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Whereof one cannot speak? Reading the *Tractatus*

Abstract:

This paper discusses the concluding remarks of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It argues that those remarks specify the task for the readers of this strange text: to overcome the illusion of sense that the propositions of the book possess, and win through to a recognition that those propositions are in fact nonsensical. In order to achieve this recognition, the text demands that its readers undergo an ethical transformation. For to recognise 'philosophical theorising' as nonsensical is to cease approaching the world in a spirit of dissatisfaction and alienation from one's own life with language. In this way, the text proposes that those who can 'win out over' its propositions, will come to 'see the world rightly'.

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Das Schwere ist hier nicht bis auf den Grund zu graben, sondern den Grund, der vor uns liegt, als Grund erkennen.

The difficulty here is not to dig down to the ground; on the contrary: it is to recognise the ground that lies before us *as* the ground. (Wittgenstein 1978, VI/§31).

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (the *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*; hereafter referred to simply as 'the *Tractatus*')¹ famously ends with the following words:

6.54 My propositions elucidate in this way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through them —on them— over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed it.)

He must win out over [*überwinden*] these propositions, and then he will see the world rightly [*richtig*].

7 Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent [*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen*].

And with that —silence.

These concluding remarks can be taken as specifying the task that the *Tractatus* sets its readers. At first blush, the task might appear to be obviously paradoxical, for Wittgenstein seems to be asking us to engage in the (apparently) impossible task of understanding nonsense —a paradox which we can express in the form of a dilemma. Either (we might say) the propositions of the *Tractatus* are understandable, and hence are not nonsense; or they are nonsense, and hence are not understandable (for there is, in that case, nothing to understand). This, however, is too hasty a reading. Closer attention to the opening sentence of 6.54 shows that Wittgenstein is not asking us to understand the *propositions* of the *Tractatus*, but rather to understand *him* (as the writer of nonsense).²

In other words, the task we (the readers) are set by the *Tractatus* is precisely that of recognising the propositions that precede these closing remarks as nonsense. To understand the author (or, to use the phrase from the Preface, to read the work “with understanding” [*mit Verständnis*]), just is to recognise the nonsensicality of those propositions. This, it is implied, is a difficult, arduous achievement, for we must struggle with, battle, ‘win out over’ the propositions —climb ‘through them, on them, over them’— to reach that recognition. The words used here all suggest that this battle with the propositions of the *Tractatus* is (at least in part) a task that is set not just for our intellect, but also for our *will*.

If this is the task of the *Tractatus*, then one thing that immediately follows is that Wittgenstein's work must be read dialectically. What is meant by this can be explained if we think, in contrast, about the nature of an ‘ordinary’ (i.e., *non*-dialectical) philosophical treatise. Such a treatise can be thought of as a progressive unveiling of a unified set of propositions that stand in various logical relations to one another (most importantly, perhaps, where certain propositions function as premises, or reasons, for accepting other propositions). In such a treatise, then, each and every proposition can be treated as a commitment of the author, and which must therefore be consistent with all the other propositions that the treatise expresses. There is thus a sense in which, for a non-dialectical philosophical text, the

sequence in which the propositions are presented to the reader is accidental, for the propositions exist ‘all in one go’ as it were —as part of a single structure, a (putatively consistent) theory or body of truths.

The *Tractatus*, however, cannot be read in this fashion —at least, it cannot so be read if we are to take seriously its closing words.³ To begin with, if the propositions preceding 6.54 are indeed nonsensical, then *ipso facto* they cannot be taken to express any views, or commitments, of the author. Hence, if the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsensical, then we cannot read the work as the progressive unveiling of a unified theory (with the overarching aim being to persuade the reader of the truth of that theory). Instead, insofar as the work appears to present a theory or theories, it must do so ironically —strategically— and with other aims in view.

Wittgenstein, after all, begins the Preface to the *Tractatus* with the words “[p]erhaps this book will only be understood by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it —or at least similar thoughts.—So it is not a textbook [*Es ist also kein Lehrbuch*]”. Which is to say that the *Tractatus* does not conceive of its readers as ignorant of something, and thus needing to be given something that they do not have (such as the correct philosophical account of the world, of logic, of language). Instead, the text is dialectical in that it attempts to work on its reader a more profound transformation —more profound, that is, than merely moving the reader from ignorance to knowledge via the provision of the correct theory.

We are told the nature of this transformation in the final words of 6.54, where Wittgenstein states that in winning out over the propositions of the *Tractatus* (that is, recognising them as nonsensical), we will thereby come to ‘see the world rightly’. The word ‘*richtig*’ used here signals that Wittgenstein sees this recognition —the reader’s victory over his propositions— as an *ethical* achievement —or, to give this matter a slightly different inflection, a *spiritual* one. The aim of the text is, in other words, to transform how its readers ‘see the world’ —to move them from seeing it wrongly to seeing it rightly.

The dialectic of the *Tractatus* thus begins with the author’s imaginatively taking up the perspective of someone who ‘sees the world wrongly’, and trying to work within that perspective in order to transform it into a ‘seeing rightly’. In the words of one of Wittgenstein’s later ‘Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*’: “[t]o convince someone of the truth, it is not enough to state it, but rather one must find the *path* from error to truth” (Wittgenstein 1993: 119; emphasis in the original). The ‘path from error to truth’ obviously enough begins in error, and may, no doubt, have to pass through many other errors, on its way towards the truth. After all, if I am attempting to talk somebody out of a profound delusion, then simply announcing ‘you are deluded’ is unlikely to be persuasive (no matter how true that statement might be). Instead, I may need to begin by talking *as if* that delusion were truth —that is, I may need to start by trying to enter imaginatively into the world inhabited by the delusional, in order to find a path out of it that they can follow alongside me.

At the beginning of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein thus conceives of his reader as seeing the world wrongly. This ‘wrong-seeing’, it seems, is intrinsically related to an inability to recognise certain kinds of proposition as nonsense. Hence, the work begins by presenting (what Wittgenstein holds to be) nonsense, but with, as it were, a straight face. By the end of the work, if we have understood the author, we will come to recognise that, from the

beginning, the book has been composed of nonsense —and we will thereby come to see the world rightly. The capacity to recognise the text’s propositions as nonsense is thus seen as itself involving an ethical conversion of some kind —a turning, or change in perspective, from seeing wrongly to seeing rightly.

The nature of the ethical conversion or transformation which the *Tractatus* aims to bring about in its readers, is more explicitly articulated in Wittgenstein’s famous letter to the publisher Ludwig von Ficker. Here he writes of the *Tractatus*, that

the material will seem strange to you. But in reality it is not strange, for the point of the book is ethical. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now but which I will write out for you here because it will perhaps be a key to the work for you. What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here, and the other, that I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the *rigorous, only* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe: that where *many* others today are just *gassing* [*was viele heute schwefeln*], I have in my book determined its place, by being silent about it. And for that reason, unless I am very much mistaken, the book will say a great deal that you yourself want to say. Only perhaps you won’t see that it is said in the book. For now, I would recommend you to read the *preface* and the *conclusion*, because they contain the most direct expression of the point of the book. (Wittgenstein 1969: 35; emphasis in the original).

This passage brings out explicitly the connection between the last part of 6.54 and the famous closing proposition 7 of the *Tractatus* —in which seeing the world rightly results in *silence*. This may certainly seem a strange end point to reach. Wittgenstein’s last proposition in the *Tractatus* is that (in the words of the Ogden translation) “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”. But this sentence itself is a kind of silence, for it says no more than: *we cannot talk about what we cannot talk about*. And that, it seems, is not to tell us something we did not already know —and therefore the path of the *Tractatus* might seem to have taken us precisely nowhere. This is, in other words, to raise the question of just what sort of ‘silence’ the *Tractatus* envisages as the closure of philosophy.

If the *Tractatus* is thus a dialectical attempt to lead the reader along ‘the path from error to truth’, then, as we have seen from this consideration of its closing remarks, it is a path that begins in nonsense and ends in silence. But what sort of error is nonsense? What sort of truth is silence? And how can treading the path from nonsense to silence be an ethical transformation?

Let us begin with the first of these questions —that is, what sort of task is it, to recognise the propositions of the *Tractatus* as nonsensical? If one is presented with a string of gibberish (‘urgle, burgle, pillion and smy’ for example), then clearly it is not much of an achievement to recognise that string as nonsensical. And certainly here there seems to be no foothold for the idea that this recognition could in any way be an ethical achievement. However, it is obvious that the propositions of the *Tractatus* do not resemble gibberish in any straightforward fashion. Indeed, it is quite the opposite, for the propositions seem to be a profound investigation into the central problems of philosophy —of the ultimate nature of the world, of logic, of thought, of language, of the self, and so on. The difficulty is thus precisely that of passing from propositions that have every appearance of being ‘a profound

investigation into the central problems of philosophy’, to a recognition that those propositions are in fact nonsensical.

Achieving such a recognition —successfully piercing the illusion of sense that Wittgenstein’s propositions possess— is such a difficult struggle because the reader (or, at least, the philosopher in each reader) desperately *wants* the propositions of the *Tractatus* to be meaningful. Consider some remarks made by Wittgenstein in the so-called ‘Big Typescript’ of 1933.⁴ These occur in §86 of this manuscript, which is entitled “Difficulty of philosophy not the intellectual difficulty of the sciences, but the difficulty of a change of attitude. Resistances of the will must be overcome”. Here Wittgenstein writes that

[a]s I have often said, philosophy does not lead me to any renunciation, since I do not abstain from saying something, but rather abandon a certain combination of words as senseless. In another sense, however, philosophy requires a resignation, but one of feeling and not of intellect [*aber des Gefühls, nicht des Verstandes*]. And maybe that is what makes it so difficult for many. It can be difficult not to use an expression, just as it is difficult to hold back tears, or an outburst of rage.

...

Work on philosophy is ... actually more of a kind of work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On the way one sees things. (And what one demands of them.) (Wittgenstein 1984: 161–3).

Our achievement as readers of the *Tractatus* (at least, if we are successful in reaching the recognition that Wittgenstein asks of us), is thus that we will ‘abandon certain combinations of words as senseless’. It is precisely because the words are senseless, that to abandon them is not to ‘abstain from saying something’ —for nonsense says nothing. To explain Wittgenstein’s thought here, the contrast with the philosophy of Kant is instructive.⁵ Kant (at least on standard readings of his ‘transcendental idealism’) holds that there is a realm of ‘things in themselves’, which are beyond the limits of our possible experience, and about which we therefore cannot theorise. As Kant puts it in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we are “never to venture with speculative reason beyond the boundaries of experience” (Kant 1998 [1787]: B xxiv). Kant, in other words, requires of us a resignation of intellect —we must ‘abstain from saying something’ about the *Dinge an sich*, and thus give up on the traditional projects of metaphysics (as being beyond the capacities of our ‘discursive intellects’). For Wittgenstein, however, we need to recognise that our propositions were, all along, plain nonsense. Hence, there is no ‘something’ that we ‘cannot say’.

To put this another way, recognising the propositions of the *Tractatus* as nonsensical does not involve giving up on a metaphysical project (e.g., of ‘explaining the meaningfulness of language’ or of ‘showing how thought connects to reality’) as being ‘too difficult for us’, or ‘beyond our limited capacities’, or ‘outside the bounds of possible experience’. Rather, it involves recognising that *there is no such project*, and there never was —that, all along, we had been speaking words that lacked any sense.

If the *Tractatus* thus demands no ‘resignation of intellect’ from us, it does —if we are to follow the passage from the ‘Big Typescript’ quoted above— ask for a ‘resignation of feeling’. And this, in turn, means that reading the text involves ‘a kind of work on oneself’,

on ‘the way one sees things’ and ‘what one demands of them’. Now, if the recognition of the propositions of the *Tractatus* as nonsense involves a ‘resignation of feeling’, it must be because speaking this nonsense had seemed the way to satisfy desires that lie deep in us. In Wittgenstein’s terms, we had been making certain ‘demands’ of the world (of language, of thought, of ourselves), and our ‘metaphysical project’ had seemed the way to make the world answer to those demands. Resigning ourselves to the thought that we had been speaking nonsense thus involves working on ourselves, and relinquishing those demands and desires.⁶

It thus needs to be considered just what ‘demands’ and ‘desires’ the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus* give the impression of satisfying. A full answer to this question would require a working through of the details of the *Tractatus*, but a schematic answer can at least be attempted. At the centre of Wittgenstein’s work is what looks like a philosophical account of language. This is an account that purports to explain how it is possible for language to ‘connect to reality’ —or, as we might also put it, how it is possible for language to ‘say something’, or for it to ‘depict a state of affairs’, or how language comes to be ‘meaningful, and not just mere noises and marks’. Now, if the reader of the *Tractatus* (at this point in the text) is conceived of as imagining this to be a possible project, with a possible answer, then one thing is clear. It is that that reader is looking at our life with language as *insufficient* in some way. That is, the reader is as aware as any of us that people say such-and-such to one another, go on in such-and-such ways with language, and so on. But this life with language (which is just to say, our *life*) —which lies open to view, which we all know, which is in front of all our noses— is viewed by the imagined reader of the *Tractatus* as leaving something crucial unexplained, a crucial question unanswered. Indeed, what it (supposedly) leaves ‘unexplained’ is precisely the most important thing of all: what it is that makes language *language*.

The *Tractatus* thus confronts a reader who makes an implicit demand —the demand that there must be something *more* about language than ‘what lies open to view’, with this ‘something more’ being the hidden *essence* of language. How, then, does the *Tractatus* confront and confound this demand, this desire, for something more? Stated somewhat schematically, what the *Tractatus* aims to do is to collapse this demand from within. By leading us to redescribe language and what we say, it aims to show that ‘what lies open to view’ —our life with language— is actually *enough*. *Enough* in that, if we can come to see our life with language rightly, we will thereby see that any demand for ‘more’ (for a ‘philosophical explanation of meaning’, for example) is meaningless.

This is the central point of the so-called (and mis-named) ‘picture theory’ of the *Tractatus*.⁷ The *Tractatus* draws us to engage in a redescription of our language (using the resources provided by the logical symbolisms developed by Frege and Russell), which will enable us to see that our propositions signify in as obvious and unproblematic a way as do pictures or a ‘tableau vivant’ [*ein Lebendes Bild*, 4.0311]. How does a tableau vivant say that the police car is on the road? What says this, is that the model of the police car sits on the model of the road (cf. 3.1432 —“That ‘a’ stands to ‘b’ in a certain relation says *that aRb*”). How does the picture show person A standing next to person B? What says this, is that the picture of A is painted next to the picture of B. These comments are as patently obvious as they sound —this is not a ‘discovery’ (for, as the Preface told us, the *Tractatus* is not *ein Lehrbuch*), and the talk of ‘pictures’ is not a *theory* (in the sense of a claim that is open to debate). But if the text is successful, it will bring us (its readers) to engage in the activity of redescribing our

language from within (after all, “Philosophy is not a body of doctrine, but an activity” 4.112). And our engagement in this activity of elucidation will help us to see that meaningful propositions say what they say as unproblematically as a picture pictures, or as an arrow on a signpost specifies a direction (cf. 3.144). If this redescription of language from within works, then it will lead the reader to see that any demands for ‘further explanation’ are meaningless —because there is nothing more to be explained. That is, there is no philosophical story to be told about ‘how language connects to reality’; rather, by seeing the facts of our life with language rightly, the ‘connection’, as it were, becomes obvious, for that language says what it says is right *there*, in that life, in front of our noses. In other words, if we see the phenomena of language rightly, the philosophical questions disappear —“and this itself is the answer” (to borrow Wittgenstein’s words from 6.52).

This has, no doubt, been stated too swiftly and too dogmatically; but it is hoped that the main point is at least clear enough. However, it must now be asked just why Wittgenstein says that our *will* resists this insight, this seeing ‘rightly’. In the words of the *Philosophical Investigations*, why is it that “we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful” (Wittgenstein 1967: §129)? And why might we find ourselves resisting the insight that there is nothing here to be explained, and that our ‘philosophical theories’ were in fact nothing but nonsense? If we resist this insight, it must be because we are convinced that what lies open to view (about our lives with language, about the world) *cannot* be enough — that that *must* be insufficient, and that there *must* be something further, deeper, to be explained about it.

To feel this way is to feel the temptation to say: ‘But our lives with language could go on *exactly* as they do, and yet we could be doing nothing more than making meaningless noises to one another. Perhaps language never really connects to reality at all; perhaps we never really communicate with one another at all; perhaps each self is stranded in its own incommunicable world. This is why there must be *something* that *connects* language to the world, that makes it possible for us to say and mean something, that makes it possible for communication really to take place. And that is what a philosophical theory of language is for: it will tell us what that *something* is, and how it connects language to the world.’⁸

For the author of the *Tractatus*, these words are an expression of a profound dissatisfaction with how things are —a dissatisfaction with our life with language, with the world. And note that this is not a dissatisfaction that things are *this* way rather than *that* way (that is, a dissatisfaction that certain facts hold, rather than others). Rather, it is a sort of *a priori* dissatisfaction —a dissatisfaction with things no matter how they are. For the whole point of this dissatisfaction is that, no matter how things as a matter of fact went on in our lives with language, the demand is that that life still needs supplementing with something more —the ‘explanation’ of which was promised by our ‘metaphysical investigation’. Without this ‘something more’ (this ‘essence’ or ‘*a priori* foundation’ of language), then, however things might be, they would not be enough (for our words ‘could still be just noises’; we could ‘for all we know, always fail to communicate’; and so on and so forth).

To put this another way, that the reader is powerfully attracted to the illusion of sense spun by the propositions of the *Tractatus* (the illusion that they are, for example, a ‘philosophical theory of language’), is an expression of a certain attitude or spirit towards the world —a spirit of dissatisfaction with our life with language. Coming to recognise those propositions

as nonsensical, is to let oneself be struck rightly by ‘what lies open to view’, and to relinquish that dissatisfaction. In doing this—in unmasking the nonsense that had masqueraded as sense for us—we thus come to ‘see the world rightly’.

To understand this change in perspective that the *Tractatus* aims to work on its reader—to understand how it involves an *ethical* transformation—it is worth drawing on some of Wittgenstein’s remarks from his ‘Lecture on Ethics’, given in 1929. In this lecture, Wittgenstein tells us that

in my case, it always happens that the idea of one particular experience presents itself to me which therefore is, in a sense, my ethical experience *par excellence* and this is the reason why, in talking to you now, I will use this experience as my first and foremost example. ... I believe that the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it I *wonder at the existence of the world*. And then I am inclined to use such phrases as “how extraordinary that anything should exist” or “how extraordinary that the world should exist”. ... And I will now describe the experience of wondering at the existence of the world by saying: it is the experience of seeing the world as a miracle. (Wittgenstein 1993: 41, 43).

Perhaps, then, another way of trying to point at the nature of ‘seeing the world rightly’ is with the words: ‘seeing the world as a miracle’.

To see how this idea can be related to the themes of the *Tractatus* explored above—the collapsing of philosophy into nonsense, and the corresponding relinquishment of a dissatisfaction with the world—it may be useful briefly to explore some thoughts of G. K. Chesterton that, in some important respects, run parallel to those of Wittgenstein.⁹ In his *Autobiography* (2006 [1936]), and in his magnificent work *Orthodoxy: A Personal Philosophy* (1961 [1908]), Chesterton discusses his hatred for both an ‘optimistic’ and a ‘pessimistic’ attitude towards the world. He writes that both attitudes

are ultimately based on the strange and staggering heresy that a human being has a right to dandelions; that in some extraordinary fashion we can demand the very pick of all the dandelions in the garden of Paradise; that we owe no thanks for them at all and need feel no wonder at them at all; and above all no wonder at being thought worthy to receive them. Instead of saying, like the old religious poet, “What is man that Thou carest for him, or the son of man that Thou regardest him?” we are to say like the discontented cabman, “What’s this?” or like the bad-tempered Major in the club, “Is this a chop fit for a gentleman?” (Chesterton, 2006: 326–7).

For Chesterton, what is wrong with both ‘the optimist’ and ‘the pessimist’ is that they approach the world with *demands in hand*—demands that the world can either meet or fail to meet. Both attitudes are forms of what he calls ‘disloyalty’ to the world—and, for Chesterton, the other name of this attitude is “Presumption and the name of its twin brother is Despair” (Chesterton, 2006: 327). Chesterton contrasts this attitude of ‘disloyalty’, which he sees as characteristic of modernity, with an attitude of ‘loyalty’ to the world, an attitude that involves humility and thankfulness for the world, as if existence were an undeserved gift that each of us has been given. This attitude, Chesterton argues, enables us to take up a perspective on the world in which we can wonder at it, see it as “wild and startling”, and as “magical” (Chesterton, 1961: 57, 52). It is, in other words, a perspective in which we can see the world ‘as a miracle’.

Here, then, are two thinkers (in other respects, very different from one another) who want us to reject a perspective that looks on the world in a spirit of dissatisfaction —that is, a perspective structured by ‘metaphysical’ demands that the world must meet, desires that the world must fulfil. Instead, both want us to take up a perspective that drops those demands and desires, and is thus able to see the world as ‘wild’, ‘magical’, ‘startling’, ‘wonderful’, and ‘miraculous’. This is the spiritual transformation of the reader that the *Tractatus* aims to achieve. The work aims to achieve this transformation by leading us to see what has been in front of our eyes the whole time. *Really* see it, that is —not a seeing that attempts always to ‘peer through’ or ‘beyond’ our lives with language to the deeply hidden ‘essence’ or ‘a priori structure’ that ‘lies behind’ that life and ‘makes it language’. Really seeing it —seeing it rightly— is seeing that the language, the meaning, the saying, is right *there* in full view, where we had thought it could not possibly be. To see our life with language, to see the world, in this way, is to see it as extraordinary, wild, startling and magical. There is nothing to be accounted for with a ‘philosophical theory’, nothing that is not already there in front of our eyes —but, for that very reason, it is all the more a fit subject for wonder.

Where then does this leave the silence of the one who sees the world rightly? This silence is, of course, that we ‘abandon a certain combination of words as senseless’. As remarked above, even the final remark of the *Tractatus* is empty nonsense. There is nothing (no *thing*) that we give up saying, for all along we were saying nothing —just speaking nonsense under the illusion that it was sense. So, in giving up this babbling, we do not end with a silence pregnant with esoteric and ‘ineffable’ insight. We babbled because we were, in a sense, blind to what was in front of us; we are now silent, because we *see*.

Endnotes

¹ First published in *Annalen der Naturphilosophie*, 1921. My translations draw on both of the standard English versions —the original by C. K. Ogden (Wittgenstein 1922), and the later one by Pears and McGuinness (Wittgenstein 1961)— with various modifications. For the German I have relied on the Suhrkamp edition (Wittgenstein 1984). Following the usual scholarly practice, quotations from the *Tractatus* are identified by number rather than by the pagination of any particular edition.

² A distinction more fully explored in Diamond (1991).

³ Interpretations of the *Tractatus* in the secondary literature are divided between what has been called ‘resolute’ readings, which attempt to take the self-proclaimed nonsensicality of the work seriously, and the more traditional ‘metaphysical’ readings, which (despite the words of 6.54) read the work as propounding a philosophical theory of language, logic, and so forth. The reading of the *Tractatus* given in this paper thus falls into the ‘resolute’ camp. The key works in this camp are Diamond (1991a, 1991b, 1991c) and Conant (1989, 1989–90, 1991, 1993). A useful collection of ‘resolute’ readings is Crary and Read (2000). Other closely connected readings are those of McGinn (1999, 2006), and Ostrow (2002). I have also learned much from the discussions in Rhees (1970).

⁴ At this point it may be objected that it is illegitimate to use these later words of Wittgenstein to illuminate the words of the *Tractatus*. For, it might be said, does not Wittgenstein’s thought undergo a profound shift between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*? A full answer to this objection is beyond the scope of this paper, but I would make the following beginning of a reply. The shift from Wittgenstein’s early to later work is indeed profound, but I would argue that, despite this, his overall aim in philosophy remains consistent.

Throughout, he is convinced that philosophical theorising is nonsensical, and the task of his work is to lead us to this realisation. Compare the closing remarks of the *Tractatus* to the following comments from the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1967): “My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense” (§464); and “When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as if were its sense that is senseless” (§500); hence, “The great difficulty here is: not to represent the matter as if there were something one *couldn't* do” (§374). The differences between the early and the late Wittgenstein lie more in the appropriate strategies for achieving this recognition of nonsense, and the sort of ‘finality’ that any recognition could have. To my mind, the best discussion of this in the literature is McGinn (2006).

⁵ The contrast with Kant is further explored in Conant (1991).

⁶ Cf. Diamond (1991a).

⁷ In this account of the ‘picture theory’, I am drawing particularly on Ostrow (2002) and McGinn (2006).

⁸ The work of Stanley Cavell (e.g., Cavell 1979) is a profound investigation of the relation between sceptical thoughts like these, and the idea of being alienated or estranged from—in my terms, dissatisfied with—one’s life and world.

⁹ Brief mentions of these parallels are also made in Diamond (1991a, 1991d).

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