

An *Elucidatory* Interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: A Critique of Daniel D. Hutto's and Marie McGinn's Reading of *Tractatus* 6.54

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Abstract

Much has been written on the relative merits of different readings of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The recent renewal of the debate has almost exclusively been concerned with variants of the ineffabilist (metaphysical) reading of *TL-P* – notable such readings have been advanced by Elizabeth Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and H. O. Mounce – and the recently advanced variants of therapeutic (resolute) readings – notable advocates of which are James Conant, Cora Diamond, Juliet Floyd and Michael Kremer. During this debate, there have been a number of writers who have tried to develop a third way, incorporating what they see as insights and avoiding what they see as flaws in both the ineffabilist and resolute readings. The most prominent advocates of these *elucidatory* readings of *TL-P* are Dan Hutto (2003) and Marie McGinn (1999). In this paper we subject Hutto's and McGinn's readings of *TL-P* to critical scrutiny. We find that in seeking to occupy the middle ground they ultimately find themselves committed to (and in the process commit Wittgenstein to) the very ineffabilism they (and Wittgenstein) are seeking to overcome.

Keywords: ineffabilism; therapy; elucidation; nonsense; Wittgenstein

I Introductory

The penultimate 'proposition' of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, proposition 6.54, (in)famously reads:

My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: he who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must overcome these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

Any satisfactory reading of the *Tractatus* must be able to comprehend Wittgenstein's somewhat enigmatic concluding insistence that his 'elucidations' have been nonsense. Currently, two ways prevail of interpreting this proposition, and consequently the rest of the *Tractatus* to which it promises to be an interpretative guide.

According to one of the two interpretations,¹ when one throws away the *Tractatus*, one throws away the text (i.e. one throws away its elucidatory propositions), but one holds onto *what* those propositions have elucidated for one, i.e. certain unstatable 'truths' about the way language works and how it is related to the world. According to this view, in 6.54 Wittgenstein is adding the finishing touch to a theme that has been lurking in the background since at least 3.221, but that is first stated at 4.115–4.1213: the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. Such metaphysical readings we call 'ineffabilist readings'.

The reading often found juxtaposed to the ineffabilist reading in the recent literature is what we term the 'therapeutic reading'.² This takes seriously Wittgenstein's claim in *TL-P* that the 'propositions' of the body of the *Tractatus* are – *strictly speaking* – nonsense (6.54). This reading claims that there are no logical distinctions between nonsensical sentences, i.e. no elucidatory nonsense. Rather, there are psychological distinctions among nonsensical sentences. The *activity* of reading the *Tractatus* provides the philosopher with a mirror whereby she can come to recognize her metaphysical claims as failing to do what she imagined they could.

While much current exegetical debate has been concerned with the relative merits of the ineffabilist and therapeutic readings, Dan Hutto^{3,4} and Marie McGinn⁵ have independently sought a reading of *TL-P* that might be situated between the two. In this paper we offer a critical examination of these 'elucidatory' readings of *TL-P*.

Such a critical evaluation is of import over and above purely exegetical considerations as lessons can be garnered from this for the purposes of reading the later Wittgenstein. In this respect let us then briefly note that, in the context of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein's 'elucidatory' aim involves the idea of 'disguised' nonsense, the possibility of our *thinking* that we can understand something that we *come* to recognize fails to make sense in the way we had hoped. *PI* arguably involves *itself* (its imaginary scenarios) being (recognized to be) just such disguised nonsense.⁶ All Wittgenstein's great works, we believe, need to be taken in a thoroughly dialogical and transitional fashion. As David Stern has put it, 'On [the therapeutic, Cavell/Diamond] reading, the aim of Wittgenstein's dialogues is not to lead his reader to any philosophical view, neither an idealised, frictionless theory of language, nor a pragmatic theory of ordinary language, but rather to help us through such ways of speaking and looking.'⁷ This brings out again the importance of our topic: this is no narrow debate over the interpretation of one text from eighty years ago; it ramifies into the question of whether

recent and contemporary philosophy has tended to misplace Wittgenstein's *entire* contribution to philosophy. We believe that Wittgenstein's elucidations (and perspicuous presentations) throughout his career have to be recognized as of *transitional*, purpose-relative and 'personal' use only.

In this paper we seek to show that Hutto and McGinn perpetuate in an insidious – *because* nuanced, sophisticated and avowedly anti-theoretical – form exactly the kind of impulses that it was Wittgenstein's ultimate aim throughout his career to help us overcome. We shall contend that their readings often make it seem as though Wittgenstein's later work allows him to do (*vis-à-vis* language and grammar) what was illegitimate according to the *Tractatus*: namely, simply to say and understand philosophical truths about how language works etc. That is, people think that one can simply say stuff about language, about ethics, etc., after and according to the later Wittgenstein.

In what follows we begin by outlining the ineffabilist interpretation of *TL-P*; in doing so we identify the weaknesses that ultimately tell against it (section II). We then turn our attention to the elucidatory readings offered by Hutto and McGinn, identifying similarities to and differences from each other and therapeutic readings; in doing so we shall express some initial misgivings (section III). In section IV we focus our attention on the passively constructed nature of McGinn's understanding of how the elucidations 'fall away' as opposed to Wittgenstein's own *active* construction of the instruction to his reader to 'throw them away'. We move toward conclusion by offering some remarks on the way in which Wittgenstein, explicitly, meant the verb 'elucidate' to be understood: transitively (section V). As a coda we offer some remarks in defence of a therapeutic view of nonsense.

II Ineffabilist Readings

Ineffabilist readings can be characterized in somewhat more detail in the following way.⁸ According to the *Tractatus*, propositions have a sense because they are capable of picturing the facts: i.e. the situations which objects are in, in relation to other objects. As long as there is more than one thing in the world, the propositions of language work by picturing the relationships in which those things stand. The order in our propositions, which renders them capable of thus picturing the facts, we call 'logic'. Hence, logic can be seen as the order of possible situations in which things can find themselves as reflected in language. Now, the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown arises as follows. Logic is not itself a fact. That is to say, logic is the pictorial representation of the order of possibilities for objects standing in relation to one another when they combine to form facts; hence it is not itself a fact. Rather, logic is more like the condition for those facts – as 6.13 says, 'Logic is not a theory, but a reflection of the world. Logic is transcendental.' Propositions work – they have sense – by virtue of

the fact that they are capable of depicting how things stand in the world. But logic is not something, some thing or state of things, in the world, and so cannot be depicted in sense-bearing propositions. Rather it *shows* itself by and in the fact that we have sense-bearing propositions to begin with.

In trying to put this across to the reader, in trying to elucidate the logical isomorphism that must exist between language and the world, Wittgenstein must commit himself to writing something that is self-conscious nonsense. On the metaphysical interpretation of the *Tractatus*, then, Wittgenstein offers something that, if it is read with understanding, must be thrown away once it has been finished, leaving its readers with a set of philosophical insights that they previously lacked, but which cannot be articulated in words. This is what is claimed to give sense to Wittgenstein's insistence at 6.54 that the whole book has been nonsense and must be discarded. Nevertheless, according to this interpretation, the *Tractatus* can serve to gesture toward (true but ineffable) doctrine even after this discarding. This interpretation of the *Tractatus*, thus, is suitably labelled the 'ineffabilist' interpretation.

Wittgenstein's intended audience was a Frege/Russell-style philosopher. As such a philosopher reads the *Tractatus*, he finds the things that he would expect to be elucidated or theorized in a logico-philosophical treatise consigned to the category of the ineffable. Such Frege/Russell preoccupations as the ontological background to the propositional calculus, the role of formal concepts and the nature of inference, i.e. all of the things that could give him a handle on how language 'hooks onto' the world, are claimed, by Wittgenstein, to be unsayable. The ineffabilist, therefore, claims that the central logico-philosophical questions have been answered by the adducing of 'substantial' or 'profound' or 'illuminating' nonsense. Thus the ineffabilist interpretation can rightly be called 'traditional' in that it reads the *Tractatus* as being concerned to give answers to the type of questions posed by the Frege/Russell-style philosopher, albeit in an unorthodox way.⁹

However, advocates of some recent interpretations of the *Tractatus* have pointed out that this leaves ineffabilist readers in a potentially problematic position, a position where they have failed to live up to what could be seen as the challenge posed by 6.54. Firstly, the distinction between what can be said and what shows itself is developed in the main body of the text, so if one holds onto the idea that the *Tractatus* has helped one to grasp ineffabilia of one kind or another, one will not *really* have thrown the entire body of Wittgenstein's propositions away; and secondly, in failing to throw the entire body of the propositions away, one will have lumbered oneself with the deeply suspect notion that one can have insights into reality that cannot be expressed in words, but that can be 'pointed toward', 'gestured at', 'elucidated' by nonsensical uses of language. The fantasy that one can have any cognitive or linguistic access to 'things' that lie beyond the reach of language is one of which Wittgenstein is explicitly critical in the Preface to

the *Tractatus*. Here he maintains that the limit to what can be thought can ‘only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side will be simply nonsense’.¹⁰ Here nonsense is *not* something that can indicate things that lie outside the reach of language but can be thought or displayed none the less: it is simple nonsense (*einfach Unsinn*).

The case against the traditional, ineffabilist, interpretation is strengthened if we turn with a little more attention to the wording of the beginning of 6.54: ‘*My Satze* serve as elucidations in the following way: he who understands *me* eventually recognises them as nonsensical.’ In 6.54 Wittgenstein does not invite his reader to understand his sentences – that would be impossible if they are nonsense – but to understand him, their author.¹¹ So what were Wittgenstein’s intentions in writing the nonsensical ‘sentences’ that make up the *Tractatus*? If nonsense cannot elucidate, what can we expect a logico-philosophical treatise to achieve that is claimed to be composed of nonsense? Why engage with such a treatise? These questions can best be answered by taking a look at where all of this leaves what we have begun calling the ‘Frege/Russell-style philosopher’.

A Frege/Russell-style philosopher, in following what he takes to be Wittgenstein’s arguments, should realize that the position sought from his thinking about the relationship between language and the world can only be realized as a kind of position ‘outside language’.¹² This ‘external’ position then must comprise insights that are (purportedly) real enough, but that cannot be expressed in words. That is to say, if a Frege/Russell-style philosopher agrees with what he thinks he reads in the *Tractatus*, he thinks that he has arrived at the definitive philosophical position, the ultimate realization of the philosophical project (only he – literally – can’t tell anyone about it). He will think that this is what Wittgenstein must have meant in the Preface to the *Tractatus* when he wrote, ‘I am ... of the opinion that the problems have in essentials finally been solved.’ We suggest, however, that 6.54, taken together with the rest of the Preface to the *Tractatus*, can most plausibly be read as intimating that to have a philosophical position that for principled reasons *cannot* be put into words is *not to have a position at all*. The insights that the ineffabilist *thought* he could attain turn out to have been a mirage; the position he wanted (and perhaps thought the *Tractatus* had achieved) transpires to be nothing more than the illusion of a position.

What one comes away with after working through the *Tractatus* and throwing Wittgenstein’s propositions away, then, is not a set of logico-philosophical insights, not a philosophical position, but rather the realization that the *Tractatus* yielded only the illusion of a position, and that one has a tendency to be deluded – led astray – by certain ways of thinking and aspirations that turn out to be false, absurd or invalid when *pursued rigorously*.¹³ The activity of reading the *Tractatus* in this alternative way can therefore be called the ‘therapeutic’ reading, in part because it aims to

question the practice of a certain powerful and influential philosophical mode of thinking, rather than, in however an orthodox or unorthodox fashion, to contribute to it.

III Hutto and McGinn on Finding the Third Way: ‘Elucidatory’ Readings

In a very recent book, *Wittgenstein and the End of Philosophy: Neither Theory nor Therapy*, and in a recent paper, ‘Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*’, Dan Hutto and Marie McGinn (respectively) argue that they are dissatisfied with both of the interpretative approaches to reading the *Tractatus* that we outline above. Both share the worries about the traditional, metaphysical, ineffabilist¹⁴ approach that we have laid out. However, both find the ‘therapeutic’ alternative unsatisfactory as well. How, they ask, can a work of supposedly unintelligible nonsense be read as containing the insights necessary for us to realize that it is not communicating anything? McGinn puts this ‘paradox’ as follows: ‘[I]f the ladder by which we climb from unselfconscious nonsense to self-conscious sense turns out to be an illusion, how can we have got anywhere by climbing it?’¹⁵ And Hutto: ‘given that it is integral to this [resolute] reading that we cannot distinguish different classes of nonsense, its supporters are faced with the awkward question about how the *Tractatus* manages to get any “message” across, therapeutic or otherwise’.¹⁶ What is needed, McGinn and Hutto independently argue, is an interpretation that will resolve the paradox. McGinn puts it as follows:

[what is needed is an interpretation] which avoids the suggestion that there are ineffable truths about reality, but which allows that there is something behind Wittgenstein’s remarks; which permits these remarks to fall away completely, but which allows that the remarks accomplish something important; which avoids committing Wittgenstein to any metaphysical doctrines, but which does not fall into the paradox of self destruction.¹⁷

To this end, most of McGinn’s paper and chapter 3 of Hutto’s book are devoted to outlining a third way. This third way we call the *elucidatory* reading. McGinn claims that *TL-P* serves to elucidate, while Hutto claims that Wittgenstein’s goal was *clarificatory*.¹⁸

Much of the above quotation from McGinn is not necessarily objectionable, even for a ‘resolute’ reader.¹⁹ For example, if the statement that there is ‘something behind’ Wittgenstein’s remarks means simply that the *Tractatus* is not a work of Post-Modernist irony,²⁰ then on that point at least, we fully agree with McGinn. Similarly, the notion that Wittgenstein’s elucidations ‘accomplish something important’ is unproblematic, if this means only (roughly) that *TL-P* is an important contribution to the philosophical canon

which consists *essentially* of elucidations (cf. *TL-P* 4.112). However, what we shall express a worry over is McGinn's expression 'fall away'.

Ultimately, then, this passage is problematic; for McGinn contrasts 'the suggestion that there are ineffable truths' with talk of the possibility that the remarks of the *Tractatus* indicate 'something' behind them before 'falling away completely'. But what is this something? Is it effable? If so, why do the remarks fall away, and why didn't Wittgenstein make it clear what this something was? *Or*, is this 'something' ineffable? If so, how is it elucidated by the remarks? And, most importantly, how would this reading then differ from 'straight' ineffabilist readings as an '*interpretation*' of the *whole* text? This does pose a dilemma for McGinn. The dilemma might well have its roots in a confusion.

The confusion in McGinn's characterization seems to stem from her indexing of ineffability to the metaphysical nature of that (something) which the remarks are supposed to gesture at. But on the contrary, it is not the nature of 'something' that leads to a predication of ineffability, e.g. 'something' does not have to be a, putative, metaphysical truth about reality to be ineffable. To predicate of 'something' that it is ineffable is merely to say that it is not *possible* to convey *meaningfully* in the language that aspect of the 'thing's' nature which we wish to convey. A thought Wittgenstein had no truck with, because if we can think the thought, we can convey it.²¹ McGinn's thought seems to be that if we can transform the nature of the *Tractatus*'s 'something' into something which is not metaphysical, then hey presto! Although we still cannot, *strictu sensu*, say what that something is, we can show (by elucidating) what 'it' is. But the question arises once again. If that 'something' is not ineffable, then why not simply say it?²²

Hutto, however, would resist this charge. For Hutto it is not that *TL-P* is elucidatory but that *Wittgenstein's goal* was elucidatory (i.e. not theoretical, not doctrinal and not therapeutic); only he failed in his pursuit of this goal owing to a representational picture of language (language only makes sense when fact-stating). For Hutto, had Wittgenstein had a more nuanced view of language, he would have achieved his elucidatory goal (as he later does in *PI*). So where McGinn needs to answer the question of how one elucidates that which is ineffable, Hutto needs to give an account of why Wittgenstein thought that one might be able to elucidate the ineffable, while resisting a characterization of Wittgenstein no different from the character presented by ineffabilist interpretations.

It is with these thoughts in mind that we seek to test Hutto's and McGinn's '*elucidatory*' interpretations, asking, among other things, whether their practice actually cashes out their intentions, and whether their interpretations of the *Tractatus* actually warrant being accorded the middle ground between ineffabilist readings and therapeutic (or resolute) readings.

The primary feature of Hutto's and McGinn's readings is the centrality of the saying versus showing distinction. Hutto and McGinn see the main aim

of the *Tractatus* as being ‘elucidatory’, and seem to understand elucidation as a process by which we become able to see aspects of our linguistic practices. The aim of such an elucidation, therefore, is to enable one, in McGinn’s words, ‘to see the phenomena of language in a new way, a way which no longer gives rise to philosophical problems; in which, for example, philosophical puzzlements concerning the status of logic, the relation between language and the world, or the relation between thought (the mind) and language, “*completely disappear*” (PI 133).’²³ Hutto has a slightly different take: ‘What he [Wittgenstein] thought lay hidden within our ordinary propositions was the *deep* logical form that is the *foundation* of all sense-making; but although this *could be revealed it could not be articulated*.’²⁴

Hutto and McGinn want to retain the distinction between saying and showing because they think that the *Tractatus* has elucidated *something* for its readers; though both make it clear that *what* is elucidated should not be thought of as adding anything to the sum total of our knowledge in the sense that (straight) ineffabilist readers of the *Tractatus* suppose. That is to say, Wittgenstein’s elucidations are not meant simply to give one access to – otherwise ineffable – ‘truths’. Rather, in bringing an order to the way in which one thinks about linguistic phenomena, in elucidating ‘logical form’,²⁵ the *Tractatus* should not be read as trying to tell one anything that one didn’t already know, but as bringing out a dimension of ‘knowing one’s way around’ what one already did know.²⁶

This ‘knowing one’s way around’ that Hutto and McGinn read Wittgenstein’s ‘elucidations’ as bringing about should not be thought of as contributing to the development of any theories; both Hutto and McGinn explicitly reject such an inference.²⁷ Rather, as McGinn puts it:

It is in just this sense that Wittgenstein’s remarks are to be understood as elucidatory: their utility and significance are exhausted by their power to get the reader to see something familiar and everyday in a new light. Once the change in the reader’s perception ... has been brought about, the remarks drop away, for they have no factual or descriptive content to sustain them.²⁸

McGinn, therefore, *seeks* to distance herself from the ineffabilist interpretation, which seems (paradoxically) to read the distinction between saying and showing as indicating that Wittgenstein’s remarks *do* have a content of sorts, albeit inexpressible in propositions with sense. For McGinn, while the remarks serve an elucidatory *function*, they do not convey any information. Hutto *seeks* to do the same, only he sees Wittgenstein’s characterization of his (elucidatory) remarks as nonsense as a product of the early Wittgenstein’s impoverished view of language:

The best way to smooth out these exegetical difficulties is to see his remarks as *attempts* at elucidation, not theory, without suggesting that

they succeeded in being such. ... It was because of his impoverished view of the function of language that the author of the *Tractatus* had limited means of characterising its remarks. They were *meant* to be elucidations, but he was pushed by his own understanding of sense to regard them as either statements of fact or as mere nonsense.²⁹

So, for McGinn the elucidations become nonsense for us once they have served their purpose. That is to say, once they have played their role, they cease to have a function and 'fall away'. For Hutto the elucidations are said to be nonsense by the early Wittgenstein because he, at that time, thought all non-propositional (non-fact-stating) discourse nonsensical; something the later Wittgenstein would learn not to be the case. For both Hutto and McGinn, then, for good or ill, the elucidatory remarks become/are nonsense. They *show* us 'our way about', are not theoretical, but ultimately are nonsensical because, for McGinn, they have no further role to play once they have served their purpose, and in being devoid of content they are henceforth nonsense; and, for Hutto, they are *thought to be* nonsense by *Wittgenstein* because they are not fact-stating.

It is important here to note the differences between our two protagonists. Hutto is claiming that Wittgenstein is *just wrong* in predicating nonsensicality of the remarks of the *Tractatus*, and that furthermore Wittgenstein realizes this later. McGinn, on the other hand, wants to say that the remarks have no content and thus fall away as nonsense once they have ceased to have a purpose in the dialectic. McGinn is then closer to a resolute reading.

However, our praise for McGinn in this regard is mitigated by her oscillation on this point, her inability to be ... resolute, even about the aspects of her practice and reading that seem most resolute. Compare, for instance, n. 24 of her text, which reads, in part, '[Wittgenstein] gets his reader to see that, at a certain level, there is no gap between language and world or between thought (the mind) and language. Neither the mind nor reality contribute anything to the sense of the sentences of our language from a position outside it. ... Rather, the world and thought are each of them mirrored in language' (our italics). This is surely just *ineffabilism by the backdoor*; i.e. this in effect commits McGinn to the claim that the remarks by which elucidation is achieved show something that cannot be said. *This* discourse of mirroring, which evidently invites an 'isomorphist' view of mind/language on the one hand and world on the other, is, we would strongly suggest, *itself* something that has to be *overcome*.³⁰ (And while it might seem unreasonable to attribute a strong tendency toward ineffabilism to McGinn, given her repeated emphasis on how the remarks of the *Tractatus* fall away entirely, without residue, and her explicit wish, as seen above, not to be committed to seeing the *Tractatus* as indexing ineffable truths, what we are doing is drawing attention to various moments in McGinn's presentation where she seems to ... fall away from any resolute accordance to such

insights. We shall also, at the close of section IV and in section V, criticize the language of ‘falling away’ as compared to ‘overcoming’, *überwinden*.)

As a result of holding onto a form of the distinction between saying and showing, McGinn and Hutto find themselves committed to distinguishing between what McGinn terms the ‘elucidatory core’ and a periphery of remarks that cannot be read on the elucidatory model. Indeed, this is already implicit in the quotation from Hutto immediately above, and, not incidentally, leaves him open to the very charge of cherry-picking³¹ which he levels at the resolute readers. Those remarks in which Wittgenstein ‘articulates his idea of philosophy, makes use of the comparison between saying and showing ... explores the role of logic,’ and looks at ‘A believes that p’, solipsism and ethics all ‘exemplify the idea of philosophy as “essentially elucidations” (TLP 4.112)³² in McGinn’s sense. Excluded from legitimacy according to her reading are Wittgenstein’s (apparent) commitments to ‘the determinacy of sense, to a logically perspicuous symbolism, to simple symbols, to the logical independence of elementary propositions, [and] to the idea that all logical truths are tautologies’.³³

The idea behind this distinction that McGinn explicitly draws between the elucidatory ‘core’ of the *Tractatus* and those parts listed above that she sees as being essentially tangential seems to be, and this counts for Hutto too, that Wittgenstein was misled by a certain picture of what logic *must* be like when he wrote the *Tractatus*, by a ‘mythology of symbolism’, and that this mythology infected his views about propositions.³⁴ When one removes from the elucidatory ‘core’ of the work those parts of the *Tractatus* that are expressive of his misguided commitment to this mythology, one is left with something like Wittgenstein’s ‘real interests’ or ‘real views’, which span the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*.

An example of the above is that, for McGinn, one of the results of Wittgenstein’s elucidations in the *Tractatus* is that one is brought to see that logic cannot be separated from its application; another is that ‘what is essential to language is disconnected from the concepts of truth or falsity and agreement or disagreement with reality’. So it is evident that, according to McGinn’s picture, once Wittgenstein abandoned the ‘mythology of symbolism’ and began to pay more attention to ‘the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language’ (*PI* 108; see McGinn, p. 497), all of the pieces were in place for him to develop the position that has been called ‘the autonomy of grammar’, whereby ‘the potential for [ordinary language] to reveal “what kind of object anything is” becomes increasingly significant philosophically’.³⁵

It will prove to be significant that McGinn justifies her division of the *Tractatus* into legitimate and illegitimate strands not on the grounds that the latter are nonsense, but because ‘they are expressive of certain theoretical preconceptions and are therefore not properly elucidatory’.³⁶ We agree with Hutto and McGinn that Wittgenstein’s propositions are meant as elucidations, and that what is elucidated is not theoretical. We also agree that there

are deep and significant lines of continuity between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's later work, although we disagree about what they are and where they are to be found. But in this article we want to take issue with both what Hutto McGinn understand of what Wittgenstein *means* when he talks about elucidation.

We shall argue that, despite their attempts to situate their interpretations between ineffabilist and therapeutic interpretations by focusing upon the elucidatory purpose of the text, Hutto and McGinn have an inadequate understanding of Wittgenstein's concept of elucidation and the role it plays in the *Tractatus*. Thus, in the end, they fail to give a satisfactory reason why one should follow Wittgenstein's crucial³⁷ injunction at 6.54 and throw away what they took to be his propositions. For McGinn they will have 'fallen away' before 6.54. For Hutto, with the benefit of what we, following the later Wittgenstein, know about language, we shall see Wittgenstein's injunction at 6.54 as *simply* mistaken: his remarks are not nonsense. Hutto and McGinn can perhaps hold onto a fairly *stable* reading of the main *body* of the *Tractatus*. However, this will yield a reading which altogether fails to do justice to Wittgenstein's – *really quite clear* – concluding insistence in 6.54 that the whole thing has been nonsense and should be thrown away (section IV). We shall conclude (section V) with some remarks about what doing justice to this insistence would involve.

We suggest, in short, that McGinn's approach, not unlike Hutto's, runs the risk of being tacitly guilty of 'quietism', in the sense that she wants prematurely to quiet or stifle or shut up philosophical desires (e.g. for a theory, ineffable or otherwise, of how language and world are related) which we suspect Wittgenstein wanted rather to get one self-consciously and happily to give up – *if one can*, if the wish to philosophize in certain ways dissolves within one. *That*, we suspect, is the meaning of 6.54.

Before this section closes, we should like to note that it is striking that the leading therapeutic readers of the *Tractatus* – and especially, in this connection, Conant – have an extremely detailed understanding of the role of 'elucidation' in the *Tractatus*.³⁸ On the other hand, a close study of McGinn's paper (see especially n. 32) reveals that its rendition of 'the therapeutic reading' of Wittgenstein is almost entirely constructed in relation to two papers of Diamond's from 1991, and not, for example, any of Diamond's papers since, or (crucially) Conant's recent work. Here, for example, is a passage from the closing pages (pp. 195–7) of Conant's 'Elucidation' paper:

[What] should one take the aim of Tractarian elucidation to be? How [on the resolute reading of Wittgenstein] are we to make sense of the fact that the *Tractatus* takes itself to be engaged in an activity which is properly termed one of 'elucidation' ...? ... If the aim of elucidation, according to the ineffability interpretation, is to reveal (through the employment of substantial nonsense) that which cannot be said, then,

according to the [new] austere reading, the aim of Tractarian elucidation is to reveal (through the employment of mere nonsense) that what appears to be substantial nonsense is mere nonsense. While the aim of the former sort of elucidation was supposed to be the conferral of insight into inexpressible features of reality, the aim of the latter is not insight into metaphysical features of reality, but rather insight into the sources of metaphysics. ... // ... Thus the elucidatory strategy of the *Tractatus* depends on the reader's provisionally taking himself to be participating in the traditional philosophical activity of establishing theses through a procedure of reasoned argument; but it only succeeds if the reader fully comes to understand ... that philosophy, as this work seeks to practice it, results not in doctrine but in elucidations, not in *Philosophische Satze* but in *das Klarwerden von Satzen*.³⁹

Our worry, expanded upon below, is that McGinn's 'elucidations' still end up looking too much like philosophical explanations/theorizations or like deliverances of ineffable insight.

IV Throwing Away the Elucidations

What is Hutto and McGinn's account of Wittgenstein's concluding insistence that the whole thing (including 'saying versus showing') has been nonsense and should be thrown away? For a reason that will emerge at the close of section V, we will focus our discussions henceforth primarily on McGinn's well-worked-out discussion of this question.

We quoted McGinn above as saying that 'Once the change in the reader's perception [achieved by elucidations] ... has been brought about, the remarks drop away, for they have no factual or descriptive content to sustain them.' Her reason for excluding those parts of the *Tractatus* that are expressive of Wittgenstein's (supposed) naïve commitment to a 'mythology of symbolism' (when he wrote *TL-P*) from legitimacy is not that they are nonsense, but that they are 'expressive of certain theoretical preconceptions and are therefore not properly elucidatory'. So two reasons have been given by McGinn for why one should be inclined to throw propositions from the *Tractatus* away: either (1), they are elucidatory, and therefore have no descriptive content to sustain them (their value 'depends entirely on their ability to induce [a] sense of clarified vision in us'⁴⁰), or (2), they are expressive of 'certain theoretical preconceptions', and so illegitimate anyway.

We think that reason (1) is, in a way that we shall seek to fill out, reducible to the philosophically problematic 'anti-theoretical' stance implied by reason (2).⁴¹

Toward the end of her paper, McGinn gives an account of a class of propositions that *don't* have descriptive content according to her reading of the

Tractatus, but should not be thrown away nonetheless, namely, scientific laws. The value of scientific laws does not depend on their *content*, but rather

their significance depends upon their application, that is, upon their being used as a means for constructing the propositions of science. The laws of mechanics, seen in this way, do not express necessary truths about the world, but are akin to synthetic principles which guide our construction of descriptions of the world, and regulate the transition from one form of description to another. It is not the system of laws itself that is important, but the precise way in which it helps us to construct true descriptions of the world.

On this view of matters, our accepting a particular set of views is comparable to our adopting a procedure for generating descriptions of the world, which can then be tested for truth. Clearly the question of truth, correctness or incorrectness, does not apply to the procedure itself, but only to the descriptions it generates.⁴²

So what, for McGinn, distinguishes Wittgenstein's content-free-and-therefore-disposable elucidations from the content-free-but-retained scientific laws? It seems reasonable to suppose that the answer must be something like that whereas the latter are, in a sense, genuinely and healthily *theoretical*, constituting the principles for a procedure that generates descriptions that can be tested for their truth or falsity, the former are not.⁴³ The aim of the *Tractatus*, on McGinn's reading, is to help dissolve our philosophical puzzles by clarifying the nature of logic and of the logical isomorphism that must exist between language and the world. Its aim, then, is to clarify something *prior* to descriptions, and so not captured *in* descriptions.⁴⁴ This might seem to be compatible with Wittgenstein's reasons for saying in 4.112 that a philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations given above: if our elucidations are successful, we should realize that we don't need to go on to form a theory on the back of them.

Elucidations, in McGinn's sense, could *perhaps* be read as being akin (on one reading of the *Investigations* at least) to the 'reminders assembled for a particular purpose' that Wittgenstein mentions in his later work.⁴⁵ They do not aim to make any additions to knowledge,⁴⁶ as philosophical theories would, but to bring about a clarity of vision that one previously lacked by allowing one to see an order to the things that one already knows. Once the clarity of vision that they aim to introduce has been attained, the elucidations have nothing more to offer and can be allowed to fall away. Wittgenstein's propositions 'drop away'⁴⁷ once one has worked through them, then, because they are content-free. This does not make them nonsensical, by the same token that one would not want to say that scientific laws are nonsensical

(recall that McGinn wants to make saying versus showing the central distinction of the book rather than (say) sense versus nonsense), but their disposability lies rather in the fact that they do not add up to a procedure for generating propositions that *do* have content; i.e. they are not empirical, they are not theoretical; they are not parts of ‘science’, even in a very broad sense of that word.

But is this really good enough, as a reading of the *Tractatus*, as a rendition of Wittgenstein’s philosophical strategy in his early work? Take close look at 6.54:

My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: he who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must overcome these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

Wittgenstein’s language here of ‘throwing away’, of *actively* ‘overcoming’ his propositions, stands in fairly stark contrast to McGinn’s *passively* constructed talk about the elucidatory passages in the *Tractatus* ‘falling away’ when they have done their elucidatory work. If Wittgenstein’s propositions are comparable to ‘reminders assembled for a particular purpose’, as McGinn understands them, i.e. ‘reminders’ designed to bring an order to things that one already knows, to show-as-opposed-to-say something, then it may be the case that one would be prepared to allow them to *fall* away once they have shown one whatever they were meant to show one; but why would one want actively to *throw* them away? to *overcome* them?⁴⁸

V Towards Conclusion: The Meaning of 6.54

It is time for us to lay our cards quite openly on the table, to state the point of view for our work as the authors of this paper. McGinn’s account of elucidation may be at least a somewhat plausible account of what *appears* to be going on in the main body of the text, on one way of reading it (which wants to retain the distinction between saying and showing). But ultimately to take what appears to be going on in the main body of the text at face value is still to fail to live up to the challenge posed by Wittgenstein in 6.54, a challenge that is the natural outcome of the dialectical sequencing that has brought the reader to that point on the ‘ladder’. McGinn fails, that is, to comprehend Wittgenstein’s writing strategies – his dialectical tactics and techniques – in the *Tractatus*, strategies notably different from those of the later work (even if the ultimate *end* in sight is, we think, *identical*).

In 6.54, Wittgenstein writes that ‘My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: he who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical.’ The emphasis here seems quite different from McGinn’s: Wittgenstein’s

propositions are to be understood as serving as elucidations *precisely because* they are nonsensical.

As Wittgenstein puts it in his *Letters to Ogden*, correcting his English translator's misapprehension of the point of his own use of the term 'elucidation':⁴⁹

I didn't mean to use 'elucidate' intransitively: what I meant to say was: My propositions elucidate – whatever they do elucidate – in this way: [he who understands me recognizes them as nonsensical ...] // Similarly I might have said 'My propositions clarify in this way ...' meaning 'My propositions clarify whatever they do clarify – say, the propositions of natural science – in this way: ...'. Here clarify is not used intransitively.⁵⁰

Wittgenstein is here keen to point out that 'elucidation' and 'clarify' are used, in 6.54, transitively: that is, something has been elucidated, something has been clarified. So the propositions themselves are not elucidations *per se*. The propositions are only elucidatory in so far as we come to recognize them as nonsense. They convey nothing; rather they serve to elucidate through their ultimate inability to convey anything. Something is elucidated⁵¹ – but *something ordinary*. Wittgenstein's elucidations thus have, one might say, *no philosophical content*. And they don't show us anything with philosophical content either. One gains lucidity about the character of nonsense by the following means: what are actually made more lucid by elucidations *are only humdrum things/words which make sense*⁵² – if one reads 6.53 (and 4.112)⁵³ again with this in mind, McGinn's reading will begin to appear unfaithful to Wittgenstein, and thus contributes little to our understanding of 'elucidation' in Wittgenstein. *All* one has, apart from the elucidation of the ordinary, is the important realization of the nonsensicality of efforts to do more than that. McGinn, on the other hand, makes it sound as though we are still elucidating (imaginary) entirely un-humdrum things – e.g. 'the nature of picturing' and 'language–world relations'.

Hutto and McGinn are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Insist on the elucidations being intransitive – and give up the claim to be interpreting *Wittgenstein* – or accept Wittgenstein's own claim that the elucidations are transitive – and say nothing other than what Conant and Diamond say.

There is a way in which McGinn – like us, following Conant and Diamond – is 'pro' the ordinary, against metaphysics. But what McGinn has in common with ineffabilist readings of the *Tractatus* is thinking that the elucidations are getting us to *see* certain '*things*'. We think therefore that she has got 6.54 wrong: she is in practice holding onto the elucidatory propositions, *not* throwing them away. In fact, she sometimes seems to think it easier to hold onto the elucidations than standard ineffabilism does: that is, she *sometimes* seems to think, roughly, that the elucidations aren't really nonsense at all, but rather something like senseless, because quite trivially true. Her interpretation

thereby bears certain resemblances to the ‘formalist’ rendering of the *Tractatus* suggested by Max Black:⁵⁴ McGinn would perhaps therefore respond to our remarks in the paragraph above by saying that we ought to think of the elucidations as themselves – when seen aright – being ‘ordinary’, humdrum, trivial remarks. For example, she would perhaps, we take it, maintain that to say that ‘Language mirrors the world’ is such a remark.

But the dream of a content-ful philosophical grammar or of the assemblage of the forms of our life in the form of allegedly tautologous truths – a dream that in one way or another McGinn surely shares, even as she castigates the *Tractatus* for still wanting a ‘logically perspicuous symbolism’⁵⁵ (p. 513) – was a dream that Wittgenstein had, evidently, abandoned *at the time of publication of the Tractatus*.⁵⁶ Really taking that in means overcoming the urge to say (e.g.), ‘Language mirrors the world’, to think that one would be saying something by uttering that string, or even to think that it is a harmless (because tautologically true) thing to say.

To understand the work that Wittgenstein’s propositions are supposed to do as elucidations, and (what is closely related) why one should actively *throw them away* when one has finished with them, seems to require a more detailed (and different) account of the Tractarian conception of nonsense than that given by McGinn. Such an account is given perhaps its fullest expression at 5.4733:

Frege says: every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* [*Bedeutung*] to some of its constituent parts.

(Even if we think we have done so.)

Thus ‘Socrates is identical’ says nothing, because we have given no meaning [*Bedeutung*] to the word ‘identical’ *as an adjective*. For when it appears as a sign for identity it signifies in an entirely different way – the signifying relation is a different one – therefore the symbols are entirely different in the two cases; the two symbols have a sign in common only by accident.

Here, it seems fair to say, Wittgenstein is employing the string ‘Socrates is identical’ in the course of an elucidation in exactly the way ‘prescribed’ in 6.54. It *looks* as though ‘Socrates is identical’ could be construed as a perfectly legitimate sentence with a subject–predicate form, exactly like the proposition ‘Socrates is dead’ in that regard. This is the impression that has to be overcome. For in the case of ‘Socrates is dead’, we know pretty well what it would be for this proposition to be true or false. Only a proposition has sense, but in order for one to be able to decide *what* sense it has, one

needs to know what referential work each of the signs that make it up is doing. A key clue to this referential work is given by the symbolizing role that the sign plays in the proposition. In the case of ‘Socrates is dead’, ‘Socrates’ is a symbol for a subject and ‘dead’ for a predicate, for example. But in the case of ‘Socrates is identical’, it is difficult to know what work is being done by ‘identical’ (and equally, therefore, by ‘Socrates’ and ‘is’) because we haven’t given it a *Bedeutung* that could give it a role as a predicate. What Wittgenstein’s consideration of ‘Socrates is identical’ has elucidated for his receptive reader is *the functioning of propositions like ‘Socrates is mortal’ or ‘Socrates is dead’*, and, by contrast, what it is for us to come to see what we took as a proposition to be simply nonsensical; and it has done so – obviously, and importantly – by means of a kind of example. If what we took to be a proposition is now seen as nonsensical, it is because we have been unable to give meaning (in the sense of reference/*Bedeutung*) to some of its constituent parts. And of course language can deceive here: just because a sign has an established reference in one symbolizing role does not mean that it will continue to have one in another.⁵⁷

McGinn fails to respect the centrality, in both Frege’s and Wittgenstein’s work, of ‘the Context Principle’, the elementary recommendation – operative in the example just considered – not to seek for sense except in the context of a language.⁵⁸ She thus tries to hold onto some sense of sense in Wittgenstein’s elucidatory ‘propositions’ – i.e. in ‘*what*’ they supposedly elucidate – after he himself has urged one to abandon such an illusion. Wittgenstein resolutely insists that it is only an *illusion* of sense that one has when one reads the sequence of Tractarian strings as if they are (sensible) propositions, or even as would-be tautologies. Their resemblance to such propositions, their being constructed out of what appear as perfectly respectable words, ought not to blind one to that illusion.

McGinn tells her reader (p. 497) that *the main task* of her paper ‘is to develop an understanding of Wittgenstein’s idea that his remarks “serve as elucidations” (TLP 6.54)’. Now, we have seen that in 6.54 Wittgenstein tells his reader that his propositions serve as elucidations *if* one comes to recognize them as nonsensical. *If* they are *successful* in that role – a process, an event, that one would do better imagining taking years or decades rather than seconds to occur – what they will have elucidated for one, as Wittgenstein remarks to Ogden, is ‘philosophic matters’.⁵⁹ *That is to say*, they will have enabled one to act on the realization that Wittgenstein has failed to give a meaning to certain signs in *his* ‘philosophical’ propositions – that is, has failed *really* to say anything at all – *and* to realize through and in practice that acted-upon self-consciousness about such matters is the goal of philosophical struggle. McGinn’s paper does not achieve this desideratum, and thus fails in its main aim.

Now, much more briefly, Hutto: Hutto’s account goes roughly that one need only act on Wittgenstein’s insistence that the propositions of *TL-P* are

nonsense and should be thrown away if one holds, as did – mistakenly – the author of *TL-P*, that all non-fact-stating discourse is nonsense. If one does not hold this view, then one can simply pass over 6.54, safe in the knowledge that its worth was located in a mistaken picture of meaning. This is a view that we reject. It is here that Hutto and McGinn really part company too, Hutto seemingly much closer to a *doctrinal* reading than he wants to be. Hutto attributes to *therapeuts* an insistence on the primacy of fact-stating discourse, quite failing to see that it is *precisely* any sense of such primacy that is to be *overcome*, at the close of the *Tractatus*, on our reading. On Hutto's reading, however, once one has discarded the doctrine of the primacy of fact-stating discourse, one is free to embrace the doctrines that would otherwise be adjudged nonsense, as sense. This manifests a complete failure to understand the depth of the critique of philosophy that Wittgenstein undertakes in the *Tractatus*. And, for Hutto, 6.54, far from being an apex of the text, is in fact some kind of bizarre and inexplicable aberration, for it urges us to throw away precisely those propositions (e.g. the ones seeming to state the primacy of fact-stating discourse) that are most crucially, according to Hutto, the basis of Wittgenstein's view of nonsense.

Conclusion: The *Elucidatory* Reading of the *Tractatus*

We think that McGinn's reading could survive as an interpretation were it not for the important (impression of a) theme running through the *Tractatus*, beginning with the prefatory remark quoted above and culminating in 6.54: this is the distinction between sense and *nonsense*,⁶⁰ which is much closer to being a master-theme of the *Tractatus* than is that between saying and showing.⁶¹ There are parts of her paper that give a plausible rendition of what seems to be going on in parts of the main body of the text. And some of this is very refreshing: it is refreshing, for instance, to see someone trying to make some sense out of 'picturing' (as she does on pp. 501f.), rather than subliming it into a positivistic 'Picture Theory' (or into an 'ineffabilium'). But it is *because* of the (partial but very real/tangible) plausibility or attractiveness of her reading, as containing positive views that philosophers might actually want to align themselves with (and as *more promising* and less obviously wrong than its metaphysical predecessors⁶²), that she fails to give a satisfactory interpretation of the whole. Her paper thus serves to perpetuate, albeit in a more developed (and therefore potentially insidious) 'anti-theoretical' form, exactly the kind of impulse (to think that there is some thing for philosophy to be about and to achieve, over and above insight into one's own desires to do metaphysics and theory) that it was Wittgenstein's ultimate and consistent aim to help us *overcome*. McGinn does not help us to *elucidate ourselves* – and 'the peculiar practice of elucidating oneself' might be one happy (elucidatory?) way of putting what it is that the Conant/Diamond/Kremer reading of *TL-P* is, above all, about.

But, we might be asked, can the latter reading stand, if there is not more to say vis-à-vis the main specific criticism (of the therapeutic reading) that Hutto and McGinn make? How can a work of supposedly ‘simply’, unintelligible nonsense be read as containing the insights necessary for us to realize that it is not communicating anything? ‘[I]f the ladder by which we climb from unselfconscious nonsense to self-conscious sense turns out to be an illusion, how can we have got anywhere by climbing it?’ (McGinn, p. 496)

In answer we suggest that there is a revealing and *fatal* error in the formulation of this question, an error which should be relatively unsurprising now that we have clarified both Hutto’s and McGinn’s failure to understand that the crucial thing is to *overcome* the elucidations, the nonsense, of *TL-P*. The progress through *TL-P* of the reader who understands Wittgenstein involves climbing from unselfconscious nonsense to what is self-conscious *nonsense*, not to self-conscious sense! One ‘throws away the ladder’ when one manages to hear the elucidations precisely not as sense any more, and thus overcomes and jettisons them. They do not ‘contain insights’. Rather, one engages in a certain (surprising) practice with them, a practice that concludes with one’s jettisoning of them – that’s it.

Similarly, we do not insist on nonsense being all of a kind with patent gibberish. It is a tendency of critics of our ‘position’ to try to force this claim upon us, as if this were our only possible understanding of nonsense, once ineffabilism is rejected. *This charge itself presupposes the ability to take up a position outside language.*⁶³ We do not commit ourselves to nonsense being of a kind at all; only that nonsense is such to the extent that *we can make no sense of it.*⁶⁴ The thought that one can identify logical kinds of nonsense is itself a thought which we are yet to be persuaded makes sense. The only distinctions we might make are psychological ones. Some nonsense can initially appear to make sense; the practice of Wittgensteinian philosophical practice – therapy – rightly understood, brings us to a position where we might come to see disguised nonsense as patent nonsense.

Wittgenstein’s aim, then, is to bring one from a piece of disguised nonsense, a seeming-proposition, to something that is patently nonsense, and that involves the idea that one can think, one can understand something – disguised nonsense – when in fact one does not; when, in fact, the whole ‘proposition’ has, as yet, no meaning. But in order to realize that one cannot understand, one needs to ‘know’ *inside out* the illusion that one can. And that process may – or rather, *will* – take some time, and have various ‘intermediate’ – transitional – steps.

To a charitably reformulated version of what is in effect Hutto’s and McGinn’s central question, now heard as ‘[I]f the ladder by which we climb from unselfconscious nonsense to self-conscious nonsense turns out to be an illusion, how can we have got anywhere by climbing it?’, the answer, perhaps, is: we haven’t *got* anywhere; but we may have learnt a lot⁶⁵ – about

ourselves in relation to our language – on the ‘journey’, on the ‘road’ (to nowhere) ... a bit like the way you can learn a lot by listening to a car engine idling. Here the engine is *you*.

And thus, rather than McGinn’s interpretation or Hutto’s, it is actually the alternative interpretation of the *Tractatus*, the therapeutic reading of that work (and of Wittgenstein’s philosophy in general), which perhaps deserves the title of the *elucidatory* interpretation. For it is that reading which actually manages to make the role of elucidations central to the functioning of the *Tractatus* in one’s philosophizing. One must be clear: the crucial point is that *the elucidations themselves* are ultimately to be *thrown away*;⁶⁶ the goal of Wittgenstein’s philosophizing is to get one to overcome the forlorn hope that there was ever really anything (*of the kind that we wanted* and ‘required’) for our elucidations to elucidate in the first place.

This interpretation of the *Tractatus*, unlike that of the positivists or the ineffabilists or even the interpretations given by Hutto and McGinn, can finally (and resolutely) comprehend the way the *Tractatus* ends; and, moreover, the way that the ‘body’ of the text *itself* leads, progressively, inexorably, for one willing to fall into what it progressively subtly reveals to be delusions of sense, to that (‘sense’ of an) ending.⁶⁷

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Notes

- 1 There is ‘another’ interpretation of the *Tractatus*, which was once popular, and which aims to be *anti*-metaphysical: namely, the positivist interpretation of the Vienna Circle *et al.* We do not *focus* on this interpretation in the body of the text for two reasons: firstly, because of its current unpopularity, at least ostensibly, *as a way of taking the Tractatus*; secondly, because it is, in the final analysis, not substantially different from the ‘metaphysical’ interpretation, as both endorse a ‘substantial’ conception of nonsense (for further explication, see Section 5 of James Conant, ‘Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein’, in Alice Crary and Rupert Read (eds) *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 174–218.) We cannot explore the positivist reading of the *Tractatus* further here; suffice it to say that we would argue that the metaphysical interpretation focuses on thought and world, and is ‘Realist’; while the positivist interpretation focuses on language and is ‘Anti-Realist’. We believe that neither Realism nor Anti-Realism captures Wittgenstein’s thought, *even in TL-P*.
- 2 This reading is also sometimes referred to as the ‘resolute’ reading. It should be noted that we do not discuss in the present article an important matter which has emerged in recent resolute readings of *TL-P*; this concerns the question of the ‘frame’. While Jim Conant and Cora Diamond hold onto the idea that *TL-P* has a frame, which is not to be thrown away with the rest of the text, other resolute readers such as Juliet Floyd (and Rupert Read) have insisted that *all* is to be overcome. Warren Goldfarb has referred to the former as Girondin readers and the latter as Jacobin. We hope that this subtlety need not occupy us in the present context (though see n. 41 below).

- 3 Daniel D. Hutto, *Wittgenstein and the End of Philosophy: Neither Theory nor Therapy* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003).
- 4 The seeds of Hutto's interpretation can be found in his paper (jointly authored with John Lippitt) 'Making Sense of Nonsense: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 98 (1998), pp. 263–86.
- 5 'Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (1999), pp. 491–513.
- 6 For more detail and defence of such a reading of *PI* see Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); David Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read, 'Memento: A Philosophical Investigation', in J. Goodenough and R. Read (eds) *Film as Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 72–94; and R. Read, 'Throwing Away "the Bedrock"', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 105 (2005), pp. 81–98. Compare also the important work of Cavell (in H. Sluga and D. Stern (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 261–296), Goldfarb (1983) and Stephen Mulhall (2001) on the opening of the *Investigations*.
- 7 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Philosophy', in H. Sluga and D. Stern (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 444 (though Stern means only to be talking about the later Wittgenstein).
- 8 We offer here a general characterization of this interpretation. Examples of readings that follow this line in detail can be found in P. M. S. Hacker's *Insight and Illusion* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997) and (perhaps best of all) in G. E. M. Anscombe's *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996). Meredith Williams, 'Nonsense and Cosmic Exile: The Austere Reading of the *Tractatus*', in Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (eds) *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 6–32, is a notable defender of such readings. (See also n. 2 of McGinn.)
- 9 Russell himself interpreted the *Tractatus* in this ineffabilistic way. And like many such readers, he found ineffabilism an unorthodox vehicle for putting forward philosophical views, and was *not* convinced by the vehicle: 'What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said.' (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), p. xxi).
- 10 Except where indicated otherwise, we use the 'authorized' (Ogden) translation of *TL-P*. However, this point is equally clear in the Pears–McGuinness translation: '[T]he aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts, for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). // It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side will simply be nonsense' (p. 3).
- 11 Perhaps the best account of this telling point about 6.54 is James Conant's, in 'Throwing Away the Top of the Ladder', *Yale Review*, 79 (1991), pp. 328–64.
- 12 Or a 'God's-eye view', or a 'a sideways-on view', or an 'external point of view' ... With John McDowell and others, part of the burden of our argument here is that there is every reason to believe that Wittgenstein entirely gives up the fantasy of a position outside language – indeed, that he gives it up *in the Tractatus* (cf. *TL-P* 4.12, the Preface, etc.)

Now, it might be objected against us here that our claim that a Frege/Russell philosopher 'should realize' such-and-such stands in tension with our claim that

- the *Tractatus* (as opposed to its author) has no teaching, in the sense that it has no content. But this, of course, would be to misunderstand the intended ‘force’ of our discussion at this point. Our discussion at and around this point in our text is directed toward a Frege/Russell philosopher *on his own terms*. We do not make the rhetorically disastrous move of already assuming our own interpretation of the text to be right. We instead allow the Frege/Russell philosopher to have the assumptions that he wants: for instance, that Wittgenstein is giving *arguments*, which are such that one understanding them precisely *should realize* such-and-such or so-and-so, and so on...
- 13 We would emphasize here the *active* nature of coming to see nonsense.
 - 14 Hutto divides ineffabilist readers into theoretical and doctrinal readers and rejects both in chapters 2 and 3 of his book: ‘Although I have rejected theoretical readings on the grounds that Wittgenstein had set his face against philosophical speculation and explanation, this does not rule out the possibility that he was advancing doctrines, in the sense of stated principles or beliefs. Perhaps, his was simply an attempt to lay down a series of *a priori* truths. [...] As the only way to make sense of the doctrinal reading is to assume that he was committed to a metaphilosophy at odds with the central aspects of his stated project, such readings are unfaithful to some of [Wittgenstein’s] own remarks. Moreover, they suffer from deep inconsistency in that they must characterise “Wittgenstein as rejecting the idea of an external standpoint, [yet] offer interpretations of his thought which keep this idea in play”’ (pp. 90–1; the quotation within the quotation is from Cray and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*, p. 4).
 - 15 McGinn, p. 496.
 - 16 Hutto, p. 93. The talk of therapists trying to hear the *Tractatus* as getting ‘messages’ across is worrying and indicative. Hutto’s wording also raises a pertinent counter-question: what could it really mean for there to be ‘classes’ of nonsense?
 - 17 McGinn, pp. 496–7.
 - 18 Hutto, p. 102; McGinn, p. 497.
 - 19 We should note that the term that seems to have been settled upon, by proponents and opponents alike, for denoting the family of readers who oppose ineffabilist readings is *resolute*. We will stick with ‘therapeutic’ for reasons that will become clearer as we progress.
 - 20 This is how Hacker sees therapeutic/resolute readings of the *Tractatus* – see his ‘Was he Trying to Whistle it?’, in Cray and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 353–389.
 - 21 For example, there is a body of literature that argues for the ineffability of aspects of the Holocaust. In this case those aspects are not metaphysical, but rather abhorrent in the extreme.
 - 22 McGinn writes (p. 503) that Wittgenstein’s remarks achieve ‘a certain order in the reader’s perception ... of language’. On one reading, this might be harmless. McGinn might simply be meaning to index, for instance, the purpose-relatively-useful sense of there being a difference between signalling or calling and *language* that Wittgenstein investigates in the opening of the *Investigations*. But if McGinn thinks that ‘uncovering’ an ‘order’ in language or clarifying the ‘logical articulation’ of our language gives one any access to a *something*, even if that ‘something’ be far less than a theory, less even than a thesis (or indeed a truth), then she has already fallen into an ineffabilism. We have already given some reason to believe that she does think this; and we give more below. The remarks of the *Tractatus* do not clarify by revealing philosophical truths; they clarify only ordinary sensical remarks, which they enable one to see as ‘making themselves clear’, or indeed as being already clear. We shall return to this point.

- 23 McGinn, p. 504. There is a risk in McGinn’s phrasing here of an illusion of literal perspicuous vision, as if this ‘seeing’ were not just a metaphor, but rather one could literally chart the whole of grammar, as if from outside/above. This risk, this illusion, we believe, is fully realized in the *Analytical Commentaries on the Philosophical Investigations* of Peter Hacker (and Gordon Baker, who has recently distanced himself in print from this reading – see, e.g., n. 10 of Baker’s ‘Wittgenstein: Concepts or Conceptions?’, in *Wittgenstein’s Method*). It is important to see the ‘seeing’ that is involved here, according to McGinn, as metaphorical through and through, or at most as *aspect-seeing* ... Compare McGinn, p. 508: she repeatedly writes as though we just manage to *see* many philosophical things/truths. (See also n. 26 below.)
- 24 Hutto, p. 85 (our italics).
- 25 Hutto, pp. 85, 103, 110–11.
- 26 Hutto, p. 124. This is explored in detail by Michael Kremer (2002). For example, on p. 297 he argues that ‘We should *not* read talk of “showing”, and correlatively of “perceiving”, “seeing”, “recognizing” that which is shown, on the model of a relation between a subject and some ineffable fact-like entity. ... This form of the idea of showing is exactly what the *Tractatus* wants to teach us to abandon. Rather, we should read talk of “showing”, and correlatively “seeing”, on the model of the demonstration of a technique, and the uptake required to understand the demonstration.’ When one looks at how McGinn in practice explores these matters, one finds that, by contrast, she makes it look as though something is seen. See, e.g., pp. 507–8 and p. 504 of her text, as well as passages quoted in our text below.
- 27 Hutto, p. 103; McGinn, p. 498.
- 28 McGinn, p. 502.
- 29 Hutto, pp. 101–2.
- 30 To be fair to McGinn, we should add that elucidatory remarks could be nonsensical and nevertheless prompt us to recognize a distinction that we did not see clearly before, e.g. (to use one of her examples) the distinction between propositions of logic and maximally general truths. However, it would be needful then to recognize that even (the bringings-about of) such distinctions are themselves only therapeutic moves, and that any wish to stabilize such a distinction itself amounts to a regression to a scientific or metaphysical conception of philosophy, and manifests a proneness to unwitting delusions of sense. We do not find such recognition in McGinn’s work.
- 31 Hutto, p. 93.
- 32 McGinn, p. 498.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Hutto confirmed this as his view on reading an earlier draft of this paper.
- 35 McGinn, p. 513.
- 36 Ibid., 498.
- 37 Why do we say ‘crucial’? Why privilege 6.54?
Internally, there is good reason to do so in that it is quite plainly a or even *the* culmination of the text; and, moreover, it is a culmination that gives an explicit over-arching instruction on *how to read* the entire text. At the very least, if 6.54 is not as significant as we think, then that proves that Wittgenstein understood what he himself was doing quite poorly. Of course, that is quite possible; but interpretative charity suggests that one should persist in attempting to read a text as if it were understood by its own author until one finds very strong reasons not to do so. We have yet to be presented with any such reasons.
Externally, Wittgenstein’s famous letter to von Ficker provides a strong cue toward taking seriously the Preface and the ‘conclusion’, including obviously

- 6.54, of the *Tractatus*. That external evidence was, of course, a primary motivation in the original fomentation by Diamond and Conant of the 'resolute reading' of the early Wittgenstein.
- 38 See, for example, his 'Elucidation', or similarly the longer manuscript 'The Method of the *Tractatus*' (which in its *full-length* version is still forthcoming – this text, from which the former is excerpted and adapted, is cited by McGinn, n. 4, and included in edited form in E. Reck (ed.) *From Frege to Wittgenstein* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 374–463).
- 39 How exactly Conant understands the latter (*das Klarwenden von Sätzen*) – and this is crucially different from how McGinn understands it – is best explained in n. 102 of Conant, 'Elucidation'.
- 40 McGinn, p. 502.
- 41 It might be objected against us here that surely we must concede that early Wittgenstein was unwittingly in the grip of certain theoretical preconceptions about language, conceptions expressed in his commitment to a certain conception of analysis, and that, in virtue of this, certain strands in his work do, just as McGinn suggests, betray his elucidatory aims. For even Conant and Diamond concede this much – see especially their joint paper 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', in Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss, *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance* (London: Routledge, 2004). It would take us too far afield to attempt to resolve this issue here; but, as Read and Deans argue in Parts 2 and 3 of their paper 'Nothing is Shown' (*Philosophical Investigations*, 26 (2003), pp. 239–269), accepting this view of the early Wittgenstein is by no means compulsory. This question divides 'strong' from 'weak' resolute readings; it divides ourselves and Juliet Floyd on one side from Conant and Diamond on the other.
- 42 McGinn, pp. 509–10.
- 43 Hutto would resist this view strongly – see his *Beyond Physicalism* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000), sec. 2.3.
- 44 This rather seems to conflict with what McGinn writes on p. 504, concerning there being for Wittgenstein 'no propositions that are true *a priori*'.
- 45 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 127. (See also Zettel, *passim*.) Try, then, another label for McGinn's approach – the 'Formalist Grammatical' reading. She, like Max Black, attempts to place the elucidations of *TL-P* in a logically similar niche to the (*sinnlos*) propositions of logic; and she suggests that their role is very alike the role of 'grammatical remarks' in Wittgenstein's later work. See the final section of this paper for some more detail on this.
- 46 Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* 89; and the notes on Kremer above.
- 47 McGinn, p. 502.
- 48 It is striking that the German word Wittgenstein uses here is *überwinden* – the very word made famous by Nietzsche, in his struggles, in his attempts, to persuade his readers to (self-)overcome. We suspect (though we cannot pursue the matter here) that this echo is not accidental, or at least not without resonance and potential significance – and that it is not compatible with McGinn's approach.
- 49 Wittgenstein, *Letters to C. K. Ogden with Comments on the English Translation of the Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, ed. G. H. Von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), p. 51. This passage, we believe, fairly decisively undermines the McGinn interpretation, just as thoroughly as it undermines the standard metaphysical interpretation. It gives the lie to McGinn's effectively ineffabilist thought that Wittgenstein is still getting us to recognize something about 'the harmony of language and reality' by means of his elucidations. (If carpers still carp, asking whether we can rely on a text which is not within the body of *TL-P*, then one

need look no further than the oft-ignored 5.5563. It gives the lie to something that McGinn appears to believe, namely, that *Wittgenstein* in *TL-P* regrettably believes that ordinary language cannot be described *itself* as in logically perfect order. For while Wittgenstein in *TL-P* did (regrettably) think that ordinary language was invariably not 'logically perspicuous' – thus there is scope (see 3.325, 4.002, etc.) for its being made clearer what thought a thought is – we are not thereby *making the thought* sharper/clearer. McGinn appears to us to elide – not, as needed, to distinguish – these two points.)

We are suggesting that if the *Tractatus* is read properly, it is not necessarily thoroughly committed to a fatal mythology of symbolism – unlike McGinn, who *is* committed to a residual linguistic ineffabilism. (See also p. 50 of the *Letters to Ogden*, alongside p. 505 of McGinn.)

- 50 Here Wittgenstein is making the same point as the later Gordon Baker (in *Wittgenstein's Method*) – and we – makes about 'perspicuous presentation': it is to be understood as an achievement term. 'Elucidate' is intended by Wittgenstein in this same achievement sense. It is not intended to indicate a content that is to be learnt or 'gestured at', but 'simply' to bring about an achieved/achievable reorientation. We are concerned that both Hutto and McGinn regard Wittgenstein as using 'elucidate' as an intransitive verb. (For more detailed discussion of these issues, see Conant, 'Elucidation'.)
- 51 Elucidated used transitively, e.g. 'I struck him', 'I elucidated it.' It is transitive because we can say of him/it that he/it was struck/elucidated; whereas to say 'I ran' (as in the sentence 'I ran along the road') or 'I elucidate' is intransitive because the verb does not take an object.
- 52 Compare Wittgenstein's Preface (see n. 10 above). Unlike McGinn's, our account is (we believe) faithful to Wittgenstein's injunction to draw 'limits' *only in language*, and to be clear that what is on the other side of those limits is (only) nonsense. That is *not* to say, of course, that the *Tractatus* does not have any covert metaphysics. In believing that it does, we do not differ from McGinn or indeed from ineffabilism in general – but the therapeutic reading of *TL-P* argues that you will find this metaphysics *in the wrong place* if you do not take seriously Wittgenstein's *aim* in *TL-P* of overcoming all metaphysics. Note, for example, that 'ineffabilism' and 'the picture theory' are not attacked by the later Wittgenstein. But some things are, such as the Russell/Frege subliming of logic and the idea of 'logical space', neither of which, so it would seem, Wittgenstein entirely overcame even by proposition 7 of *TL-P*.
- 53 We note further that the term 'elucidation' first enters *TL-P* at 3.263. McGinn, surprisingly, says nothing about this occurrence of the term.
- 54 See n. 19 of Conant's 'The Method of the Tractatus' for devastating criticism of the 'formalist' interpretation of *TL-P*.
- 55 *PI* (and *OC*, etc.) features grammatical remarks: these may at various moments in one's philosophical struggle seem to one to be senseless, nonsensical, stipulative, sensical (seemingly true-or-false), and perhaps more besides. *TL-P* engages (one) in its analogue to grammatical investigation – namely, the activity of elucidation. This much of what McGinn evidently supposes it would be hard to dissent from. But her quasi-formalist rendering of elucidations makes it look as if they really should be part of the symbolism (like tautologies) – and this just IS a mythology of symbolism, we have suggested. This *cannot* be an adequate reading of 6.54, which requires that we throw away the nonsensical, not that we (e.g.) let the merely senseless 'fall away' when we recognize it as senseless – and the production of an adequate reading of 6.54 was expressly McGinn's *main aim* in her paper (see again p. 497).

It may seem an unsatisfactory aspect of our interpretation of McGinn that we seemingly cannot decide whether she is an ineffabilist, a positivist or a formalist reader of *TL-P*. But we think that this is actually a symptom of *her* confusion – she cannot decide, and oscillates between all of these and the therapeutic reading. Her effort to generate an elucidatory reading which is not simply an unstable pot-pourri of all *four* of these reading-genres is, we have argued, unsuccessful. It is quite odd, however, that she does not mention the Blackian ‘formalist’ possibility, which on the central question of the status of elucidations seems possibly the reading closest to her own. Perhaps the reason she does not favour ‘formalism’ (besides its well-known defects) is her insistence, remarked earlier, that ‘the idea that all logical truths are tautologies’ is itself to be excluded from the alleged ‘elucidatory core’ of *TL-P*.

- 56 What does harm is to think that one has grasped and can set out the grammar of our language so as to refute metaphysicians, solipsists, sceptics, etc. This, as we have said, unfortunately seems to remain McGinn’s and Hutto’s implicit wish/dream.
- 57 A fuller treatment of the matters discussed in this paragraph would bring out the importance to 5.4733 also of Wittgenstein’s remarks concerning ‘internal relations’ and concerning ‘the context of significant use’ (as emphasized by Conant in his ‘Elucidation’ and also by Denis McManus in his forthcoming book on the *Tractatus*). But we think that our text above is sufficient for present purposes.
- 58 It is important to bear in mind that the Context Principle (CP) is above all a methodological recommendation, not a quasi-metaphysical assertion. The failure to see its relevance throughout Wittgenstein’s work links McGinn and Hacker – see, for example, the argument of Witherspoon’s paper, especially pp. 333–8, wherein Witherspoon shows exactly where in McGinn (pre 1999) goes wrong, and falls into a sophisticated version of positivism (‘Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein’, in Crary and Read, *The New Wittgenstein*, pp. 315–350). McGinn’s failure to take proper account of the Context Principle in her thought on any stage of Wittgenstein’s career, together with her wish to have Wittgenstein enable us to say or at least ‘see’ things about language, eclipses the – secondary – question of which particular variant of positivism or ineffabilism or formalism (or what hybrid of the three) she ascribes to *TL-P*, and which to *PI* or *OC*. For more detail on (the centrality of) the Context Principle, see the work of Conant, Ricketts’s essay in Sluga and Stern, *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, and the 1997 exchange between Goldfarb and Diamond in the *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 30.
- 59 *Letters to Ogden*, p. 51 – and see also the passage from p. 51 quoted above. McGinn has, one might say, been deceived by the grammar of the word ‘elucidation’...
- 60 It is important to understand that we do not intend this as a general, quasi-technical, quasi-positivist distinction which can be wheeled in to do philosophical work. On this score, the discussion on pp. 70–1 of Goldfarb’s ‘Metaphysics and Nonsense’ (1997) is well taken: ‘Wittgenstein’s talk of nonsense is just *shorthand for a process of coming to see how [certain strings of] words fall apart when worked out from the inside*’ (p. 71, our italics).
- 61 One reason why this must be so is that, crucially, the distinction between saying and showing as employed by the ineffabilists – and once again we fear that on this point McGinn must backslide into their position (and/or else into some variant of positivism) – is a *mashed-together and incoherent rendition of two different distinctions*. (I) There is what is said by ordinary propositions (something) and tautologies (nothing) versus what their form shows us (that they are propositions, or that they are tautologies) – a distinction made by Wittgenstein

in the body of the *Tractatus*. (II) Then there is what is said by nonsensical propositions (nothing) versus what is allegedly shown by them (e.g. the way language hooks up to reality), or what is allegedly elucidated for us by means of them – II is a ‘distinction’ not found in the *Tractatus*, but it has to bear the main weight of any more or less traditional reading of that work. For detail on why the distinction between saying and showing is thus a hopeless basis for any *genuinely* elucidatory reading of that work, see nn. 11, 19, 20, 26 and 68 of Conant, ‘Elucidation’.

- 62 By which we do not mean to say that McGinn actually succeeds in ‘making sense of’ (quantitatively) more of the text than does (say) Anscombe. What we mean is simply that her reading seems at least to give some hope *of not turning out to be* evidently *irresolute*, and of not requiring Wittgenstein to be fundamentally inconsistent and without intellectual integrity. Plus that, as discussed above, she has at least the ambition, as do resolute readers, of sketching genuine continuities between Wittgenstein’s early and later work.
- 63 See Read’s discussion at pp. 91–2 of his ‘Throwing Away “the Bedrock”’.
- 64 See also n. 60 above: it is very important to understand, then, that ours is *not* an interpretation on which the early Wittgenstein implicitly buys into a fact-stating ‘picture’ of language. Ineffabilist and positivist interpretations of the *Tractatus* centrally *do*; and our interpretation precisely sets its stall out via the overcoming of those interpretations. To read Conant and Diamond with understanding, as one of us (Read) endeavours to do, for instance, in Part 1 of ‘Nothing is Shown’ (with Deans), is to understand that we ‘resolutists’ do not call the *Tractatus* nonsense because it fails to conform to a model of fact-stating language, but, rather, simply because in the end it does not do linguistic work, does not *amount* to anything: because it fails to exhibit the kind of solidity or non-ambiguity that working language has to it. The ‘propositions’ of the *Tractatus* systematically *hover* – to such an extent that, in the end, whether or not they are *propositions* at all is itself something on which they hover. (See Read’s ‘Throwing Away “the Bedrock”’ for development of this theme.)
- 65 This would also stand as an indication as to why Wittgenstein sought to dispense with the ladder metaphor in his later work.
- 66 See again Conant, ‘Elucidation’, n. 102.
- 67 This paper owes a large debt of thanks to two people in particular (neither of whom would concur with its content): Luke Mulhall and Dan Hutto. Dan read a late draft and made extensive and helpful comments, giving us much pause for thought and much more work to do. The paper would simply not exist without Luke Mulhall’s initial thoughts and writings on these matters, thoughts of which he later thought better! Thus our greatest debt is to him. Indeed, Mulhall’s Ph.D. thesis is, in our opinion, the most profound non-therapeutic, elucidatory reading of *TL-P* that we have come across. Others who have helped at key points throughout the paper’s genesis are Jim Conant, Rob Deans, Simon Glendinning, Kelly Dean Jolley, Marie McGinn and David Oderberg; thanks to all. We also thank the audiences at the University of Chicago Wittgenstein Workshop and at the Notre Dame Philosophy Department for helpful comments.

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