

## CRITICAL NOTICE

### **The Enchantment of Words**

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Denis McManus, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp. 288, £ 21.99

ISBN: 978-0-19-958552-6 (paperback)

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During a reunion dinner in which he is entertaining other guests with a customary recounting of his exploits in battle during the Crimean War, General Burroughs selects a collection of nuts from a bowl: 'These nuts were the Russians, guns, guns, guns !', he loudly exclaims. Then, after dipping his finger into his wine glass, he proceeds to draw the 'Thin Red Line' on the table a couple of feet or so away from the collection of nuts. An apple picked from a bowl and placed at or near the line serves as the Commander in Chief, whilst a large pineapple is used to represent his own position at the head of his men as the battle commenced.

This description fairly accurately captures the scene only a few minutes into Alexander Korda's 1939 film production of *The Four Feathers*. As it turns out, Harry Faversham, the hero of this 'Boy's Own' story, will come at the very end of the film, and during yet another reunion dinner, to throw some doubt on the accuracy of Burroughs' actual description of the battle. He will illustrate his reservations by redeploying those forces on the table-cloth which will have been yet again amassed by Burroughs in the course of recounting his exploits for the umpteenth time.

One notable feature of this tale for an appreciation of what Wittgenstein is up to when he introduces what has gained the title 'The Picture Theory', is that in order to tell his story about the battle, the items that General Burroughs actually uses to *represent* the various individuals who are taking part in it, are quite arbitrarily chosen. Burroughs could as easily have used salt-cellars, knives, forks, spoons and cups, and whatever other fruit was to hand, to get across the point that he was wanting to convey. Indeed, he might have felt that there was no need to supplement a verbal account of the battle with this kind of representation at all, although it is natural to believe, as most people probably do, that a *model* of this kind, properly used to reflect the configurations of the

participants in this kind of complex moving scena, can more accurately explain what really occurred.

Another important feature of this story, and one which directly relates it to the 'picture analogy' referred to by Denis McManus in the fifth Chapter of his book, is that the items used to represent the various participants in the battle, in order to fulfil their roles, do not have in any way to *resemble* the actual individuals who took part in it. Yet as McManus reminds us, Wittgenstein reported that this picture analogy came to him (*Ibid.*, 66) when he read about how a Parisian car crash was represented in the courtroom by way of a model in which toy cars and dolls stood for the victims of the accident. So it would seem that the *physical resemblance* between the reality and the model *must* have been instrumental in awaking him to the possibility that this notion of a *Picture* might have an important role to play in his considerations. Indeed, the very idea of a 'fit' between the toy cars, the pedestrians and their 'real' counterparts, would appear to lie at the centre of what the 'Picture Theory' is all about. The isomorphism between the elements of the Picture, and the elements of the 'real' accident, is primarily what strikes us when we think about and go on to reflect more deeply upon those more traditional accounts provided by mostly earlier commentators on the *Tractatus*, of what *must* have struck Wittgenstein when he considered this courtroom confrontation.

Yet no matter how tempted we may be to say that what makes this picture, say, of Edinburgh Castle a picture of *Edinburgh Castle*, is that it so resembles Edinburgh Castle that it can hardly pretend to be a picture of anything else, this neglects what has now become the familiar point that it is only within an established convention in which resemblance is *used* as a means of representation that it can perform its picturing role. As the character of General Burroughs shows with the casual adoption of his battlefield model, this kind of model does not, in order to fulfil its function, have to employ the usual arrangements of miniature soldiers which commonly illustrate historic scenes of battle. In the same way, if we were to ask an artist to draw for us a picture of Edinburgh Castle without our knowing that he dabbled in abstract art, he may feel that he had more than adequately fulfilled our expectations by presenting us with what in our eyes might look like a monstrosity precisely because it bore no *resemblance* to Edinburgh Castle whatsoever.

The central point that Dennis McManus wishes to draw from similar considerations to these is that what at first sight might have the appearance of a powerful *explanation* of the 'fit' between language and world, a Picture Theory that reveals the 'internal relation' between the method of depiction and the reality it serves to depict, can be shown to rest on a confusion. As the General Burroughs example reveals, and as McManus illustrates with his dining-table display employing cups, napkins and a pepper-pot to represent the cars, roads and pedestrian called 'Frank' of his own road accident, the *model* used to illustrate the scene gains its sense not because it intrinsically carries this meaning along with it, but because it is chosen for a particular purpose solely as a means of more clearly representing certain events which actually took place:

What the picture analogy serves to remind us of here is that our signs have as much life as our use of them gives them. But when the elements of our representation are familiar words or elements which, as in conventional, non-abstract pictures, have some visual similarity to what they represent, it is easier to fall into thinking of such elements as possessing a life of their own, as it were. (*Ibid.*, 69).

This apparent 'life of their own' is what on McManus's view, leads the philosopher in us to mistakenly think that words have an application independently of the use we make of them. Drawing on his example of a pepper-pot being drawn across a napkin as a way of representing Frank crossing the road, the philosopher on his view is led to believe that the pepper-pot has 'possibilities' which *mirror* Frank's, to the extent that it becomes for him unthinkable that these items should lose the 'forms' in virtue of which this mirroring holds without ceasing to be the items that they are, items which are in this way 'internally related' to each other. But this kind of 'internal relation' is a sham, because what sense it has depends, as has been amply illustrated, on having *already* made a decision about how to *use* the pepper-pot and napkins as a means of

*representing* these items and the roles they play within the model:

The root confusion that creates the illusion of a necessary, substantial isomorphism is that, when we contemplate Frank standing in the road and the pepper-pot standing on the napkin, we are not contemplating bases which may yet allow a correlation between the two to emerge, but rather two *products* of a method of correlation, of projection; in this case it is spatial location.....When we see object and name matching in form, what we see before us is not something which will *allow* the two to be correlated, but rather the *output* of a correlation that has already been enacted (*Ibid.*, 95).

This correlation 'between word and world' is what General Burroughs succeeds in enacting when he *uses* the items on the dinner-table for his immediate purposes to represent the soldiers and guns in his Crimean reminiscences, or when McManus uses the pepper-pot and the napkin to explain the factors that caused his road accident to occur. This point is hammered home throughout Chapter 7 of the book, where he reiterates that the metaphysical notion of a 'fit' is a myth because there can be no 'facts of correspondence' prior to the use that is made of the picture to represent for a particular purpose what the facts actually are (*Ibid.*,98); just as there is no requirement that the world imposes upon language in some proposed metaphysical sense, independently of the ordinary *uses* that we make of our terms when we correctly describe the General's battle or what took place to cause the accident to occur (*Ibid.*, 99).

On this view, anyone who takes seriously the idea which we imagine *must* have motivated Wittgenstein when he was struck by the story about the Parisian car accident, *viz.*, that it brought home to him the notion that there is an isomorphism or 'fit' between the reality and the model in which this reality is represented, will be giving full reign to a tendency which all the examples used so far have shown to be mistaken. From this new perspective, one that we can readily see that Wittgenstein adopted in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the requirement for a 'fit' between

word and world reflects only the confused *need* to tell a metaphysical story about an isomorphism between a reality depicted and a method of depiction, that has no *useful* role to play.

The more difficult question which then naturally arises is whether Wittgenstein can be seen to have been guilty *himself* of accepting this story when he wrote the *Tractatus*. On a certain very traditional account of that work he certainly was, although it can also provisionally appear from McManus's examples that he was *always* too farsighted a philosopher to have given in to tendencies which have been shown to be misguided. Far from its being the case that Wittgenstein adhered to some form of Picture Theory in the *Tractatus*, he was according to McManus actually attempting to *undermine* the very tendencies that the road accident model is usually assumed to illustrate. The appeal of the courtroom model could *not* then have consisted for him in its telling us any kind of metaphysical story involving a dichotomy between a reality depicted and a method of depiction:

When he leads us to certain 'internal properties' and 'internal relations', he is not articulating perplexing answers to certain difficult questions, but indicating situations in which we face things that look like 'questions' but which we do not really understand. Thus those supposed 'answers', Wittgenstein's 'propositions', can be seen as 'rungs' of a 'ladder' to be 'climbed' and then 'thrown away' (*Ibid.*, 100).

This concise expression of what has come to be known as a *resolute* approach to the *Tractatus* is repeated two pages further on, at the beginning of Chapter 8 on 'Subjectivity', where he claims explicitly that Wittgenstein's strategy is to 'think through a con-formist conception of the relationship between thinker and world; the internal relations he identifies show once again how such a conception would have to work, but serve ultimately to indicate how that conception rests on a confusion' (*Ibid.*, 102). To some readers, however, McManus may seem to make things rather too easy for himself at the beginning of his Chapter 5 on 'The Picture Analogy' by claiming, after quoting *Tractatus* 2.1 and 4.01, that a Picture Theory 'is not very appealing' (*Ibid.*, 65). For those who may already be puzzled by how language represents, he questions firstly how alike

linguistic and pictorial representation are in any event, and secondly how pictorial representation is supposed to work. Indeed, this form of representation on his view faces problems which parallel those concerning linguistic representation, with the consequence that Wittgenstein 'may seem to be seeking to assimilate one problematic form of representation to another':

Ascribing a 'picture theory' of representation to the *Tractatus* is, I believe, a mistake anyway. My view is that Wittgenstein uses the analogy between pictures and propositions not as part of an explanation of how meaning or thought is possible, but rather in questioning whether we have assigned sense to that very 'possibility', whether we really understand what it is that we think needs to be 'accounted for' here, the supposed philosophical problem that needs to be 'solved' (*Ibid.*, 65).

Remarking that what is so striking about the Paris courtroom representation is that it is 'not what most people would immediately think of as an example of a picture' (*Ibid.*, 66), it would appear that McManus has no sympathy whatsoever for the thought that reading about the car crash and how it came to be reflected in a courtroom model *might* after all have struck Wittgenstein at the time as a revelation, because it provided a 'concrete' example of an abstract idea. Even if the model might never have been able to *wholly* capture his intentions, it may nevertheless have formed an approximation which came close to reflecting what he wanted to say, for example, about analysing ordinary propositions into elementary propositions. McManus then quotes what on the face of it is a very revealing passage from the *Tractatus*:

The essential nature of the propositional sign becomes very clear when we imagine it made up of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs.

The mutual spatial relation of these things then expresses the sense of the proposition ( 3.1431).

Yet the most that McManus can say in response to what would *appear* to be a pretty clear

endorsement of the claim that the idea of a proposition as a picture is playing an important role in his thinking, is that the 'model envisaged here is even less "picture-like" in that its "elements" are physically or visually dissimilar to what they are to represent' (*Ibid.*). It would seem that he has already from the beginning of his presentation stacked his cards against the idea that Wittgenstein could *really* have been endorsing a metaphysical viewpoint in 3.1431. The view he wishes to expound instead is that whilst on a first reading of the *Tractatus* it appears that names and propositions are 'internally related', as a way of explaining how the 'logical/illogical' boundary manages to lie where it does, a proper appreciation of the import of 6.54 will reveal to us that whilst there is indeed 'no sense to the notion of first grasping what a name represents and then learning how that name relates to the propositions in which it figures' (*Ibid.*, 73), the picture analogy ultimately shows that to have identified a name understood as a symbol and not as a sign is *already* to know how it figures in propositions. Consequently, the *philosophical* question how names combine to form propositions, depends on confusing *sign & symbol*. That names and propositions are internally related, therefore, is a pseudo-answer to a pseudo-question. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is undermining these spurious problems from within through the employment of a startlingly new *modus operandi*.

Yet when we study the considerations that weigh with McManus when discussing his road-accident, he may appear to some readers to be availing himself of notions which are not obviously central to the philosophy of the *Tractatus* at all. The use of his pepper-pot and napkins, for example, like the reaction that he believes that most of us would have to the claim that 'this is Frank' followed by *nothing at all* (*Ibid.*, 67), where the *role* of the sign 'Frank' as a symbol in an ordinary proposition, is not explained in the manner of General Burroughs, are ideas which find their proper home only in the *Philosophical Investigations*. But can McManus really be doing no more than leaving himself open to a charge, often made against resolute readings, that in objecting to a certain metaphysical notion of *picturing*, and in claiming that 'our signs have as much life as our use of them gives them' (*Ibid.*, 69) he is reading into the earlier writings ideas which find their proper home only in Wittgenstein's later work? This issue is naturally quite separate from that of the validity of those ideas in their own right.

It may be that the important question is not whether this charge can be made to stick, because on this point it may be surmised that the argument at this point can go either way depending on one's initial predilections. The fact that McManus appears to be appealing to certain features usually found only in the later philosophy does not in itself show that they cannot find their expression in some form in the earlier philosophy as well. Furthermore, if a philosopher is committed to a *resolute* view, derived, say, from a textual study of the book itself, according to an approach which is *text-immanent* in Alois Pichler's sense (1), this may make him less tempted to regard as even *relevant* certain *external* historical *facts* relating to what was said by Wittgenstein during the 1930's, which could be gathered as *evidence* in favour of the claim that he was then in the course of repudiating a metaphysical viewpoint to which he had earlier adhered. Why, it may even be suggested, should *he* have the last word on the fundamental significance of what he wrote in the *Tractatus*, when at the point of writing he may not have been at all certain of the true nature of the vision which his genius had revealed to him?

Whilst considerations of this kind are hardly conclusive, they can help to explain why the debate at this point sometimes has the appearance in the literature of going round in a circle, suggesting that in the final reckoning there may be no acceptable criteria for adjudicating between these outlooks, since they depend on the presuppositions that each side brings to the debate. Here, however, McManus may be able to come to our aid when he raises the question in an interesting 'Appendix A' why there is a Later Wittgenstein at all, a question to which he cannot understandably be seen to be providing the conventional answer that the *Tractatus* advocated what he calls a kind of *con-formism* which Wittgenstein later recognised to be mistaken (*Ibid.*, 235):

One of the main reasons why I came to have doubts initially about the notion that the *Tractatus* offers us an explanation of the possibility of meaning that rests on some kind of ineffable metaphysics was my reading Wittgenstein's transitional works and failing to find there the kind of critical revisions that his having advocated such a view earlier would lead one to expect. (*Ibid.*)

There is on McManus's assessment no working out of a new metaphysical outlook in these transitional writings, presumably because there is no older one to be rejected, and no criticism either of an ineffable metaphysics for the same reason. McManus also claims that what criticisms of con-formism one does find are not criticisms of Wittgenstein's former self, presumably because he did not in the *Tractatus* actually hold this con-formist point of view.

What McManus does discover, however, is a criticism by the later Wittgenstein of the earlier in terms of his early adherence to an all-encompassing conception of language, a conception mentioned in § 65 of the *Investigations*, with its reference to the *general form of propositions* and of language. The new conception of language which replaces the old one, and its relation to the notion of family resemblance, capturing the principle that there is no one thing that we can call a 'proposition', have consequences which are uncontroversially regarded by McManus both as wide-ranging and also as fundamental to the kinds of changes that took place later on in Wittgenstein's conception of philosophical problems (*Ibid.*, 240).

Readers will find, then, that McManus's discussion in the following sections concerning those changes and developments in Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook, contain a great deal that is common ground between those like himself who aspire to a resolute approach and those who in a more traditional way see a change from the overtly metaphysical to the anthropocentric: his treatment of sections §§ 90 - 91, § 23, and § 121, for example, contain much that might form part of a standard 'textbook' treatment of the speaking of language as a reflection of participation in ways of living, forms of life; and whilst he does find the reorientation in Wittgenstein's thinking 'radical and difficult to appreciate' (*Ibid.*, 253), this does not prevent McManus from seeing Wittgenstein's refusal to become involved in spurious debates about the discovery of *the* defining characteristic shared by *all* the problems of philosophy, as a component of a 'true later radicalism' which is to be sharply distinguished from Wittgenstein's earlier metaphilosophical vision in the *Tractatus*. McManus is evidently complaining here about the dogmatic outlook which characterised a Wittgenstein who in the Preface to the *Tractatus* claimed that its 'definitive' and 'unassailable' truths provide the final

solution to the problems of philosophy. This explains his reference to Wittgenstein as someone who earlier on articulated a certain vision of philosophy: that of 'Philosophy-capital-P articulated in terms of Analysis-capital-A and the Arbitrariness-capital-A of Grammar-capital-G, all of which are underpinned by a vision of Language-capital-L' (*Ibid.*, 254).

This quotation immediately precedes the final question he will ask in his book, why the *Tractatus* is still worth reading if its value as a work of philosophy is compromised by the shortcomings which, *via* his account of the change in Wittgenstein's ideas which culminated in the *Investigations*, he has just been using his Appendix to unravel. Repeating the not uncommon charge already made here against *resolute* readings of the *Tractatus*, that they make philosophy less interesting because they assimilate the early Wittgenstein to the later, he understandably replies that this charge depends on the assumption, which he has throughout his book attempted to repudiate, that the only thing that could make the *Tractatus* interesting on this view is its advocacy of an ineffable metaphysics and a picture theory of representation. Believing that there is a lasting value in at least one aspect of the early Wittgenstein's work that the later work lacks, he then makes a claim that is bound to startle those wedded to the *Tractatus* as a work of metaphysics :

Many of the critical insights that this Appendix discusses ought perhaps to have been anticipated by the author of the *Tractatus*: to fail to recognise 'family resemblance' concepts is to display a faith in 'surface grammar' as a guide to our intent in using words, a presumption that where we have the same sign, we have the same symbol (*Ibid.*, 255)

For those already wedded to a more traditional account of Wittgenstein's intentions in the *Tractatus*, this will appear to be no more than a begging of the question based on the very charge of assimilating the early Wittgenstein to the later that he has already attempted to undermine. One only needs to study the outlook on the *Tractatus* expressed, for example, by Severin Schroeder in *Wittgenstein The Way Out of the Flybottle* (Polity 2006), a book published in the same year as the

original hardback version of his own, to appreciate the yawning gulf between two approaches between which it is difficult to see that there could be any kind of accommodation. McManus nevertheless wishes to regard the *Tractatus* as having presented, despite its shortcomings, a vision of philosophy as a misguided exploration of the supposed basis of 'intelligibility' made possible only by sign/symbol confusion, that is more *vivid* than that provided in the later philosophy, (*Ibid.*, 256) even if the later Wittgenstein provides a 'richer' exploration of how and why we succumb to philosophical confusion (*Ibid.*, 255).

The final chapter of the book prior to his Appendix A explores the fate of four 'keys' to the *Tractatus* that McManus has identified at the beginning, 'the point' of the book, its 'whole meaning', its author's 'fundamental thought' and his 'main contention'. Here McManus again emphasises that the 'discovery' of an internal relation as a reflection of what is *shown*, e.g., a proposition as 'showing' its sense, disintegrates because the desire which cannot be fulfilled for a certain kind of explanation points towards the conclusion that this desire itself rests on a confusion. What, for example, sounds like an *explanation* of how names can be combined to form propositions, *viz.*, that names and propositions are internally related, collapses because posing the question already presupposes its everyday 'answer'.

This ground has already been covered earlier in the book, so that McManus's 'Conclusion' Chapter 15 is in some measure a summing-up of material much of which has already been explored in Chapter 7, 'The "Con-formity" of Language and World'. Once again McManus draws our attention to the internal relation of *depicting* which appears as if it could explain *how* propositions can represent reality, when the form of isomorphism envisaged provides not the *grounds* for a comparison, but rather *presupposes* that the relation between the means of depiction and what is depicted is already the *product* of a method of comparison. In much the same way, the General's decision to employ the apple, pineapple and nuts as a way of representing various participants in his story *is* just his way of deciding their roles in the model which he is using in order to clarify what went on in the battle:

As I argued..., a sign/symbol confusion can be seen behind the con-formist story. No one thinks that one might discover rules for the use of signs, since 'the sign is arbitrary' ...But also, no one thinks that one might discover rules for the use of symbols, since when considered as symbols, we take for granted how the words in question ought to be used; that cannot be seen as a matter to be determined. Rather, the illusion of con-formity, of a determination of how words must be used to describe the world, arises when we treat words simultaneously as signs and symbols (*Ibid.*, 221).

This is another echo of the fundamental misperception, mentioned at the very beginning of his book, with which he is ultimately concerned, the confused temptation to endow words with a life of their own, independently of the use we make of them, so that we *enchant* and become *enchanted* by them, especially when doing philosophy (*Ibid.*, 1). It is a significant feature of McManus's approach here that he sees Wittgenstein uprooting this confusion between sign and symbol and the role it plays in the philosophical notion of an *internal relation*, even in cases where Wittgenstein might be thought to be clearly outlining a metaphysical proposal:

On a larger scale, the manner in which the picture analogy itself works might be compared with the *modus operandi* of this 'notational' solution: both undermine philosophical illusions by 'disenchanting' words. By asking us to think about models that are 'made up of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs' (3.1431), Wittgenstein breaks up the familiar sign/symbol associations upon which our philosophical confusions feed. (*Ibid.*, 222).

In the course, therefore, of releasing us from the temptation to think that his pepper-pot and napkin, for example, could retain their meanings independently of 'the particular systems

of representation in which they figure' (*Ibid.*), McManus uses as an example 3.1431, which many more traditional commentators would be inclined to regard as an expression of the very antithesis of what he is suggesting. In these circumstances, the possibility of some form of accommodation between these opposing perspectives seems highly unlikely.

There is a brief treatment in the next section of 'the mystical' which 'shows itself' (6.522), and McManus suggests that Wittgenstein, ever down-to-earth in his approach to matters of this kind, is not concerned with anything mysterious or supernatural, but instead with a mismatch between the difficulties of ordinary life and the resources and mind-set of philosophy:

The mundane ethical demands of ordinary life, of being straight with other people and with oneself, are obscured by the demand that we make ourselves receptive to mystical insight; such a notion encourages us to look in the wrong place for what is difficult about 'doing the right thing'. But a step towards recognising that ordinary life that we already know, recognising it having been in the grip of philosophical fantasy, is a confrontation with what that fantasy can understand only as 'the mystical' (*Ibid.*, 223).

What McManus is saying here, however, following his initial remark that what is actually meant by the *mystical* in the *Tractatus* is unclear, can surely have very little to do with what is being expressed in 6.44, 6.45 and 6.522. It derives, in fact, from comments by Englemann who clearly understood Wittgenstein to be someone who in his daily life would have no truck with any 'transcendental twaddle' (*Ibid.*). In the *Tractatus*, on the other hand, the concentration is almost entirely on a kind of puzzlement that might arise from reflection on the thought that anything should exist at all, a characteristically 'metaphysical' *insight* that in *other* circumstances we might imagine Wittgenstein questioning as having no useful *role*, yet one which is repeated in the Lecture on Ethics where '*wonder at the existence of the world*' is regarded as one of his 'ethical experiences *par excellence*' (As quoted, *Ibid.*). This leads McManus to conclude that Wittgenstein's

remarks on the ethical may help us understand what he says about the mystical. Yet McManus's account of ethics in Chapter 13, 'Ethics and "the Inexpressible"' and in Chapter 14, 'Ethics and "the Ladder"' contains some of the most difficult material in the book, sometimes difficult in its own right and sometimes difficult because it is hard to see how it relates to Wittgenstein. This justifies his initial remarks before launching his account:

The evidence upon which any commentator can draw in trying to make sense of Wittgenstein's comments on ethics is sparse. These comments are few and far between; this is one of the reasons why they are so puzzling - they seem to come out of nowhere - and are so easy for commentators to disregard. As a result of this insubstantial basis, any reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on ethics will be speculative; and anyone unable to entertain such a reading will simply have to suspend judgement on what these remarks mean (*Ibid.*, 177).

Yet this precedes an account in which the 'inexpressibility' of ethics is related to the notions of *decency*, *conscience* and *goodwill*, as background 'capacities' without which ethical talk lacks substance, yet which cannot themselves be 'condensed' into ethical principles to be conventionally followed. As in his account of 'internal relations', there is a distortion involved in a first recognition of these phenomena, a ladder to be 'thrown away' as the philosopher comes to appreciate his misguided view of ethics for the fantasy that it is (*Ibid.*).

Whilst the complexities of McManus's treatment of ethics with its speculative character make this subject very difficult to adequately consider in the present context, at one point in his discussion he raises a question that points towards one of the most important treatments in his book. The question he raises (*Ibid.*, 179) is whether the *logical* like the *ethical* might be unteachable, and this takes him back to his previous discussion of the apparent impossibility of teaching or learning symbols. This subject is important because it relates directly to the process of teaching or learning a first language, and here McManus once again repeats the apparent difficulty to which this idea gives rise:

Roughly speaking, learning a second language can be seen as a matter of learning a collection of contingent facts about *signs*, learning that 'x' refers to *x*s; but this presupposes a capacity to distinguish *x*s from non-*x*s, and it is that capacity that corresponds to mastery of a first language, to a mastery of symbols. On the sentential level, the second-language learner learns that this sentence is used to represent that fact; but learning a first language cannot be the same kind of feat; mastery of a first language corresponds to the capacity to discriminate facts upon which, according to our sketch, second-language learning draws (*Ibid.*, 180).

So, a zoologist comes across a kind of animal he has never seen before, and decides to christen it as a member of a new species by giving it a name. This proposal gains its sense because anyone who is already master of a language can discriminate different kinds of items in his environment even if there are questions to be asked in specific cases about the nature, the purpose and also about the names, whether already granted or not, of items with which he is unfamiliar. However, someone who is not already master of a first language on this assessment, might appear *by definition* to be unable to discriminate any items in his environment whatsoever. He would in effect be going nowhere in gaining any kind of understanding of his surroundings. This is not an empirical matter. This follows solely from the role assigned to the notion of *learning a first language*.

The issue arises initially for McManus in relation to his second objection to the proposal that 'language and world are internally related', for if the Subject cannot 'make language happen', and if the idea that thought *links* language and world, endowing signs with their life, is irremediably empty, the question he asks is how a language can possibly be *learned*. It would appear that this kind of thinking has forced the philosopher into a corner in which concept *acquisition* must always be presupposed, since any attempt to argue that ostensive definition might teach one the meaning of a *symbol* on McManus's reckoning, is already to assume a capacity on the part of the learner to

recognise an item as one of a particular *kind*. As Wittgenstein implies in 3.263, the ostensive definitions that are proposed gain a role only when the meanings of the signs they contain are already known (*Ibid.*, 108).

This understandably leads McManus to ask whether the philosopher is then bound to accept a doctrine of innate ideas towards which the apparant inability to *acquire* a mastery of a language would appear to be driving him, and in a rich discussion suggests amongst other things that if the use of our symbols cannot itself be understood as a *response* to 'how the world is', then one way of looking at things which has some grounding in the *Tractatus* is to propose that since meaning must always be treated as a given, what 'the problem of concept acquisition demonstrates...is that we live, as it were, in the midst of, bathed in, meaning, and can never step outside it so as to see that, or how, it is'. Perhaps the ultimate unsurveyability of our thought and talk stands as a condition of our thinking and talking, something which *shows* itself in everything that we say or do (*Ibid.*, 111).

It can come as no surprise that on a *resolute* reading, McManus twists this kind of thinking inside out by suggesting that in treating our 'capacity to think' as something that cannot coherently be questioned, and in thinking of intelligibility as con-formity as an *internal* property of a thought, we are contorting ourselves in knots in the belief that we are saying anything at all, as in the 'assertion' that the person who crosses the line first *always* wins (*Ibid.*, 115). We have failed on this view even to assign to our notions of *language* or *thought* senses which can allow the question of intelligibility as con-formity to coherently arise. This is an expression of the point he had made at the beginning of his Section on learning a first language:

I discuss language learning because it provides an intuitive way into Wittgenstein's reflections on a powerful, unreflective philosophical vision of the meaningfulness of language and what it is to use a language with understanding. I will argue ultimately that the apparent impossibility of language learning that is to be discussed emerges only if one adopts

that vision and that that vision and the understanding of language  
learning that rests upon it must be abandoned as confused; that vision  
is the early Wittgenstein's ultimate target.....(*Ibid.*, 106)

Essential to that vision is the idea that 'mastery of a first language rests on something like a judgement of the way that the world is' (*Ibid.*, 123), that it results from what is akin to an observation of how things are. But just as we can discover that no real sense can be attached to the 'issue' of whether 'the world is available to us as ordered', we equally discover that what we must ultimately 'observe' if we believe that our understanding does 'rest on' something like an observation of how things are, are Wittgensteinian *objects*. But Wittgenstein's real intention is to show that we have failed to assign any sense to this 'thought'.

The apparent impossibility of *learning a first language* as distinct from learning a second, is consequent upon the philosopher's understanding that learning anything at all about the world already presupposes a division of the items within it into items of different kinds using concepts. This theme is also an undercurrent to Wittgenstein's thinking in the *Investigations*, raising its head again in § 32: one misleading facet of Augustine's account of learning a language is said to rest upon his treating the learning of a first language *as if* it were like learning a second, which it is not. What is evidently misleading about this, and it is an assumption that is very easy to make, is that Augustine's child has all the appearance of already being able to effect this division of his world into items of different kinds before having learned a language, so that his only problem is to learn the *names* of those different kinds of items he is already able to distinguish.

Augustine's apparent adherence to this 'language of thought' hypothesis is judged by Wittgenstein to lead to an infinite regress, because it gains its credibility solely from transferring the consequences of having already learned a first language in a public context, into a situation in which this learning process has failed to occur. The ability to *imagine* a child born into these circumstances, a child who goes on to *invent* a language for himself to talk about the *kinds* of things around him, is an only too common feature of a secondary literature now replete with

born-Crusoes conforming to this rather familiar pattern; and insofar as the ability to imagine a solitary individual of this kind turns on the Humean principle that whatever is conceivable is possible, irrespective of whether this is possible as a matter of empirical fact, then it forms the basis for Peter Hacker's well-known distinction between the genesis of an ability and its exercise.

There is every reason to believe that at least one aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking is quite in accord with this idea: it is central to the famous *Blue Book* passage in page 12, where he remarks that although as a matter of fact, teaching is the *cause* of understanding *etc.*, it is surely *conceivable* that the child might have had these abilities without ever having been taught the language. A last vestige of the idea remains in *Investigations* § 6, where it is pointed out that the 'ostensive teaching of words' is an element in the training by which a child learns a language. This forms an important part of the process by which human beings are inculcated into the *practice* of speaking a language, although this could of course be *imagined* otherwise. Wittgenstein does not specify what alternatives might be imagined here, but it would be reasonable to conclude that he is harking back to his earlier Humean *possibility* that the child's achievement in speaking a language might not have been the result of training after all. This leaves the born Crusoe as a *possibility* only insofar as it is *imaginable*.

Wittgenstein also says a number of things which can help dispel confusions which almost inevitably arise in this area, and one of them, well-known, relates to babies and animals who do not have language; for if having concepts depends on having language, how can babies and animals even think if they do not speak? An underlying assumption that the ability to express propositional attitudes is a condition of being able to think, or even of 'being conscious', is dispelled in § 28, where it is said that whereas human beings use language, animals (and babies) do not. But that is as far as it goes. Animals communicate amongst themselves, and react appropriately to their circumstances, so that in saying that they lack language in any but its most primitive forms, Wittgenstein is pointing to a hierarchy in which there can be no sharp dividing line between behaviour which is mechanical, *e.g.*, inherited predispositions, and behaviour which is the expression of intention, purpose and thought in an accepted, yet ordinary sense. Perhaps it should almost go without saying here that

the definition of *learning a first language* provided earlier on *can* be highly misleading, just because it may be taken to imply that a human being who has not in fact been trained into the practice of speaking would have no understanding or relationship to his surroundings; and as a matter of empirical fact this surely cannot be true. Whatever a baby, or for that matter a wolf-child may lack, it is far from being *in fact* a lack of any orientation towards the world whatsoever. Whilst the definition provided of *learning a first language*, as distinct from learning a second, is intended to emphasise its connection with concept acquisition, *thinking* itself is also a widely ramified concept (Zettel § 110).

It is not immediately clear how the difficulties that McManus discusses in relation to learning a first language in the *Tractatus* relate to those later treatments of Augustine's child, because they arise in a quite different context. McManus warns against a particular mythology in which initial linguistic mastery 'rests on' something like a *judgement* of the way the world is, a judgement about what is 'observed'. This judgement, made in a distinctly 'solipsistic' context, presupposes that what are 'observed' are Wittgensteinian objects, a thought which McManus's Wittgenstein is undermining by revealing that this 'thought' makes no sense. Wittgenstein's later treatment, on the other hand, views the learning of language as a process which takes place in a public context in which the child gradually acquires linguistic techniques. Just how it is possible that he should be *able* to acquire these techniques is an empirical question which is not Wittgenstein's concern. It is also an interesting feature of this training into language acquisition, that achieving the right results is not *guaranteed*: there is a strong element of 'trial and error' in the process by which a child gradually 'catches on', with plenty of scope for *misunderstanding* over what the teacher is *pointing* at, and this can be regarded as a final recognition on Wittgenstein's part of the yawning conceptual gulf emphasised by McManus between being master of a first language and being master of a second.

Chapter 4 on 'The Method of the *Tractatus*' is distinguished by the way in which McManus differentiates between the traditional reaction to 6.54 developed, for example, by Norman Malcolm and Peter Hacker, in which the 'nonsense' involved relates to a metaphysical proposal of some kind, albeit one which is inexpressible or ineffable, and the hard-headed approach instigated by Cora Diamond

and James Conant two decades ago, in which nonsense becomes plain nonsense or sheer gibberish. What the *Tractatus* reveals on this view is the reader's susceptibility to a number of illusions which Wittgenstein carefully allows him to become aware of in the act of undermining a metaphysical viewpoint which is really only an apparent and not a genuine feature of the text.

McManus describes the toing and froing of the argument between those advocating what has become known as a *resolute* response to 6.54, and its traditional opponents, who would claim that if the resolute response is correct, it turns the *Tractatus* into a joke, instead of a serious contender for the title of one of the most profound works in the Western Philosophical canon. The anti-traditionalists would regard it as a poor argument, however, to respond by claiming that the book *reads* as a piece of real metaphysics, since the resolute response to this is that in so regarding it, the reader is merely showing that he has been taken in by the illusion of sense which Wittgenstein intends that he will in time be able to outgrow. McManus draws our attention to the overwhelming desire on the part of traditional interpreters to point to Wittgenstein's later comments indicating that nowhere does he leave the impression that he intended the work to be anything less than a serious metaphysical treatise. The answer which McManus describes Diamond & Conant as having provided to this charge is that Wittgenstein later recognised that he had unwittingly incorporated certain metaphysical proposals in the book which were quite unintended. On the face of it this sounds at the very least a trifle disingenuous.

A more serious suggestion in favour of the resolute proposal is that throughout his life Wittgenstein believed that philosophical problems ought to be dissolved rather than solved, so that the appropriate response to a philosophical problem is not the creation of a theory but the identification of the locus of the confusion giving rise to a puzzle that is only apparent rather than real (*Ibid.*, 47). In fact, McManus believes that 'Wittgenstein's demonstration of how we come to reach for "the unsayable" is something that is meant to help us see the confusion in whose grip we are thinking' (*Ibid.*, 48). This is consistent with his claim not only that the story about the *Tractatus* that he wishes to provide does not require a 'theory of meaning', but also that none of the existing

theories of meaning that are intended to accommodate 6.54 are in any way plausible.

Echoing his primary claim throughout that conflation of sign and symbol give rise to fundamental confusions, he remarks that the debate over how to read this nonsensical book has been conspicuously short of examples, which he then proceeds to provide. However, these examples are taken from the works of Lewis Carroll, and are intended to demonstrate that there are varieties of nonsense with which the current debate has so far failed to reckon (*Ibid.*,51) That this kind of nonsense need not be intended to incorporate some kind of ineffable claim yet that it can be understood, is something that McManus wishes to use in elucidating the *Tractatus*. The significant feature of the examples from Carroll is that they are 'nonsensical', capable of being 'understood', can figure in 'arguments' and thus 'possess a logic'. Nevertheless, they are properly described as plain or real nonsense which cannot be described as ineffable truths:

I will argue that the *Tractatus* 'elucidates' a con-formist image of language, thought and world; like Carroll's humour, what such 'elucidations' do is work through what is in fact a confused logic, a double-think that characterizes this confused image's borrowings of sense; these elucidations demonstrate how we must look at language, thought and world in order for the con-formist image to seem to make sense, but with the ultimate intention of demonstrating that it doesn't (*Ibid.*, 57).

This leads McManus to think of coming to a true understanding of the *Tractatus* as a matter of reading the book *twice*, with the first reading involving a pseudo-understanding of Wittgenstein's propositions, leading the reader to talk nonsense. On a second reading, however, although he still talks nonsense, he does so having come to realise how Wittgenstein has allowed him to understand the way in which confusions have shaped his thinking during the earlier reading. This is described as having acquired the requisite double-vision. Consequently, Wittgenstein, although he may *appear* to be saying the same thing as the confused person, is doing so without confusion

because, possessed of the requisite double-vision, he possesses a form of enlightenment which allows him to say, for example, that 'Propositions and facts are internally related' with the proper understanding that he is talking nonsense.

Despite the fact that there is a rather traditional perspective on the *Tractatus* from which this account of Wittgenstein's intentions will appear to be preposterous, the difficulties here are at least partly terminological. Indeed, McManus agrees wholeheartedly with Peter Hacker that the *Tractatus* is a 'great book' presenting 'philosophical insights' (*Ibid.*, 136), differing with Hacker only over the nature of the insights that it offers. Referring to Wittgenstein's reference to the same traps that language sets everyone, McManus believes that Wittgenstein's 'ladder' can be 'climbed' by engaging our capacity to reason, and this will seem a much more acceptable description of Wittgenstein's intentions, albeit one which philosophers have traditionally tended to associate rather more with his later rather than with his earlier thinking.

In his Chapter 11, 'The General Form of the Proposition', McManus interestingly claims that he knows of no philosopher who has not attributed the claims surrounding this GFP as a summary of the requirements of logical analysis of ordinary propositions into elementary propositions, and surrounding the associated claim that the world is the totality of existent atomic facts, to 'prejudices, naivetes, or uncritically accepted legacies or as derived from other views of his with similarly unappealing pedigrees' (*Ibid.*, 142). Applying this analysis to later Cook, and even to astute commentators like Fogelin and Stern, the general aim of the chapter is to show how Wittgenstein's adherence to what he regarded as quite unproblematic insights, relate to the general commitments of the *Tractatus*, and how the 'dogmatism' they embody is to be viewed against the background of a work that ultimately does not have the metaphysical import usually attributed to it. The discussion is continued in Chapter 12, 'Problem Cases for the General Form', which deals amongst other things with the colour-exclusion problem.

In his Preface, Denis McManus states that it has taken him a long time to write this book, yet in doing so he has become aware that there are probably many ways through the *Tractatus*, his

present reading being itself incompatible with other ideas he has about the book to which he may at some point return. Wittgenstein's work with its multi-faceted nature points in many different directions, so that the ability on the part of a commentator to highlight certain aspects of the *Tractatus* or of the *Investigations* at the expense of others as a means of indirectly revealing distinct and separate 'voices' in these works, *pace* David Stern, can be said to have played a lasting role in accounting for the almost unlimited variety of interpretations to which his thinking has given rise.

This variety was evident in 2006, the original year of publication of McManus's book. In addition to the account of the *Tractatus* by Severin Schroeder already mentioned, 2006 also saw Roger White's traditional yet original **Reader's Guide** to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* from Continuum, and Pasquale Frascolla's *Understanding Wittgenstein's Tractatus* from Routledge with its ontological commitment to objects as qualia. Marie McGinn also produced in that year *Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Language* (O.U.P.) with its attempt to steer a 'middle-course' between the more extreme therapeutic interpretations from Diamond and Conant and traditional metaphysical accounts from Pears and Hacker *etc.* by deriving inspiration from the work of interpreters like Rhees, Winch, Ishiguro and McGuinness. Mark Addis in his *Wittgenstein: A Guide for the Perplexed* from yet another Continuum series about thinkers, also provided a more traditional kind of treatment of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* as part of his wider account of the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Denis McManus's book is distinguished throughout by a close familiarity with the *Tractatus*. It is notable for the sheer number of aspects of that work which he manages to cover with an attention to detail to which no review could do full justice. At times he provides something of an intellectual *tour de force*, *e.g.*, in his pursuit of the idea of *learning a first language* and its relation to *solipsism, objects etc.* Although the presentation of a highly *resolute* perspective on the *Tractatus* is one of the book's main goals, that perspective seems at times quite incidental to the importance of the arguments used and the conclusions arrived at. That is perhaps as it should be when we have no idea whether a *wholly* resolute Wittgenstein has in the longer term any real chance of survival.

## ENDNOTES

- (1) Alois Pichler: 'The Interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations*: Style, Therapy, *Nachlass*' in *Wittgenstein and His Interpreters* ed. Guy Kahane, Edward Kanterian, and Oskari Kuusela (Oxford, Blackwell Pub., 2007).

*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. His latest, on Wittgenstein, appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, with a further in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010.*