes the *Tractatus* to do this by presenting a method for clarifying sentences, a method requiring use of a begriffsschrift. Now there is nothing in the *Tractatus* suggesting that Wittgenstein's understanding reader must have a begriffsschrift in hand in order to throw away the ladder and see the world correctly. It then can look as if the understanding reader should devote herself to the activity of clarification by constructing and using a begriffsschrift to analyze the sentences of colloquial language to consummate the solution of the problems of philosophy.

I doubt that 1919 Wittgenstein viewed his book in this way. I do not think that Wittgenstein thought engaging in an activity of clarification involving a fully developed begriffsschrift would or should be a priority for the understanding reader any more than it was a priority for him after completing the book. Wittgenstein saw no pressing need for actual clarifications of the sort a begriffsschrift offers. First, 5.5563 tells us, 'All the sentences of our colloquial language are actually, just as they are, logically completely in order.' Second, I earlier noted how use of a

begriffsschrift to expose philosophical nonsense would exhibit the correct method of philosophy. 6.53 presents the correct method using contrary-to-fact conditionals, indicating that Wittgenstein did not foresee the actual use of this method.[43] Third, while 1919 Wittgenstein thinks that philosophical problems arise through our misunderstanding of the logic of our language, those misunderstandings are mainly the product of equivocations like those mentioned in the 3.32s, equivocations arising from the enormous complexity of colloquial language. There is no suggestion in early Wittgenstein that posing philosophical problems is endemic to the use of colloquial language.

Wittgenstein thought that in uncovering the general sentence-form, he had in essentials solved the problems of philosophy.[44] First, it is the recognition of the general sentence-form that gives Wittgenstein the method of clarification resolute readers find in the *Tractatus*. It also grounds the understanding reader's confidence in the scope and adequacy of the method to solve the individual problems of philosophy. However, I think that Wittgenstein presents the use of a completed begriffsschrift to clarify sentences as an ideal that establishes standards for the complete clarity and perspicuity in the expression of thoughts which Wittgenstein believed to be possible. Second, for early Wittgenstein, a principal goad to philosophy is the desire to take care of logic. He saw this in himself and his teachers, Russell and Frege. As I urged above, recognition of the general sentence-form as such and the orientation toward logic it brings with it saps this desire.

Perhaps, there is a third way in which the general sentence-form deals with the problems of philosophy. The general sentence-form is not the form of all sentences. It is, as its presentation at 4.5 indicates, the form of sentences that say how things stand. As Diamond has noted, the *Tractatus* recognizes that there are sentences that have a use in language, just not this use.[45] Recognizing that a sentence does not have a use to say how things stand does not exclude finding it to have some other use in language, perhaps one easily confused with saying how things stand.[46]

I assume that putative philosophical theses are put forward as substantive necessary truths. It is, however, important to their advocates that their theses say how things stand, that saying how things necessarily stand be a species of saying how things stand so that their theses are true or false

just as contingent factual claims are. No such advocate would acknowledge any sentence used some other way as a formulation of her thesis. Furthermore, no such advocate would acknowledge a sentence she recognized to be a tautology to paraphrase the thesis. Finally, no such advocate would acknowledge a paraphrase she recognized to assert a contingent matter of fact. Under these circumstances, the understanding reader, having recognized the general sentence-form as such, finds that there is no sense to be made of the putative thesis as a sentence saying how things stand. The philosophical thesis, taken to be an attempt to say how things stand, may then be discarded as nonsense.[47]

The recognition of the general sentence-form as such is available to guide the understanding reader in the construction of a begriffsschrift. It is available to ground her confidence in the comprehensive adequacy of the method of the *Tractatus* to attain in principle complete clarity and perspicuity. It is available to remind her of how logic takes care of itself. I claim that in the same way, it is available, at least under some circumstances, to anticipate the result of subjecting philosophical theses to analysis.[48] I see here no serious breach with a resolute interpretation.[49]

Notes

1. Wittgenstein's word 'Satz' in the *Tractatus* is translated 'proposition' in the two leading translations. I prefer the translation 'sentence' to emphasize that Wittgenstein's *Sätze* are linguistic items in contrast to the use of 'proposition' in early Russell and in contemporary philosophy of language.
2. In Diamond (1991b), 181, Diamond says that the interpretations she opposes 'chicken out.' I also wanted a more graceful alternative to 'non-chickening out interpretation.'
3. For a discussion of the marks and varieties of resolute interpretations, see Conant and Bronzo (2017).
4. Some other interpretations take off from 'Throwing Away the Ladder' in a way that makes them equally deserving of the title 'resolute.' My restricted use of 'resolute' is to save me from constantly having to qualify my uses here.

5. In the literature my ontology-oriented interpretations are often called 'metaphysical interpretations' or 'standard interpretations.'

6. I follow the Ogden-Ramsey translation in my use of 'significant' to translate '*sinnvoll.*'

7. 3.31 defines an expression or symbol as any part of a sentence that 'characterizes its sense.' 3.314 states the context principle for expressions. In speaking of Wittgenstein's context principle, I mean both of these principles.

8. For example, see McGuinness (2002), 87–88. Hide Ishiguro and Peter Winch make similar objections. For Diamond's version of the objection see Diamond (2019), 110–114.

9. This case is assimilated by Diamond's opponent to the case of the semantically anomalous sentence 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.' To talk here of semantic anomaly assumes that 'sleep' here is used as it is in the sentence, 'I always sleep eight hours at night.' Similarly, the semantic clash between 'ideas' and 'sleep' prevents 'sleep' being used as the verb of a meaningful sentence whose subject is 'ideas.'

10. Here and later I mention central characteristics of resolute interpretations that are important for the sort of resolute interpretation I discuss. I do not present these as the defining criteria for resolute interpretations, and I do not mention other characteristics which some may take to be essential to resolute interpretations, for example, the putative distinction between the frame of the *Tractatus* and its elucidatory body.

11. This feature of a resolute understanding of 'nonsense' has been made by several commentators. For example, see Conant (2002), 423–424; Goldfarb (1997), 71; and Sullivan (2004b), 38 and 40.

12. However, the last and parenthetical sentence of 3.323 may indicate that Wittgenstein would think of 'bank' as an ambiguous symbol, at least if we think of 'bank' in both uses as signifying different things in the same way.

13. I use 'begriffsschrift' as Wittgenstein does, to mean a devised logical notation governed by logical grammar. In some places, including 3.325, Wittgenstein uses the word '*Zeichensprache*' ('sign-language').

14. I do not intend to suggest that clarification must await the development of a full-fledged begriffsschrift. Kremer (2013) notes how Wittgenstein uses pieces of devised notations to bring out how some of his criticisms of Frege and Russell turn on equivocations like those mentioned in 3.323. However, it is the use of a full begriffsschrift that gives the meth-

ods of clarification in the *Tractatus* the reach required to solve the problems of philosophy.

15. Here I follow Kuusela (2008), 102.
16. Sundholm (1992), 76.
17. Warren Goldfarb calls this '…the deep difficulty in trying to attain a resolute understanding of the *Tractatus*', in Goldfarb (1997), 72.
18. The material in the rest of this section is drawn largely from §2 of Ricketts (2014).
19. Wittgenstein (1929), 167.
20. We can go on to develop a logic of brightness in logical terms. For example, we can use a disjunction of the options to define a two-place *brighter than* relation. From this definition, the asymmetry and transitivity of the *brighter than* relation quantificationally follows. The use of form-series to stipulate the bases for a truth-operation gives this strategy for analysis broad application. In Ricketts (2014), 283–284, I argue that the 'color-exclusion' objection Wittgenstein goes on to make in Wittgenstein (1929) would have been dismissed by the Wittgenstein of 1919.
21. McGuinness (1979), 182.
22. See 4.002b: "It is humanly impossible to gather the logic of language *immediately* from [language]." (My emphasis.) I suspect that Wittgenstein was overly sanguine about the feasibility of constructing a begriffsschrift.
23. Diamond (1991a), 19.
24. Conant and Diamond (2004), 64.
25. In Conant and Diamond (2004), 82–83, Conant and Diamond usefully list a series of unwitting metaphysical commitments contained in the *Tractatus*. They do not address the question I am raising. For a detailed discussion of Wittgenstein's later attitude toward the *Tractatus*, see Kuusela (2008), Chap. 3.
26. Kuusela raises a similar question for resolute interpretations in Kuusela (2011), 132.
27. Wittgenstein (1979a), 7.
28. Wittgenstein (1979a), 37.
29. NB 25.12.14 is incorporated verbatim into the *Tractatus* as 4.0312b. I have quoted the Anscombe translation of the notebook entry for the way that her use of 'proxy' marks how Wittgenstein here uses '*vertreten*,' not '*darstellen*.'
30. Wittgenstein (1979b), 100.

31. In Ricketts (2014), §1, I argue that Wittgenstein's intensional conception of truth-functions (agreement and disagreement with truth-*possibilities*) motivates the requirement that the elementary sentences be independent of each other. Kremer gives a different, but compatible, motivation for the independence of elementary sentences in terms of the simplicity of their component names. See Kremer (1997), §4.

32. For example, Wittgenstein's N-operator, applied to a group of sentences, yields that truth-function which agrees only with those truth-functions of elementary sentences with which every sentence in the group disagrees. In this way the sentence a truth-operation yields is a function of the senses of the sentences to which the operation was applied (5.2341).

33. Wittgenstein acknowledges that some notations make it easier to see this from the sentences than others. See 5.1311.

34. In this paragraph and the next, I am indebted to Diamond's discussion of Anscombe's exposition of the picture theory and the general sentence-form in Diamond (2019), pp 117–118, but we make somewhat different things out of the comparison.

35. Wittgenstein uses this rhetoric in *Philosophical Investigations,* §92. I am indebted to Cora Diamond for bringing these remarks to bear on *Tractatus* interpretation. See Diamond (2011), 252.

36. I owe this idea of *seeing the general sentence-form in the sentences of one's language* to Diamond. See Diamond (2011), 251, the second way to view remark 6 of the *Tractatus.* See also Diamond (2000), 151. I think that my views here coincide with Diamond's.

37. See Diamond (2019), especially 137–149.

38. See Diamond (2019), 141 and Diamond (2012). The view of the general sentence-form Diamond advances in this paper is controversial. See Sullivan (2004a), to which Diamond's paper replies.

39. See Diamond (2019), 146–147.

40. Diamond (2000), 157–58. See also 151.

41. See Kremer (2007) and (2013). 'The Whole Meaning of a Book of Nonsense' and 'The Cardinal Problem of Philosophy' in Diamond *Festschrift*. See Narboux (2014). 'Showing, the Medium Voice, and the Unity of the *Tractatus.*'

42. Here I'm indebted to Michael Kremer who emphasizes the importance of the theme of letting logic take care of itself in reading the Tractatus in Kremer (2013).

43. Warren Goldfarb called my attention to the use of counterfactual conditionals in 6.53.
44. For a similar claim, see Kuusela (2008), 47–49 and 101.
45. For example, see Diamond (2011), 247.
46. See Kremer (2002). See Conant and Diamond (2004), 72–75.
47. I think Kuusela comes close to this view in Kuusela (2008), 25 and 99. Of course, the advocate of philosophical theses will not be moved by this dismissal of her putative statement, but neither will she be satisfied by the correct method of philosophy of 6.53.
48. The role I have suggested that the recognition of general sentence-form as such plays in a resolute reading brings that reading closer to the interpretation of the *Tractatus* presented in McGinn (2006).
49. I'm grateful to Tyke Nunez for a very useful conversation on some of the ideas of this chapter.

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