

## CRITICAL NOTICE

### **Beyond The Tractatus Wars**

*The New Wittgenstein Debate*

Edited by Rupert Read and Matthew Lavery  
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Did Wittgenstein throughout his philosophical career have a single aim of clarifying the nature of meaning and that of a proposition, an aim that he came later on to realise that he had but imperfectly achieved in the *Tractatus* because of its dogmatic character, only to succeed more fully in the *Philosophical Investigations* with its freedom from dogmatism of any kind? The answer to this general question is independent of whether one favours a traditional, as distinct from a therapeutic reading of the *Tractatus*. Following Anthony Kenny, for example (1), one may understand that meaning in the *Tractatus* is conferred by 'the pure will of the extra-mundane solipsistic metaphysical self'. On this reading, the anthropocentric outlook of the *Philosophical Investigations* would be understood to be making a radical break with the Tractarian thought that the source of meaning must, in some sense, lie 'beyond' the use of ordinary language, by instead locating it within language-games which are played exclusively within the contexts of multifarious human practices.

Whilst the initial question stresses that there is a *continuity* in the development of Wittgenstein's ideas, this continuity is not therefore incompatible with the rejection of one *theory* in favour of another. A recent tendency, however, has been to ally this continuity to an outlook on the thinking of Wittgenstein which takes it to be *therapeutic* both early and late, so that the *dogmatism* could be seen to lie in his partial failure to realise and accept that he had earlier been party to metaphysical commitments that on a *resolute* reading of the *Tractatus* he ought really to have expunged. On this view, the *nonsensical* character of the book dictates Wittgenstein's *real* outlook - determined by the framing role of the Preface to the *Tractatus* and the content of 6.54 - to be one that *he* had not fully appreciated. Or, on an even more radically therapeutic assessment, Wittgenstein intends that his reader should find out for *himself* the truly nonsensical nature of the attractive propositions to which the book entices him to adhere, an outlook on Wittgenstein's part that must be tinged with irony insofar as it *purposefully* presents an edifice that is *ab initio* intended to collapse from within.

If, on the other hand, one simply takes it for granted that Wittgenstein in a straightforward and rather traditional way, went on after the *Tractatus* to gradually dismantle a profoundly theoretical edifice on theoretical grounds, grounds which are listed in detail in the early sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, then one is free to argue that this is not at all incompatible with the claim that Wittgenstein had the one aim throughout his life of clarifying the nature of meaning and that of a proposition. Yet the idea that there is a continuity in his thinking has come to be associated more readily with this therapeutic outlook than has the idea that the *Investigations* makes a radical break with the *Tractatus*. Indeed, with the passage of time, a theoretical reading of the development of Wittgenstein's ideas has come to seem, to those wedded to some kind of *resolute* approach, more and more oversimplistic. It has, however, already been indicated that there are a number of variations to this kind of response which can be made to any traditional reading of the *Tractatus*: from the accounts of Diamond and Conant (2) to the resolutely resolute outlook of Rupert Read and Phil Hutchinson (3) to the need by Marie McGinn to find a middle-way (4) between metaphysical and resolute readings by utilising the work of Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, Hide Ishiguro, and Brian McGuinness, some of which goes back to the 1960's (5).

If there is a difficulty for all of these approaches, it is that for many readers, the texts at least appear to allow for a wide range of divergent interpretations without any really determinate criteria to choose between them, with the consequence that aesthetic considerations alone may serve occasionally to favour one view rather than another. On the other hand, where there is clear historical/ external evidence that Wittgenstein later said certain things or made certain responses to an outlook that can be discerned in the *Tractatus*, so that he genuinely appears to be wanting to point to *mistakes* in his earlier work - as indicated, for example, by both Peter Hacker and Ian Proops (6) - then what he says in certain reported conversations with his colleagues cannot simply be ignored. On this view, it may be thought difficult to take seriously the extremely therapeutic outlook of a Wittgenstein who can only now be seen positively to be inviting his reader to work through temptations to accept his statements at face value, only *in order to* make him realise that the content of these seemingly metaphysical remarks can be understood to be nothing but pure and simple *nonsense*. Yet those who adopt an approach of this

kind may deem that Wittgenstein's personal psychology is irrelevant to their conclusions, so that their resolutely resolute interpretations can be seen to follow solely from an *internal* investigation of the text of the book in relation to its 'frame'. This would be entirely compatible with the claim that the genius of Wittgenstein was such that he could not necessarily have himself discerned all of the implications that could be understood to follow from the content of his works.

If the rather dramatic title of the present book is to be taken seriously, then, it might appear that with the passage of time following the appearance of *The New Wittgenstein* in 2000, we must steadily be approaching a point at which we will justifiably talk of having suffered a lengthy *Thirty Years War* following a paper by Cora Diamond (7), a war with considerable numbers of casualties and no obvious sign of an immediate end to hostilities. In this connection, the use of the term 'samizdat' (*cover blurb*), if taken literally, to describe those essays by Warren Goldfarb and Roger White, is a little misleading, given that both of them are contributing to a pre-existing and open debate, though these papers may very well have been circulated privately, like some of Wittgenstein's own work in the 1930's, amongst interested parties prior to official publication.

Matthew Lavery and Rupert Read set the scene in a short 'Introduction' with their claim that the days when a resolute approach to the *Tractatus* had to be propounded and explained are now over, so that a treatment of that book which in many circles is now even taken for granted, can be explored in greater detail, together with the views of 'engaged detractors' and 'constructive critics' (*Ibid.*, 1). It is in this sense that we are to understand how their volume goes 'beyond' the *Tractatus* Wars of the past few decades towards a period of development and consolidation. The remainder of their Introduction provides a brief synopsis of each of the nine papers that follow, papers that are taken to demonstrate the 'rich vastness of post-standard interpretations of Wittgenstein' (*Ibid.*, 5), and which help to promote 'more important thought (and, hopefully, action)' (*Ibid.*). What is to count as 'action' here is not expanded upon. Replete with scare quotes to a degree rarely encountered, Lavery & Read's account performs the useful role of preparing readers both for the viewpoints expressed in the papers to follow, and for the kinds of debates that are liable to arise from them.

The first relatively short paper by Warren Goldfarb, 'Das Überwinden - Anti-Metaphysical Readings of The *Tractatus*', is said by Lavery & Read to have created a sensation when first aired at Kirchberg in 2001. 'Long-awaited', and previously only available in 'samizdat' form, this paper is at last said to be seeing the light of day. Goldfarb presents a very stark rendering of the highly traditional Hacker-Pears reading of the book as a metaphysical treatise in which there are very important things that can be *shown* but not said, where this importance is very much a function of that very inability to express itself in factual language. Wittgenstein's *objects* are simple and eternal, and 'have fixed repertoires of possibilities of combinations with other objects, and lack intrinsic material properties' (*Ibid.*,7). This prior realist ontology of simple objects, determines that propositions have sense as part of an inherently realist metaphysics. Technically, of course, this is all nonsense, although the real meaning of 'nonsense' here remains to be clarified.

Goldfarb wishes to dissent from this 'standard view', and claims that the New Wittgenstein finds its roots in a paper by Hide Ishiguro from 1969, with others from Brian McGuinness, Peter Winch and himself later on. Eschewing the idea that one can look for the referents of Tractarian names outwith their roles in propositions, Ishiguro concludes from Frege's Context Principle that, partly because of the queer nature of Wittgenstein's 'objects', a realist reading is unwarranted.

Cora Diamond is said to expand on this point from 1988 onwards:

As a result of Diamond's work, the central problem for those who wish to dissent from the dominant reading of the *Tractatus* has become that of seeing what a resolute interpretation could come to and how it might be carried through. The starting point has shifted, from the question of realism to the very notion of the *Tractatus* as presenting a metaphysics (*Ibid.*, 14).

On Goldfarb's view, nothing that Diamond says precludes the possibility that the *Tractatus* provides its reader with insights, although what these insights are, becomes rather

esoteric, given that they are captured in the revelation that the philosophical sentences under consideration are saying nothing at all. Diamond's point on this assessment is just that since the so-called dominant interpretation of the *Tractatus* depends upon an unWittgensteinian notion of what is sometimes referred to as *substantial* nonsense, Diamond has articulated 'a program for interpreting the text' (*Ibid.*, 15), a programme that has not even begun to be executed in any detail. However, should that programme amount to little more than the discovery that in all specific cases that come under investigation, 'Wittgenstein's purpose is to get us to see that the concepts involved are not coherent' (*Ibid.*, 16), it may be wondered what value the programme really has. Referring to Peter Hacker's charge of 'deconstruction' and 'postmodernism' as 'silly', Goldfarb nevertheless believes that there is an important task to be undertaken:

So again we are forced to recognize how far from any settling of the question we are without developing the actual readings, the tracings of how the notions invoked in Wittgenstein's sentences implode (*Ibid.*, 18).

Goldfarb similarly and interestingly provides his own resolute reading of how we are to respond to the surely important historical/external claims that Wittgenstein made during the 1930's about his having once believed, but no longer, in certain (metaphysical) doctrines which his later thinking had led him to reject:

...Wittgenstein's later remarks like 'I used to believe there was a connection of world and language' are no longer proofs of irresolution. They are certainly autobiographical, but it is autobiography that Wittgenstein wishes to preserve precisely because the illusion of understanding such a remark...is what can drive one (and did drive him) to the realization that philosophical theories....were nonsensical (*Ibid.*, 18).

On this view of Goldfarb's, it would appear that nothing that Wittgenstein later came to

report about his changed attitude to the *Tractatus* can be taken at face value, and this for many readers of a traditional bent, will mean merely that Goldfarb is being rather disingenuous. On the other hand, he is quick to disassociate himself from a viewpoint of Juliet Floyd's that he describes as one of wishing to undermine the general idea of analysis 'and hence of the content of the requirement of clarity', as being far too radical for him (*Ibid.*). With over two pages of detailed endnotes, this paper of Goldfarb's is an entertaining, informative and clear statement of a position that cannot fail to aid a reader's appreciation of what is at stake in this debate.

The second 'samizdat' paper, and the longest in the book at over forty pages, is Roger White's 'Throwing the Baby Out With The Ladder - On "Therapeutic" Readings of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in which he forcibly begins by emphasising the paradoxical character of the book's global introductory statements, 'nonsensical sentences attempting to bring us to see something that, on pain of contradiction could not be said, but that was actually *shown* (but not said) by the way that sentences that *are* significant relate to reality' (*Ibid.*, 27). Not only does it make no sense to talk of standing 'outside' language in order to 'compare language with reality':

...when we talk of 'comparing language with reality', we are talking about something that we learn to do when we learn the language, and which is shown by the way that we do in practice compare propositions with the world. But any attempt within language to give an informative description of the relation we are looking for when we seek to verify a particular proposition is doomed (*Ibid.*, 26).

This leads White to raise the difficulty that has puzzled many commentators, *viz.*, that if a book is to be written communicating what cannot be said but only *shown*, then either its content will be nonsense, or if it is not nonsense, it will fail to capture what its author wants to convey to his reader. So how can a book containing sentences that its author admits to be nonsense, convey anything at all? (*Ibid.*, 31). Because there may appear to be no coherent answer to this question,

there has arisen the idea that nonsensical sentences do not say anything, and neither do they point towards something that can only be *shown*. To ascribe to Wittgenstein the idea that there are two kinds of nonsense, mere or *austere* nonsense on the one hand and *informative* or *substantial* nonsense on the other, is to 'chicken out' (Cora Diamond) or to be 'irresolute' (Warren Goldfarb) (*Ibid.*, 32). This has become very familiar territory in the innumerable discussions that have taken place about the New Wittgenstein, and White finds this *resolute / therapeutic* reading 'bizarre' because it 'rests on a series of misrepresentations of what it is that the proponents of the more orthodox readings of the *Tractatus* are saying' (*Ibid.*).

This leads White to the conclusion, in his following discussion concerning Wittgenstein, Frege and Geach, that what is really at stake is not whether there is a form of *substantial* nonsense, which he understands *not* to be the genuine issue at stake, but whether philosophical insights can be conveyed by sentences which are *austerely* nonsensical, and this is a question that he is happy to answer affirmatively (*Ibid.*, 37). White then provides a number of examples that are intended to illustrate his point:

We frequently can, and do communicate using sentences that are simply nonsense - including even sentences which can be grossly grammatically deviant ('Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle').

Under appropriate circumstances, we do so freely and easily. That much is, or ought to be, uncontroversial (*Ibid.*, 38).

These uses of language are for White *parasitic* on ordinary uses, and this leads him to the conclusion that proponents of the *therapeutic* reading themselves require an account of their austere or ironic use of *nonsense*, given that on his view there simply is no such thing as 'imaginatively taking "piggly wiggle" for sense'; and so, it would appear to follow, no genuine activity of *imaginatively* taking certain 'metaphysical' sentences in the *Tractatus* to make sense, *prior* to being disabused of the idea that these sentences are *really* saying anything at all, and are not rather *nonsense*. Their content, White gives every impression of arguing, may be inappropriate or misguided, the result perhaps of

having become party, *pace* a later Wittgenstein, to a misleading *picture* of some kind, but that is far from claiming that they are saying nothing at all:

If there is only the illusion of having understood the theory,  
there is only the illusion that the theory has revealed itself  
to be nonsense.....If what is meant is that the theory is in some  
way self-refuting, or that we are actually presented with a theory  
which implies any such theory to be impossible, that simply  
shows the theory to be false, not nonsense (*Ibid.*, 46).

It may appear paradoxical that White should favour the conclusion that the sentences of the *Tractatus* are not, *per se*, austere nonsense, but become so solely because they attempt to describe what can only be *shown*. This is captured in his claim that 'Wittgenstein wishes to bring us to see something that is manifest in our significant use of language, but that cannot be properly described by the sentences of that language'. In the *Tractatus*, understanding Wittgenstein amounts to recognising *what* is revealed *via* the sentences which *have* sense, but which cannot be *described* by them, and it is in *this* context that they are to be understood as (austere) *nonsense* because they are baffled accounts of what can only really be *shown* (*Ibid.*).

Even if one were tempted to be sympathetic to White's reasoning here, one is left with the impression that there is something not quite right about his use of the term 'nonsense'. This becomes *austere* nonsense to talk about what can be *shown* but not said, a conclusion that is claimed to emerge from sentences which are *not* nonsensical in themselves. They *become* nonsensical in what then appears to be a rather technical use of 'austere', insofar as they fulfil their role of leading us to what cannot be *described* but only *shown*. Suffice to say that if we are inclined to give White the benefit of the doubt here, it is because this kind of ambivalence may be thought to be intrinsic to the entire debate. He then goes on to make the point that the *therapeutic* reading he opposes has all the appearance of being irrefutable, given that 'any text from the *Tractatus* that seems to contradict it can be dismissed as, simply, part of the ladder that we are meant to throw away' (*Ibid.*, 47).

White's belief that the New reading, if taken seriously, would reduce the status of the *Tractatus* to that of nothing but an 'eccentric sport' in the history of philosophy, is pursued further by pointing towards the historical/external evidence, as uncovered by Peter Hacker, revealing that Wittgenstein on his return to philosophy attempted to modify and repair his account of the relation of language to reality before eventually dismantling it (*Ibid.*). This is augmented by White's account of the reason for Wittgenstein's later rejection of metaphysics because it attempted to describe what can only be *shown*, and the Vienna Circle's rejection based on the claim that it is nonsense *simpliciter*, following an application of the verification principle, a distinction he believes that Diamond and Conant are unable to account for if Wittgenstein's therapeutic project takes the content of the book as a whole to be pure *nonsense*. Or perhaps not quite the whole, because White then takes New Wittgensteinians to task for making a distinction between the content of 'the frame' and that of the rest of the book:

The attempt to extricate certain sentences as 'frame' sentences from the rest, so that the rest will be shown to be nonsense by that frame, is in this way always to fail to appreciate the extent to which those 'frame sentences' are themselves put forward only as consequences of such clear examples of nonsense as 'The world is the totality of facts' (*Ibid.*, 50).

In a final section, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', White asks how his austere view of nonsense within the context of his belief that Wittgenstein succeeds in pointing to what can be *shown* but not said, differs from the use made of it by Diamond and Conant, and concludes that for them the book 'is purely designed to expose an illusion' (*Ibid.*, 58). Therefore, there 'is nothing that "shows itself", nothing ineffable, and the idea of "what shows itself" is part of the ladder to be thrown away' (*Ibid.*) Yet for White, to remove the idea of what *shows* itself, is to remove the dialectical character of the *Tractatus*: this character is captured in the thought that these sentences,

whilst they are not, *prima facie*, to be regarded as being nonsensical, since they would appear at face-value to be descriptive, *become* nonsensical because their only genuine *use* is not after all to *describe* anything, but to point to what can only be *shown*. White concludes that the only reason provided by Diamond and Conant for rejecting a belief in the idea of what can be shown, but not said, is that the sentences Wittgenstein employs *are* nonsensical. This, however, would require that a sentence that had no meaning had no *use* either, and White argues that the examples of nonsensical sentences he has already provided, point to the conclusion that 'we use nonsense sentences all the time, and to good purpose' (*Ibid.*, 59).

No doubt we do use such sentences in the specific kinds of contexts that White describes. The problem is that these kinds of contexts bear very little relation to the rarefied *use* that Wittgenstein is said to make of sentences which have all the appearance of making sense, but which are really used to point to what can only be *shown*, and so become nonsensical because they cannot be used, and are not intended to be used to describe anything. This, however, is quite at odds with the rather queer and apparently senseless remarks like 'grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle' which can be explained as having specific applications in specific circumstances. The difference here is fairly obvious, and whilst it does not in the least follow that this renders White's traditional outlook on the *Tractatus* invalid, it does mean that his examples fail to perform the task in this context that he requires of them. White's stimulating paper is not one to miss, albeit that a certain amount of repetition in the course of clarifying the issues at stake is unavoidable. With over six pages of detailed and interesting endnotes, it makes a substantial contribution to the field.

There follows a critical response to White in 'Throwing the Baby Out - A Reply to Roger White' by James Conant and Ed Dain, in which they make a similar point to that made here about White's examples of usable nonsense sentences (*Ibid.*, 71). Believing that White's 'novel and interesting lines of criticism....merit serious attention', they nevertheless identify the weak spot in White's argument as one of failing to explain how pure nonsense could ever be used to communicate insights of any kind (*Ibid.*, 67). On this point, it is worthwhile considering exactly where Conant

and Dain locate their differences with White:

The choice we are presented with between resolute and standard readings, then, is not one between a view of the *Tractatus* as communicating in some still mysterious way ineffable insights into reality and a view on which it communicates nothing and is therefore purely negative. On a resolute reading the *Tractatus* does not communicate anything, but it is not purely negative for all that. Its value consists precisely in the insights it affords into the ways in which language functions. What White fails to see is where these insights really lie (*Ibid.*, 81).

A considerable portion of their paper is dedicated to revealing that White's examples of useful nonsensical sentences do not relate to the use that White appears to require to justify a genuine Tractarian distinction between *saying* and *showing*, a distinction that they implicitly reject. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Conant and Dain should add to their claim that White fails to establish that nonsensical sentences can be used to convey insights, the additional charge (*Ibid.*, 80) that he is guilty of being party himself to an incoherent notion of *substantial nonsense*. This is because White argues that the nonsensicality of sentences in the *Tractatus*, is said to follow from their falling outside the scope of 'the general form of a proposition', when their being *austerely* nonsensical for Conant and Dain means just *that, viz.*, that they are gibberish, and as such do not coherently fail to meet any criteria laid down by 'the general form of a proposition'.

The issue here turns on the point that White evidently accepts Wittgenstein's notion of *the general form of a proposition*, according to which anything other than a 'vacuous tautology' or a 'merely contingent proposition' is effectively *defined* as nonsense (White, *Ibid.*, 30); and in this context that would include the statements of the *Tractatus* and those of 'ethics, aesthetics, and religion' mentioned by White on the same page. This is an excessively familiar point, and although entirely in keeping with White's claim that Tractarian statements are nonsensical because they can only *show* what they cannot describe, is incompatible with Conant and Dain's 'nonsense' as 'sheer gibberish'.

It is for this reason that White, in their terms, is guilty of adhering to a notion of *substantial nonsense*; and if White *is* at fault here, it is solely because he has ‘unwittingly’ (Cf. Conant and Dain, *Ibid.*, 80), and perhaps unwisely, avowed an intention to adhere in his paper to a notion of *austere nonsense*, when it is patently clear that what conforms to ‘the general form of a proposition’ cannot specify anything that this notion fails to meet. But this takes us round in a circle. It leaves White free to argue in favour of a point that perhaps he ought to have argued for in the first place, that White’s, and Wittgenstein’s, notion of *nonsense* is *sui generis*, and as such can only be understood in its own unique terms. If this should be incompatible with a Diamond/Conant idea of sheer gibberish, no matter what category of nonsense it is described as belonging to, then so be it. What Wittgenstein *really* meant in the *Tractatus* by ‘nonsense’ can then be understood to remain part of a continuing debate, even if the traditional interpretation in terms of what fails to conform to ‘the general form of a proposition’, *i.e.*, anything other than tautologies and empirical statements, may still be thought by many traditional readers to have a great deal in its favour, and, more importantly, to capture exactly what Wittgenstein says.

The next paper in the collection, ‘Context, Compositionality, and Nonsense in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’ by Silver Bronzo, is dedicated to illustrating that ‘the *Tractatus* can be coherently committed, at one and the same time, to a strong version of the context principle (sufficiently strong to entail the austere conception of nonsense) and to a version of the principle of compositionality.’ (*Ibid.*, 84). For if it is true that only in the context of a proposition does a name have meaning (*Tractatus* 3.3), and if to understand a proposition is to understand its constituent parts (*Tractatus* 4.024), it is difficult to see how these claims can be mutually compatible. Furthermore, if the only kind of nonsense is *austere nonsense* or sheer gibberish, according to the views of the New Wittgenstein, there can be no such thing as a traditional notion of *substantial nonsense* deriving from the transgression of the rules laid down by a theory of sense, and this implies that in the absence of any rules of logical syntax, for example, often claimed to be central to traditional readings of the *Tractatus*, New Wittgensteinians are committed to a strong version of the Context Principle. This would after all be in keeping with *Tractatus*

5.473, 5.4732, and 5.4733, which Bronzo quotes in favour of his claim that these passages suggest an austere conception of nonsense, although it is once again incompatible with *Tractatus* 4.024. Glock is quoted extensively, though he does not actually, as quoted, promote *substantial* nonsense.

The question that Bronzo then goes on to ask is whether the endorsement of the context principle, the principle of compositionality and an austere conception of nonsense can be coherently combined. On the face of it, his definition of *Contextualism* in terms of the meaning and understanding of a sentence as prior to that of its parts, and of *Compositionism* in terms of the meaning of the parts of the sentence as prior to that of the sentence, would render these quite incompatible; whereas he goes on to argue in a rich exposition, that properly construed, these principles ‘articulate two necessarily interconnected aspects of language’ (*Ibid.*,90). This is also combined with the claim that this kind of interdependence rules out the notion of *substantial* nonsense. He eventually arrives at a Tractarian picture which he regards as ‘superior’ to both contextualism and compositionism as traditionally understood. In his summing-up, he uses *Tractatus* 2.0122 and 3.141 to illustrate the form of interdependence to which he is drawing our attention, in order to show how ‘the author of the *Tractatus* wishes jointly to affirm both a version of the principle of compositionality and a version of the context principle’ (*Ibid.*, 106).

If Bronzo’s paper with its additional five pages of detailed endnotes, carries its reader forward with a fine display of scholarship, he will be brought to an abrupt halt with ‘Towards a *Useful* Jacobinism - A Response to Bronzo’ by Matthew A. Lavery, which many readers will resent with its jejune appeal to ‘Wittgensteinians....ideally prepared to transfer the benefits of a properly trained “philosophical disposition” to problems outside of philosophy’:

The energy and intelligence so well displayed in Bronzo’s wrestling with issues of *Tractatus* interpretation are desperately needed outside of the academy at a time of great global peril. Regardless of how one gets there, this, it seems to me, is what lies beyond the ladder (*Ibid.*, 118).

Even if one's initial reaction to this, is to say that if one wishes to wear one's heart on one's sleeve, it would surely be better to do so when manning the barricades and not when replying to a philosophical paper, this should not detract from our appreciation of his main aim, which is to question the 'philosophical superiority' Bronzo assigns to his analysis (*Ibid.*, 112). However, if we *are* prepared to give Lavery the benefit of the doubt here, we are quickly disappointed to learn that Bronzo's real failure in following the 'resolute program' is that he should find it necessary to *justify* his reading, because this is to take 'the resolutist away from home, as it were, playing on the turf of the standard reader in the games of textual and anecdotal evidence., etc ', and this does not bear on the *real* value for Lavery of the resolute *Tractatus*:

The value of resolutism, for me anyway, is that it moves us away from 'philosophising'.. - away from abstract questions of truth values, for instance - and toward action in the lived world in a clear-headed way free from philosophical or academic pretension (*Ibid.*, 113).

Arguing that 'resolutism is at its best when freed from a narrow, textual conception of the *Tractatus*'s meaning', we are encouraged to endorse the claim that the real meaning and value of the *Tractatus* lies in what we actually do 'off of the ladder' (*Ibid.*, 115). As Lavery would have it, Bronzo's ultimate error is that he does not manage to dispel completely the impulse to do philosophy at all, so that his search for a 'philosophically superior position' flounders because it encourages 'more "philosophizing" where no philosophizing is appropriate' (*Ibid.*, 117). The success of Bronzo's paper for Lavery - insofar as he surprisingly sees it as being successful at all - is that it 'redoubles the thought that we Wittgensteinians, and the world in general, will be better off if we stop talking about how to get off the ladder and rather just endeavor *to* get off it (and this is the directive at the end of the *Tractatus*, no?)' (*Ibid.*, 118). Since most readers will find Lavery's claims at the very least provocative, and more than likely preposterous, they will leave his essay with the hope of finding solace elsewhere in the book.

That solace is readily found in the next paper by Oskari Kuusela, 'The Dialectic of Interpretations - Reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in which Kuusela wishes in his own way, yet in common with the approach of Marie McGinn referred to earlier on, to discover some middle - ground between the traditional and resolute approaches:

In this essay I seek to develop...a version of the resolute reading that incorporates a certain strand of the traditional readings. This strand is their attribution to Wittgenstein of an intention to impart certain very general logical insights, the possibility of which, however, I seek to explain without recourse to the notion of a nonsensical or ineffable theory or truth (*Ibid.*, 122).

Believing that an interpretation ought to be found that meets the 'conflicting demands that a philosophically viable and at the same time exegetically plausible interpretation of the *Tractatus*' requires (*Ibid.*), Kuusela proceeds by discussing in succession Hacker's 'Ineffability Interpretation', the re-reading of 'Nonsense' provided by Conant and Diamond, and finally Hacker's critique of those 'Resolute' approaches themselves. This takes up half of his paper, and there is an inevitable overlap in these pages with material already covered earlier in the book by Goldfarb and White: the reference to Diamond's 'chickening out' and Goldfarb's 'irresoluteness' (*Ibid.*, 123); the difference between the 'nonsense' of Diamond & Conant and that of Hacker explained in terms of its being a theoretical term for the latter based on an articulated theory of language in the *Tractatus* (*Ibid.*, 126); the key difficulty for resolute readings on Hacker's view, as resting in their failure to recognise the philosophical insights that the *Tractatus* manages to express (*Ibid.*, 127); and the entire metaphysics of language embodied in Wittgenstein's earlier method of clarification ascribed to him by Diamond & Conant (*Ibid.*, 130).

This is certainly excellent material for those looking for some grounding in the entire debate, although it also must lead one to question the extent to which the book as a whole is really going 'beyond' the *Tractatus* Wars, as Read and Lavery suggest. Of more significance in the present

context, however, is how Kuusela uses this material to lead his reader to ask the question, once again, of how logical insights can possibly be expressed in a book whose author declares its content to be nonsense (*Ibid.*,127):

...if one accepts that Wittgenstein's book contains insights about the logic of language, is one forced - and indeed justified - to consider these insights as the expression of ineffable truths and Wittgenstein as committed to claims that can't be stated? Crucially, if there are other ways to express philosophical insights besides making claims or theoretical assertions, as I will argue...,then there is a gap in Hacker's argument against the resolute reading (*Ibid.*, 128).

Believing that Hacker's rendering of Wittgenstein's presumed argument in favour of the denial of philosophical truths, which nevertheless re-emerge as ineffable truths, is self-destructive, an argument he describes as 'incomprehensible' (*Ibid.*, 124), Kuusela proceeds to outline where he believes that the answer lies, and this is partly in the conclusion that the logical insights in the book must not count as a set of theoretical truths, or constitute a set of claims (*Ibid.*, 128). Wittgenstein's concept-script as a tool of analysis involves *per se* only a methodological commitment: 'the logical distinction between making a statement and articulating a mode of presentation', is connected to 'the possibility of a novel kind of approach to philosophy that doesn't involve putting forward theses' (*Ibid.*, 141). The problem of dogmatism, however, arises on this view from the erroneous conclusion that this mode of presentation must be applicable to *all* phenomena, and this involves 'putting forward a philosophical thesis about the necessary characteristics of things'. This helps to explain how 'a thesis about the essence of language sneaks into the *Tractatus*' (*Ibid.*, 140):

The back door through which metaphysics enters Wittgenstein's early philosophy is his methodological commitment to analysis in terms of the concept-script introduced in the book....The back-door is the assumption that there should be something like *the* correct method

of philosophy, and the dogmatic imposition of a particular framework of analysis as the one to be adopted (*Ibid.*). (8)

Kuusela then quotes a well-known passage from 1931 in which Wittgenstein refers to his having seen something from a far distance and in a very indefinite manner, and to his having proceeded dogmatically in consequence. With its additional five pages of detailed endnotes, Kuusela's paper is one of the more thought-provoking in the book, a considerable achievement in a field replete with competing accounts. Yet it is precisely because the texts do admit of so many divergent interpretations, that these accounts actually foster the continuance of Lavery & Read's *Tractatus Wars*.

As if to prove the point, Rupert Read and Rob Deans in 'The Possibility of a Resolutely Resolute Reading of the *Tractatus*', provide an interpretation of the book which is so extreme that it would render any kind of accommodation with metaphysical readings well nigh impossible. Read and Deans in their reply to Kuusela, affirm that he has with some success attempted to look upon the warring parties 'with genuine charity', and so has helped to resolve the problems leading to the *Tractatus Wars* (*Ibid.*, 149). Nevertheless, their main aim in the paper is to rebut Kuusela's charge that so-called strongly-resolute interpretations of the *Tractatus* are not really viable:

Our ambition in the present paper....is to characterize, in the wake of some criticisms that have been made of anything like our version of the enterprise, how a 'strong' or 'severe' or 'Jacobin' or 'purely therapeutic' resolute reading of the *Tractatus* may be possible. We wish to do this, precisely because of our concern, *directly symmetrical* with Kuusela's, to read the *Tractatus* with genuine charity (*Ibid.*).

Even fellow would-be resolute readers, we are told, have done this all too rarely. But when we come to discover where Kuusela's account falls down, this is over the point that any suggestion at all that Wittgenstein's goal is to introduce a concept-script more as a methodological

tool than for theoretical purposes, for example, or that his logical insights are not to be expressed in terms of theoretical true/false assertions, is already to be 'irresolute', to 'chicken out', because any thought that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is expressing 'logical insights' or 'views' is to go too far (*Ibid.*, 150):

For us, the possibility of a 'strong' resolute reading is the possibility of being able to say that Wittgenstein's writing is through and through transitional (transitional back to the ordinary). It cannot stand and *dictate* anything - including a concept-script - and nor can any concept-script that it eventuates in. *Our ordinary language* has to speak for itself. Language must look after itself; propositions must look after themselves (*Ibid.*, 152).

This is followed by the claim that what constitutes the frame of the *Tractatus* is itself a function of the 'dialectical' progress an individual reader has made through the text, for the frame is merely a 'prop' allowing the reader to reach a point at which, like the ladder of the *Tractatus*, it can be 'thrown away' so that in principle it does not matter for Read & Deans whether, as they are inclined to express it, the entire *book* is described as 'frame', or 'not frame' :

Inasmuch as one can 'never say for sure' that what one is handling is now and forever frame, then one has to admit the essential moral of the argument...The 'frame' too is open to being treated as elucidatory, and cannot be closed off definitively from being so treated. *This is enough to make a severist reading of the Tractatus (both) possible and (moreover) attractive* (*Ibid.*, 153).

Indeed, the very idea that one could 'climb the ladder' in order to obtain complete clarity in philosophy is itself an idea that the *Tractatus* is actually designed to *free* us from, for the

process of obtaining clarity never ends (*Ibid.*, 155). Is it possible on a reading of this kind, a reading referred to as 'severe mono-Wittgensteinianism', to account for Wittgenstein's apparently unwitting metaphysical theorising in the *Tractatus*? Although Wittgenstein does not in principle betray any 'metaphysical commitments' in the *Tractatus*, a work with no 'theoretical underpinnings' (*Ibid.*, 161), Wittgenstein's 'failure' in the *Tractatus* really lies in his not fully appreciating, for example, 'how particular kinds of propositions and their particular contexts of use in everyday life contribute to their meaning and their philosophical treatment' (*Ibid.*). Even with his overall 'deflationary intent', Wittgenstein's unwitting concentration on the single case of the 'bi-polar fact-stating proposition', means that his treatment of other kinds of propositions 'is insufficiently developed'.

The problem with this kind of reading is that, stripped of its therapeutic jargon, it could just as easily be expressed by saying that Wittgenstein replaced an overtly solipsistic metaphysics of simple objects in the *Tractatus*, with an anthropocentric outlook in the *Investigations*. To this, one can add a concomitant replacement of a limiting concentration on White's 'vacuous tautologies' and 'merely contingent propositions' in the former by a realisation of the almost limitless different ways in which, in the latter, language in everyday life is actually used. The difficulty, as always, is to assess whether there is sufficient textual or historical evidence to justify coming to one decision rather than another. On this point, however, one may be worried to discover that the hard work often required to achieve this, is not after all what is of utmost importance to Read and Deans:

What is of more interest to us...is how severe mono-Wittgensteinianism, in comparison and contrast to its mild cousin, enables you to move more easily from the mere exegesis of texts to the actual philosophical work of applying Wittgenstein to oneself and one's (the) world (*Ibid.*, 165).

But if 'the mere exegesis of texts' is of little importance compared to thumping the tub in favour of the 'Resolute "resolutism"' that philosophy actually *needs* (*Ibid.*), then to all intents and purposes the attempt to elicit what Wittgenstein is actually saying has been abandoned. If, in the final analysis, 'it matters very little what one wise or clever man wrote or thought', and that what really

counts is 'what one takes to be philosophically right, and how one goes on' (*Ibid.*, 170, Endnote 34), then one is left to wonder what Read and Deans believe that they are doing. If what *they* believe that Wittgenstein said and meant is not actually what he said and meant - though they believe that it was - and they are prone to declare nevertheless that 'it was what he *ought* to have said', then we are replacing a careful assessment of the texts with political drum-beating. If Wittgenstein's point of view is not really that which Read and Deans attribute to him, although 'it is at least ours now' (*Ibid.*, Endnote 35), they are not even pretending to be contributing to scholarship, or to an understanding of Wittgenstein's work. If this 'is where we want to be' (*Ibid.*, 166), whether it is where Wittgenstein wanted to be or not, one has to ask again what the overall purpose of this essay really is.

If the final two essays in the book do not, at least at first sight, appear to have any role to play in favour of either major side in the *Tractatus* Wars, this is firstly because they are concerned with the highly general and rather ill-defined area of Wittgenstein's (Kantian) idealism, and secondly because the first and longer paper of the two, 'Synthesizing Without Concepts' by Peter Sullivan, discusses his main issue by shifting 'the primary focus of discussion from Wittgenstein's earlier to his later thought' (*Ibid.*, 171). Lavery & Read, on the other hand, seize upon this fact as an illustration of how 'questions of interpretation in early and later Wittgenstein are most fruitfully *brought together*':

For the issues that preoccupy Sullivan and Moore (primarily in later-Wittgenstein interpretation, and in substantive philosophy) are best seen as '*projected*' from questions about what reading the *Tractatus* resolutely is / would be / could not be like. This is a powerful for-instance of what Wittgenstein himself famously said: that the one book ought to be read directly after and against the background of the other (*Ibid.*, 4).

On Lavery & Read's assessment, Sullivan in one respect allies himself with 'the central consequences of the resolutists' continuist "program"; namely that there are not two distinct phases of Wittgenstein's philosophy *in anything like the way normally assumed in Wittgenstein studies*' (*Ibid.*).

Adrian Moore, on the other hand, in his short six-page 'Reply to Sullivan', is said, correctly, to treat Wittgenstein in his earlier work as someone who repudiates transcendental idealism as nonsense, a nonsense 'whose attractions his own work engenders' (Moore, *Ibid.*, 191). Lavery & Read, however, argue that 'what is so remarkable about these final essays', even if they cannot be taken to support the 'Jacobinism' that the editors clearly favour, nevertheless reveal a 'full grown *interest*' in their 'resolutism' which goes beyond a mere interest in the *Tractatus* itself, 'a text that, if the resolutist reading is right, there is strictly no such thing as *understanding* anyway' (*Ibid.*, 5). Sullivan and Moore therefore take the reader 'beyond the *Tractatus* Wars' by helping him to 'think Wittgenstein (early and later) as a philosopher whose sticky engagement with idealism sheds distinctive valuable light on the entire post-Kantian philosophical problematic' (*Ibid.*).

But when we actually turn to read these final essays, the available evidence to justify these general conclusions, is far more circumstantial and indirect than this would indicate. Indeed, at first sight the relevance of the 'rule following considerations' in the later work, to any question of Kantian transcendental idealism in Wittgenstein, may seem difficult to fathom. But on this point Adrian Moore comes to our aid with the thought that 'What justifies you in doing that?' (*Ibid.*, 194), what justifies the following of a rule, say, is a question 'about how something is possible' (*Ibid.*, 195), and this leads his reader to think in terms of the conditions of the possibility of following a rule, 'the precondition for there being this or that practice among us' (*Ibid.*). Moore, however, is careful to distinguish between limits and limitations, and it is only insofar as one might be able to think of Wittgenstein as presenting the *limitations* which provide 'the conditions of the possibility' of what it is to follow a rule, that he could be said in *this* context to be embracing a form of Kantian transcendental idealism.

As it turns out, Moore does not see Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* as resting limits on limitations in the appropriate sense: insofar as human beings in a community behave together in a certain way, that is once again 'a precondition for having such-and-such a rule', but 'it is not a sub-bedrock quasi-justification for anything we do' (*Ibid.*), which it would have to be

if Wittgenstein is to be thought of in this context as a transcendental idealist. Moore ends his paper with the claim that although Wittgenstein's question is a Kantian one, his answer is not, and for this reason Moore believes, in opposition to Sullivan, that the later Wittgenstein was not a transcendental idealist. According to Moore, Sullivan on this point misreads Wittgenstein because he tends to see the appeal to 'what I do' as a 'quasi-justification' of the appropriate kind, and so mistakenly regards Wittgenstein as a transcendental idealist in the later work.

When we turn to Sullivan's paper as a whole, on the other hand, there is not a great deal of discussion that paints the issue at stake in just these particular terms:

Moore and I are agreed that the crucial step in embracing or resisting idealism consists in succumbing to or resisting the construal of limits as limitations.....Wittgenstein was always with Kant: *if* there had to be any account of such things, then an idealist account was the only contender he could take seriously.

This is all common ground between Moore and me. And we further agree that Wittgenstein aimed, in both his early and his later work, at exposing the emptiness, or sheer senselessness, of any account one might be tempted to offer of these matters.....

Our difference begins over whether the construal of limits as limitations only ever plays this negative role in Wittgenstein's thought, or whether, at some other level, he embraces it.....

(*Ibid.*,172).

Given that Sullivan declares at the beginning of his paper that he understands the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* to be a transcendental idealist, it follows that he must embrace this 'construal of limits as limitations' (*Ibid.*), and indeed goes on to argue, for example, that 'Mention of shared reactions and whirls of organism and so on might be relevant in these connections'.

The relevance is deemed to consist, *a propos* their connection with the following of a rule, in the illumination they are said to provide concerning 'the rationality of my following the rule as I do'. This 'rationality' is no doubt intended to have a distinctively Kantian ring, and Sullivan sees it reflected in Wittgenstein's dismantling of Platonism, for example, where the 'construal of a limit as a limitation' is precisely what makes it possible for a reader to come to fully grasp the sense in which Platonism is a myth (*Ibid.*, 174).

This account of Wittgenstein is certainly not going to appeal to everyone, especially when David Bell's 'The Art of Judgement', the 'richest work....to illuminate the connections between Wittgenstein and Kant' (*Ibid.*, 175) in the present context, is used to reach the conclusion, said to be consistent with Bell's own thinking, that attributing a form of Kantian transcendental idealism to Wittgenstein is unavoidable. Yet Bell's aim in his essay is to clarify 'the subjective, non-conceptual, spontaneous sense that experience must make to anyone capable of objective thought' (Bell, as quoted, *Ibid.*), and this is, following Kant, 'an aesthetic response to experience'. This response is said to be a 'species of understanding, hence a species of knowledge, that cannot be put into words' (*Ibid.* 176). All of this, however, is going to require a considerable amount of unpacking if it is not to sound, as it certainly does here, patently *unWittgensteinian*.

Based on this reading, the last two essays in the book, whilst interesting in themselves, do not really relate to Lavery & Read's concept of the *Tractatus* Wars quite as do the remainder. It is also perhaps regrettable that two of those remaining essays in which the editors have a hand, are rather more partisan in their promotion of a 'resolutely resolute' account of Wittgenstein than may be thought compatible with a strictly editorial role. That said, there is still a lot of interesting and important material here that is bound to stimulate those who have an interest in current debate about the interpretation of the *Tractatus*.

## ENDNOTES

- (1) Anthony Kenny: 'Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Mind' in *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1984), 9.
- (2) See, for example, amongst many others, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely - Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan' by Cora Diamond and James Conant, in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance* (London, Routledge, 2004).
- (3) See, for example, amongst many others, 'An *Elucidatory* Interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: A Critique of Daniel D. Hutto's and Marie McGinn's Reading of *Tractatus* 6.54', by Rupert Read & Phil Hutchinson in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 14, No.1, 2006.
- (4) Marie McGinn, *Elucidating Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Oxford, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006).
- (5) Rush Rhees, 'Ontology and Identity in the *Tractatus* a propos of Black's Companion', in *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* ed. Peter Winch (London, Routledge, 1969). Peter Winch 'Language Thought and World in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1987). Hide Ishiguro, 'Use and Reference of Names' in *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* ed. Peter Winch (London, Routledge, 1969). Brian McGuinness, 'The So-Called Realism of the *Tractatus*' in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Irving Block (Oxford, Blackwell, 1981).
- (6) Peter Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle it?' *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. A. Crary & R. Read, (London, Routledge, 2000). Ian Proops, 'The New Wittgenstein: A Critique', *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.9, No.3, 2001.
- (7) Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*' in *Philosophy*, Vol.68, 1988.
- (8) On this presentation, the reader is surely being invited to think of the methodological enterprise as coming through the *front door*, given that *per se* it is innocent of any charge of dogmatism, and the assumption of '*the correct method*' through the *back door*, since that assumption is the guilty party in Wittgenstein's later thought.

*As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH and PHILOSOPHIA. A paper on Wittgenstein appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, another on Ebersole / Ayer in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010, a later paper on Wittgenstein in ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY, March 2013 and a further one on Ryle, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, April 2014.*