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Nonsense and the Ineffable:
Re-reading the Ethical Standpoint in
Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

Abstract

The first half of this paper examines the ethical standpoint of the *Tractatus* as it has been reconstructed by Cora Diamond (“the austere view”) and gives an account of some of the criticism this reconstruction has received in the work of P. M. S. Hacker and Meredith Williams (“the standard view”). The second half of the paper tries to argue that the austere and the standard views rather complement each other if we recognize “two ‘P-s’ in the *Tractatus* and if it is supposed that there is a “3rd person” and “1st person” perspective which are both voiced on its pages.

1. The marginalization of Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein was once a towering figure in the philosophy of our time. For non-professionals with an interest in philosophy, this is still true. Among professional philosophers, however, his stature today seems radically diminished. Even though a great deal of what would appear to be original work is carried out along lines inspired by him, it is hardly noted by philosophers of a different bent of mind.

So goes Lars Hertzberg’s apt diagnosis of the “marginalization of Wittgenstein” (2006: 82).¹ In spite of the incredibly large amount of

¹ For a useful overview of the most influential and diverse voices in the Wittgenstein-reception of our day see the “Introduction” of Alois Pichler and Simo Säätelä in

writing on Wittgenstein, philosophical thinking has never (optimistically: has not yet) truly incorporated his work. There are excellent Wittgenstein-scholars and textual editors explaining, besides exegeses, the significance of Wittgenstein both for the Analytic and the Continental tradition, yet very little (only rather such “catch-words/phrases” as “truth table”, or “language-game”) has organically been absorbed and got into vitalising circulation, especially if one compares Wittgenstein’s influence to that of Quine or Davidson, Husserl or Derrida. What I find most sadly symptomatic is that in spite of books like *The Literary Wittgenstein* (Gibson and Huemer 2004), he has not become a source of inspiration, even to the present day, for any mainstream “schools” of aesthetics, literary theory and criticism, as opposed to e.g. Derrida behind deconstruction, Foucault behind new historicism, Heidegger (via Gadamer) behind literary hermeneutics, Austin, Searle and Grice behind a speech-act and conversational-implicature-oriented approach to literary texts, etc.² One of the most important thinkers of the 20th century not providing a widely appealing framework for thinking about literature is, to say the least, odd, and although several reasons might be mentioned, one of my goals has been to work out a “literary-reading practice”, a “poetics” (or, as I like to think about it, an “ontological aesthetics”) based on Wittgenstein; my re-visitation of the *Tractatus*, here largely from the ethical standpoint originating in the work of Cora Diamond, is part of this effort. However, as 6.421 of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 1967) states, “Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same”, so this essay hopes to have some aesthetic implications as well.

Wittgenstein: The Philosopher and His Works (2006: 13-71). I wish to thank colleagues and students at my home department in Budapest for useful suggestions. I am also grateful to Dr. Amália Kerekes at the Department of German Literatures of my home university for helping me with Wittgenstein’s German and for further relevant observations and to my two anonymous reviewers for insightful criticism.

² This is not to say, of course, that no work has been done on Wittgensteinian aesthetics, see, e. g. Hagberg (1994; 1995; 2008), Johannessen and Nordenstam (1981), Lewis (2004), Tilghman (2006), etc. Giving an overview of Wittgenstein and aesthetic theory is, however, for a longer and later study.

2. Cora Diamond's resolute reading

As David Stern's helpful summary informs us, there have been five basic approaches to the *Tractatus*, some of them often appearing side-by-side even within a single work on Wittgenstein's book. These are the respective logical atomist, the logical positivist, the metaphysical, the ethical-religious and the therapeutic readings of the *Tractatus*; here I will concentrate chiefly on the version of the therapeutic reading as represented by Cora Diamond, also called the "resolute", the *non*-"chickening out", or "austere" reading (Stern 2003: 134-35), especially as it is put forward in her "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*" (Diamond 2000; the title abbreviated in this essay as *EIM* 149-173). Thus, far from doing full justice even to the tradition of the therapeutic reading, I will mention, selectively, a few, I think highly original features of Diamond's reading, as well as some of the criticism – chiefly, but also selectively, by Peter Hacker and Meredith Williams – levelled against Diamond's standpoint, and then try to argue that both the Diamond- and the Hacker-fronts of interpretations have significant points worthy of serious consideration, and perhaps it is not hopeless to reconcile them: this will serve as an opportunity to suggest some points of interpretation of my own.

As it is by now well known, one of Diamond's major claims was that the penultimate paragraph of the *Tractatus* should be taken very seriously:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical [*unsinnig*], when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. [Diamond's translation is more precise: "when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them" (*EIM* 150): "*wenn er durch sie – auf ihnen – über sie hinausgestiegen ist*"]. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it [*er auf ihr hinausgestiegen ist*]).

He must transcend [*überwinden*] these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (*TLP* 6.54)

Diamond makes much out of these words, of course together with other passages of the *Tractatus*. The first item she calls special attention to is "me", i.e. the appearance of the First Person Singular.

Diamond insists that we should draw a sharp distinction between trying to understand the text of the *Tractatus*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the person, functioning here, I take it, in Diamond's reading as the "implied author". The "implied author" is the persona we construct in our reading-process "behind" the text, rather than the flesh-and-blood man (cf. *EIM* 150-1), this implied author being already there in the "Author's Preface" of the *Tractatus* (3-5). Wolfgang Iser describes the implied author as one "whose attitudes shape the book" (Iser 1974: 103), and on the same page he quotes Wayne Booth's classic study, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, according to which "The 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; [...] he is the sum of his own choices [...]. This implied author is always distinct from the 'real man' – whatever we may take him to be – who creates a superior version of himself, a 'second self', as he creates his work".

There is, indeed, even in everyday practice a significant difference between understanding a *person* on the one hand, and *what* he or she says on the other. I may not understand what the Other actually, perhaps incoherently, utters but I can understand her, and I may, in turn, understand the very words that leave her mouth but I may be unable to tell what she is driving at. According to Diamond, we should understand Wittgenstein's gesture of qualifying all the sentences of the *Tractatus* to be nonsense as an invitation to understand *him*, what *he* wishes, intends to say, not so much "beyond" the sentences of his work but both with a nonsensical text as a whole, and with the very gesture of holding, considering his text to be nonsense himself. Indeed, Wittgenstein, at the end of the *Tractatus*, seems to *sentence* his sentences to nonsense.

We have already been led to the second item Diamond carefully analyses. This is the problem of *nonsense* (*Unsinn*), re-opening one of the most hotly debated issues concerning the *Tractatus*. This issue necessarily involves the question of *saying* versus *showing* (one of the favourite topics of the metaphysical reading), the question of the "unsayable" or the "ineffable", and – the most important issue for Diamond – the ethical standpoint implied by the *Tractatus*. This is chiefly the question whether, imaginatively or otherwise, we are

entitled to, or it is possible at all, to “reconstruct”, and especially attribute any ethical “views” to Wittgenstein when he clearly says in 6.421: “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words” [*Es ist klar, daß sich die Ethik nicht aussprechen läßt*]: “it is clear that ethics does not let itself/allow itself to be spoken out/expressed”] and: “Ethics is transcendental”. Of course, in Diamond’s reading, the previous sentences saying something about ethics directly, must be nonsense, too.

Diamond encounters this problem by insisting that we should take, as a first step, the sentences of the *Tractatus* as *plain* (austere, sheer, stark, real, utter) nonsense, as opposed to e.g. Elizabeth Anscombe’s metaphysical reading. According to Diamond, Anscombe claims that there are two types of nonsense in the *Tractatus*: one type of nonsense is “useful” (or “illuminating” (Williams 2004: 8), or, as F. P. Ramsey put it, “important” (Braithwaite 1931: 8) nonsense, since “behind” these nonsensical sentences there is a truth we may “grasp” (perhaps intuitively feel) and cannot express only because they are in the realm of the ineffable, so this truth “shows itself”. Yet for Anscombe there is another type of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, too, behind which there is nothing, so those nonsensical sentences are “incoherent and confused” (*EIM* 158). So it seems there are sentences which are nonsensical by virtue of the sheer fact that they are unsayable. Yet somehow they do “express” some truth, because in one way or another they “show” this truth, while there are “really” (genuinely) nonsensical sentences which are, trivially, sayable but do not mean anything.³ Diamond is right in claiming that this approach entitles, or even requires, interpreters to select between the sentences of the *Tractatus* according to their own liking. Not only is this selection likely to be arbitrary, but the interpreters are allowed – to use David Stern’s apt formulation – “enormous exegetical leeway” (Stern 2003: 129) as well, which often results in their putting something substantial where for Wittgenstein silence should prevail. In other words – as Diamond paraphrases James Conant – interpreters may “project something out of their own heads or

³ This is also called sometimes the “standard” interpretation of the *Tractatus*, of course with several differences between the various authors, cf. Williams 2004: 7-8.

some combination of thoughts from Schopenhauer, Tolstoy and other writers” (*EIM* 155) where Wittgenstein is silent.⁴ Instead, Diamond offers the following (and this is the next step for her to appreciate the *Tractatus*):

My point is that the *Tractatus* in its understanding of itself as addressed to those who are in the grip of philosophical nonsense, and in its understanding of the kind of demands it makes on its readers, supposes a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it (*EIM* 157-8).

For Diamond, there is only one “type” of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, and we get out (climb out) of nonsense through – imaginatively – participating in this nonsense, simultaneously acknowledging that we have been in nonsense, and *thus* we are – “therapeutically” – cured of nonsense. More precisely, we are purged of the illusion that “we had meaningful thoughts” while reading the *Tractatus*, and *that* makes sense. Thus, for Diamond, one of Wittgenstein’s chief *ethical* points is precisely this exercise, this philosophical activity: in acknowledging a wrong philosophical attitude, I leave it, in the very gesture of its acknowledgement, behind. This way I understand the *person*, namely (the implied author) Wittgenstein behind the text, or, as Diamond puts it, I may “*find in myself the possibility of meaning*” (*EIM* 165, emphasis original). For Diamond, to come to *my* meaning, to my very ability to mean something the prerequisite seems to be to be able to participate in the Other’s nonsense and to “enter imaginatively into the seeing of it as sense” (*EIM* 165), i.e. to be able to see how the Other takes the sentences of his or her own to be meaningful, to see the ways he or she attributes meaning to his or her locutions (thoughts). That seems to be, according to Diamond, the ethical task the *Tractatus* sets for us.

We could, as it were, highlight Diamond’s reading of the *Tractatus* along the three significant prepositions (adverbial particles) Wittgenstein uses in 6.54. We could say that she pays very careful attention to *auf* (on) and *über* (over), and although finds

⁴The works Diamond refers to are G. E(lizabeth) M. Anscombe (1963: 165) and James Conant (1989), but see Conant’s numerous articles on the *Tractatus* since then, especially Conant (2000; 2004; 2006).

durch (through) significant, too, her critics sound as if they were thinking that she does not take the *through*-aspect seriously, namely she neglects that one should very carefully and thoroughly work one's way through *all* the paragraphs of the *Tractatus* (even in order to see them as nonsensical) and that these paragraphs, or some of them, or many of them, have proved very meaningful for a great number of readers.

3. Peter Hacker's objections to Diamond's reading (the "metaphysical view")

Among the critics of Diamond, Peter Hacker claims that Diamond's reading dismisses the main body of the text at a single stroke: she considers only the "framework", the ending, i.e. 6.54 and the "Author's Preface" of the *Tractatus*, and she sounds as if Wittgenstein could have written anything "in between" (Hacker 2000: 357 and 361-2). So far, I have not mentioned the Preface of the *Tractatus* but the sentences of utmost significance for Diamond are:

Thus the aim of the book is to set a limit to thought, or rather – not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to set 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 set, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense [Unsinn] (*TLP* page 3).

For Diamond the above passage says, in effect, what 6.54 does (*EIM* 149-51). It is debatable to what extent a Preface is part of a work, but 6.54 surely is part of the *Tractatus*. Of course, Diamond never claims that 6.54 would not be just as nonsensical as all the other paragraphs. However, as Hacker points out, she still refers to it (and the Preface) as part of the "frame" of Wittgenstein's work (Hacker 2000: 363-7) and it is hard to deny that she attaches, as we have seen, great significance to 6.54 over the other paragraphs to

the extent that it is from this paragraph that she largely derives precisely the meaningful way, the (right) *method* of reading the *Tractatus*. This very gesture, at least in a certain sense, seems to contradict her claim that the book as a whole is sheer nonsense.

An even more serious charge that can be levelled, on the basis of Hacker's criticism, against Diamond is that if everything, at least enclosed by the frame, is utter nonsense, then perhaps any other sentences which are nonsensical would do in order to arrive at Diamond's conclusion, which is, as we may recall, how to allow ourselves, emerging from nonsense, "to find the possibility of meaning" in ourselves. Why is Tractarian nonsense any better (or worse) than any other? Taken Hacker's charge this way, his argument is a version of that one which I have heard from my students more than once when I tried to explain what might be said positively concerning Wittgenstein's ethical (and aesthetic) message: whatever the content of that message is, does it *follow* from the "great amount of logic" found in the *Tractatus*? Can we just throw away the "logic" in the *Tractatus*? Is it not exactly this what Diamond is doing? Can we not just throw away the ladder *before* we started climbing up on it? Why to climb at all?

Moreover, as Hacker points out criticising Diamond, the carefully wrought design of the *Tractatus*, which Meredith Williams calls "architectonic" (Williams 2004: 24), the rigour and the systematic treatment of the topics, going from ontology to representing with thought, then to the propositional sign, then to the relationship of thought and sentence to facts, then to the logical relations between propositions – just to mention a few "themes" within the frame – do not show that for Wittgenstein any kind of nonsense one utters would have been able to do the job Diamond attributes to the text of the *Tractatus*. Further, the "explanatory" paragraphs under the six main theses are all arranged according to the relative importance and illuminating power they have with respect to these main theses (after the seventh, the last one, there is of course "nothing", just silence), and Wittgenstein uses a highly complex but very significant digital numbering to show their respective degree of relevance. This does not indicate, either, that for Wittgenstein all that falls within the frame would not make – at

least in a certain sense – *sense* (cf. Hacker 2000: 353-5). Why bother with construction, numbering and all, once the *Tractatus* is utter nonsense anyway? So, although Diamond insists that the *Tractatus* is nonsense, she still has to, willy-nilly, get involved with a *type* of nonsense – call it for a moment “the nonsense *about* logic” – because she should substantiate why it is the kind of nonsense found enclosed by the “frame” that may trigger finding “the possibility of meaning” in myself, or why Wittgenstein chose *this* (type of) nonsense to evoke it. So: is this nonsense special, and would any other kind of nonsense produce the same effect?

What Hacker calls “internal” evidence to prove that Diamond (and Conant, and Peter Winch, and other “resolute” readers) are wrong is far from being exhausted by the above sketch, and an even longer part of Hacker’s paper puts several pieces of “external” evidence together (from Wittgenstein’s lectures, discussions with friends, his type- and manuscripts, so also from the *Nachlass*, etc., cf. Hacker 2000: 372-82) to bring his positive thesis home, the gist of which is that, after reading the *Tractatus*, “one is [still] left holding on to some ineffable truths about reality, after one has thrown away the ladder” (Hacker 2000: 357). Or, as Meredith Williams formulates it: “though meaningless, these philosophical propositions [in the *Tractatus*] are illuminating in that they lead us to a proper understanding of the conditions of meaningfulness” (Williams 2004: 7-8). This takes us to Williams’ reading of Diamond, which is not as negative as Hacker’s, yet critical enough.

4. Meredith Williams’s objections to Diamond’s reading (the “standard view”)

One of Williams’s main points starts from the seemingly trivial but, from Diamond’s point of view, crucial fact that although of course the *Tractatus* is not bed-time reading, i.e. the understanding of the work has always been considered to be notoriously difficult, its sentences do not *strike* the reader as nonsense. We find sentences like “The world is all that is the case” (*TLP* 1), “The world divides

into facts” (1.2), “Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death” (6.4311). These famous sentences I have randomly selected are not like – as Williams’s example goes – the nonsense: “what those view Paradise 5 between of”, yet Diamond does insist that they *are* on the same level as the previous syntactic gibberish. Diamond is of course aware of this problem, so she has to say that *seemingly, apparently*, the Tractarian sentences do make sense (Williams 2004: 13-21) but Wittgenstein precisely wanted to teach us to see, at least in the end, his sentences in the *Tractatus* as syntactic gibberish and thus to cure us from taking them to be meaningful. But once *seemingly* is introduced, Diamond has to introduce some criterion to distinguish *seeming* nonsense from *obvious* nonsense and thus, Williams points out, we are no better off than standard interpreters like Anscombe or Hacker, because the paradox Wittgenstein introduced into his work by calling his own sentences nonsense is only “relocated”, shifted, but “not eliminated” (Williams 2004: 20). Thus, Diamond reproduces the same paradox which led the “standard” interpreters to the saying-showing distinction, and the standard readers at least start out from, and rely on, the picture-theory of meaning as put forward by the *Tractatus* itself to distinguish between nonsense and sense (Williams 2004: 18), while Diamond fails to supply any theory of meaning in order to buttress her “seemingly-sense-but-in-fact-utter-nonsense” distinction. Williams’s main claim is that one cannot spare the trouble of working out a theory of meaning when approaching the *Tractatus*.⁵ Yet Williams also notices that if there is a criterion of meaningfulness for Diamond, then it lies – as it was briefly mentioned above – in our ability to *give* meaning to our words; as Wittgenstein himself puts it in the *Tractatus*:

Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense [Sinn]. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately

⁵ “Can the austere reader [like Diamond] justify the charge of nonsense without some (implicit) theory of meaning of language? I do not see how” (Williams 2004: 18); and: “The need for a theory of meaning is avoided only by running into the second horn of the dilemma [holding up consistently that the *Tractatus* is utter nonsense], which turns the [nonsense-] thesis into something ineffable [which is the loop-hole of the standard view] but recognized by those who successfully manoeuvre the *Tractatus*” (Williams 2004: 24).

constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* [*Bedeutung*]⁶ to some of its constituents.

(Even if we think we have done so.) [emphasis original] (*TLP* 5.4733)

Diamond – herself referring to the above paragraph – builds her “austere” reading of the *Tractatus* on the thesis that sentences are not meaningful “in themselves”: it is us, speakers and interpreters, who assign meaning to utterances (*EIM* 151). Hence the significance of her insight in an end-note that “a proposition’s being an elucidation is a matter of context of use, not of the content” (*EIM* 172). So, for Diamond – and, as she interprets Wittgenstein, for Wittgenstein – neither the “general form” of propositions [*die allgemeine Form des Satzes*] (“This is how things are”, *TLP* 4.5), nor the logical form [*logische Form*] of propositions that propositions have “in common with reality in order to be able to represent it [i.e.: to represent reality]” (*TLP* 4.12) will guarantee that a proposition (sentence) will be meaningful. Logical form, which can be given in a most general way, is a necessary but not sufficient condition of making sense; logical form only provides the possibility of meaningfulness. Thus, as Williams points out, although deprecatingly, assigning meaning to sentences for Diamond becomes not a matter of the relationship between sentence and world but looking for the speaker’s intentions. For Diamond, Williams claims, “the aim is to grasp Wittgenstein’s true intentions” (Williams 2004: 22).

⁶ It must be noted that the interpretation of 5.4733 is not without problems, since, in the context of Frege, the original “Bedeutung” cannot just be taken as meaning “meaning”, since, as it is well-known, the Bedeutung of a “constituent” (word) is the word’s referent, and its Sinn is the way this referent is given to us (through name or description), while the Bedeutung of a sentence is the True or the False, its Sinn being the thought it expresses. Thus with Wittgenstein’s reliance on Frege, and in spite of his obvious dissent from him, we inherit all the difficulties that have been, from Russell through Dummett to Kripke, long debated in the secondary literature on Frege, and this heritage might be more complicated than as Diamond interprets it on page 159 of *EIM*. See also Williams 2004: 10-11 and *passim*.

5. The “austere” and the “standard” (“meta-physical”) readings compared

A possible reconstruction of the difference between the “standard” and the “austere” readings, as regards meaning, would be as follows: the standard reader (Anscombe, Hacker, Williams, etc.) bases his or her account of meaning on the picture-theory in the *Tractatus*, namely that thought and sentence picture reality. In order to see what the meaning of a sentence is, we have to look at the fact, the state-of-affairs the sentence depicts (cf. *TLP* 4.063, 4.1). And facts are in the world, having the same logical form as the sentences corresponding to them, so the question of being meaningful is an affair between language and reality. The resolute reader (Diamond, Conant, etc.), as far as I can see it, does not deny this but insists that for Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, language and reality will take care of each other: until we move on the level of facts, nothing may go wrong; even if someone described a state-of-affairs that does not exist, she still described a fact, although a negative fact (cf. *TLP* 2.06).

Problems arise with *non*-sense. For the resolute reader the declaration that the very sentences of the *Tractatus* (the sentences of the meta-language with which Wittgenstein gives an account of the relationships between language, world, and self) are nonsense must warn us that the problem of meaning (in the sense of *sense*) is decided in us, human beings who assign or do not assign meanings to their words and sentences. Wittgenstein, with his blessing or curse: “dear Reader, what I say here is nonsense” purposefully wants to move us out of (cure us from) an attitude, this attitude being that we think we may justify the talk that “theoretically” and “generally” “discusses” the relationships between world, language and speaker and we often call “philosophical”. We think we can establish “theses” concerning these relationships, we treat the sentences about these relationships as if they were depicting (describing) facts, states of affairs. We may speak meaningfully about facts of the world but we cannot speak about relationships *between* fact, language and self (language-user) because these are

relationships which are not facts, so they lie outside of the world, since the world is the “totality of *facts*” (*TLP* 1.1, my emphasis). Factual language, tied to the world through logical form, cannot get between itself and the world. So we resort to another language to “describe” this relationship (and such language is the language of philosophy, including the language of the *Tractatus* itself). However, this language will by definition be nonsense precisely because it is *not* factual language, yet it may “masquerade” as factual language and hence it is deceptive because it gives us the impression that we have described facts. A possible way, for the resolute reader, to get out of this situation is to appeal to Wittgenstein’s intentions themselves because the only way out is to understand the *person* behind all this. This understanding, however, is not, it cannot be, linguistic, because there is no language, properly speaking, *to be understood at all*, because this language (i.e. the language of the *Tractatus* describing relationships) is doomed to be nonsense, and nonsense is nonsense. It is not hard to see that, for the resolute reader, at least *some* version of the use-theory of meaning, made famous later on the pages of *Philosophical Investigations*, is already there in the *Tractatus*, if in no other form than as a promise. No wonder that Diamond, Conant and others emphasise that there are not “two” (or even “three”) “Wittgensteins” but there is a strong continuity as regards the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*.

6. Two “I”-s

I also – “resolutely” – think there is a continuity. What Wittgenstein says about meaning in the *Investigations* cannot of course be “exhausted” by the “use-theory” but this is for another study.⁷ Let us rather turn to our readers, standard and resolute again. Both perceive, of course, the limit to thought and language Wittgenstein promises to talk about as early as the Preface of the *Tractatus* but they react to it quite differently because of their respective stances to how they reconstruct the way Wittgenstein

⁷ My best guide for the *Philosophical Investigations* is still Stanley Cavell (Cavell 1979, especially 3-125, 168-190).

accounts for meaning in the *Tractatus*. The standard reader thinks that the limit is brought about by language itself; that the realm of meaningfulness is very much limited, so the standard reader may conclude that Wittgenstein thought that “real” truth is ineffable, that it can only be shown, and that the limit may liberate me for some action other than speech: I should rather “act truth out” by, for example, going to Lower Austria to become a village school-teacher, as Wittgenstein did after the publication of the *Tractatus*. Of course, such a gesture will and must be an entirely personal matter, so it is more than likely that my vocation is different but whatever it is, I will not be able to put it into words, just *do it* at best. The resolute reader, in turn, will identify *Wittgenstein* himself as the source of drawing the limit, and will argue that there is deep wisdom behind his gesture because he did not bring us into the narrow cage of meaningfulness in vain: through my limits I may experience the conditions of my meaning *anything* and see that if I can be meaningful anywhere at all, it will not be in the language of philosophy, because that is where we are most likely to produce gibberish. Thus, the *Tractatus* cures us of the philosophical superstition that through (philosophical) reflection we might formulate some general “truths” about reality, language and ourselves. It is noteworthy that, put in the above way, neither reading rules out the possibility that after I have gone through the *Tractatus*, I react to the world, language, myself and the Other rather with a changed *attitude*, a transformed outlook and overall disposition and conduct, rather than a changed opinion or body of thought. This might imply that philosophy is not, and has never been in a privileged (elite, divinely, or otherwise “chosen”) position to talk about the human predicament. For me, this is about the Wittgensteinian urge that we should exchange our basically epistemological, “knowing” attitude to the world, language, ourselves and the Other for an ethical and aesthetic one.

“My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me...”: the great merit of Cora Diamond’s reading, as far as I can see it, is to have discovered *perspective* in the *Tractatus*. It is not that previous interpreters have not seen, and have not attached importance to the appearance of

“I” and “me” and “my” on the pages of the *Tractatus*, especially from paragraph 5.6 (“*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*”, emphasis original) to paragraph 5.641, allowing to talk about the “I” as metaphysical subject. Yet no one, to the best of my knowledge, attached the *kind* of importance Diamond does to the appearance of the I (“my”, “me”) in 6.54, i.e. to the “elucidations-passage”, claiming that there it is Wittgenstein as implied author who speaks, so “my” and “me” marks the appearance of the *personal*.

This I take to be of utmost importance because I think there are two “I”-s in the *Tractatus*: the metaphysical subject and the personal implied author. It is also true that, as noted by several commentators, but brought out most dramatically and powerfully by Eli Friedlander, the text starts on a highly impersonal note, imitating the very voice of metaphysics (Friedlander 2001: 21-2). When we read “The world is all that is the case” (*TLP* 1), it is as if the World itself was “emanating” something of its “metaphysical spirit”. So the arch of the *Tractatus* is from the maximally impersonal to the maximally personal, as if, at the end one should realise that the two coincide at least on the level of the “metaphysical subject”, i.e. the “metaphysical I”: “The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world”. (5.62, emphasis original). But how about Diamond’s “personal I”, who is to be understood, instead of the text of the *Tractatus*? I think in 5.62 Diamond’s “implied author-I” is the one who has a language only *he/(she)* understands, who is an “I” with a kind of “private language”. I think the “implied author-I” has access to the understanding of the world as a “limited whole”⁸ (6.45) through the “metaphysical I”. But, as Wittgenstein is very much aware, there is a third “I”, *me*, the reader of his book, who makes his (or her) presence in the very first paragraph of the Preface: it is *me*, the (implied) *reader* to whom, as Wittgenstein identifies his aim, the *Tractatus* should give pleasure: “Its [the book’s] purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood

⁸ The “whole” might be understood as a world that does *not* “divide (*zerfällt*, literally: ‘fall apart’) into facts (*in Tatsachen*)” (*TLP* 1.2).

it” (*TLP* page 3). Now for the implied reader the implied author *must* speak gibberish, unless, as the very first sentence of the Preface says, he (she) “has” him-or herself “already had the thoughts that are expressed in it” [i.e. in the *Tractatus*]” (*TLP* page 3). This amounts to saying, in my reading, that Wittgenstein cannot expect any of his readers to understand *him*, the implied author because who could guarantee that the words he, the implied author uses on the pages of the *Tractatus*, mean the same (or at least something similar) to what they mean to the implied reader? Or, if the implied reader does understand the implied author, the reader will precisely see that the author is talking nonsense. In this respect, Wittgenstein as the implied *author* stands in the same relationship to the “metaphysical subject” as *I-as-implied-reader* stand to the “metaphysical subject”: I can perhaps understand the implied author if he could persuade me in his book to become a metaphysical subject myself. But of course the pre-requisite of the persuasion is that I understand the sentences on the pages of the *Tractatus*, but this is precisely what cannot be guaranteed: the language of the *Tractatus* is just as much a means to understand the author as it is an obstacle to do so. I do not think that this would be much more than acknowledging something about the general nature of language: whatever we say opens up a possible way of understanding, as it also blocks up our chances to understand anything. Sometimes we would like (as Russell and the logical positivists wished) to relieve language of its post (to exchange it, for example, for an unambiguous super-language of logic) but we have little else than language, while we know that what we say will only be but partial and especially linear: for example when “we bring up a topic”, we will necessarily focus on something but every focussing is also a narrowing down. We cannot say “everything at once”, either: we have to lay what we wish to say out in successive words and sentences. By saying that we have “little else” than language I mean that we might refer to, and try to find refuge in, feelings, intuitions, signs etc., when we see the impotency of language, yet all these are even more uncertain to be understood, as they are even more ambiguous than language.

To apply what I said above to the respective standard and resolute reader again, the standard reader will say that I understand who (or what) the metaphysical subject is not through explanation but rather through something having been shown to me: something other than linguistic has made itself manifest to me through which I may grasp some metaphysical and ineffable “truth”. The resolute reader will say that I simply do not understand the very words “metaphysical” and “subject”, they are utter nonsense, as it was especially gibberish to say, on my part, that the implied author or reader (the truly and most *personal*) may come to an understanding “*through*” the “metaphysical subject”. How *through*? And how to “become” such a “subject”? How could these be conceived at all? Yet if I – the resolute reader tells me – acknowledge that I have speculated about, and with, the help of gibberish, I may be cured of a *kind* of talk in philosophy, maybe even philosophy itself, if I had thought that *that* kind of talk *was* philosophy.

7. The Third and the First Persons: perspectives

Turning to a reading of my own, it would be too easy to say that there are as many “*Tractatuses*” as there are readers (as some literary critics like to say that. e.g., there are “as many *Hamlets* as there are readers” which, I think, is also only true with serious qualifications). Wittgenstein is an exceptional thinker for several reasons, one being, as it has often been observed, that with the rhetorical organisation of his texts he opens an enormous space up for the reader: he allows for an unusually large amount of interpretative “leeway”. Yet just to say at this point that “everyone has their *Tractatus*” would not only be too easy but also misleading from the point of view of the appreciation of the book because in my understanding the *Tractatus* on its pages already dramatises, stages and enacts, and even re-enacts the two “rival” readings: the standard and the resolute. It does, as Cora Diamond has ingeniously noticed this, through the introduction of *perspective*. Yet what I think she does not acknowledge is that the Third Person

perspective is just as important in the *Tractatus* as the First Person one. Hacker and the other standard readers, in turn, do not acknowledge the significance of the First Person perspective. I think the two readings rather complement than compete with each other. This should be carefully qualified but can only be done after I have tried to explain what these two perspectives are.

As far as I can see (playing the role of the implied-reader-I, of course)⁹, Wittgenstein introduces *degrees* of the *personal* through shifting (changing) the perspectives between the Third and the First Persons on the pages of the *Tractatus*. For example, logical form is well within the range of the Third Person perspective; it is “over there”, belonging to language, a “Third Person” – it is not *me*, the First Person. Logical form belongs to pictures, propositions and the world: pictures, propositions and the world all share this form and this ensures their harmony, yet logical form is also very distant from me with respect to my understanding, since logical form itself cannot be represented in order to be comprehended; it can only be shown: it manifests itself (cf. *TLP* 2.172, 2.174, 4.121). Yet logical form is the “firmament” which ensures that there is a tie between sentences, world (facts) and selves. Thus, it measures out the extent to which we can be meaningful in the public domain: in the world of facts we can expect to say what we mean because for both speaker and listener there are facts to fall back on; facts, publicly observable, behind the “pictures” we depict to ourselves and to others, serve as a “gold standard” or “reserve” to mean, and there what we mean and what the sentence means coincide. If, however, we take the First Person Perspective and talk about inner feelings, values, etc., then we no longer talk about facts of the world. And then how can the Other know what I mean by a word, a sentence when I named an inner feeling of mine? And how can I know what the Other means by *beautiful* or *good* or *right*, when these words do not refer to “objects” or “facts” of the world but a world of values somehow “in” the Other? In a non-factual world we risk nonsense all the time.

⁹ I would like to thank Professor Paul Roth at UCSC for calling my attention to my previous neglect of the implied author and reader in the second half of my paper, and also for other very useful commentary.

From this, referential theory of meaning these doubts, this scepticism will follow. When it will be grammatical rules, including syntactic and semantic rules which ensure harmony between world, language and selves, as in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2001), it will be no less – but no more! – than my expectations that the Other will follow the same, publicly established and acknowledged rules of uses in language and in action that provide the conditions of being meaningful. One of the discoveries of Wittgenstein after the *Tractatus*, I think, is that logical form occupies too narrow a field as our “credit” to be meaningful but I think in the *Tractatus* logical form plays the same role as grammatical rules do in the *Investigations*: for language, they provide the conditions, and thus the limit of being meaningful. I am well aware that this needs qualification again: for example, the *Investigations*, as it is well-known, talks about ordinary, everyday language, e.g. § 120: “When I talk about language (word, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day [*die Sprache des Alltags*]”, whereas in paragraph 5.5563 of the *Tractatus* – to which *Investigations* § 97 explicitly refers back – “everyday language” is *Umgangssprache* (literally something like: “the language one gets by with”, “the language we use in coming and going”). Are we to say that *die Sprache des Alltags* and *Umgangssprache* are the same (they are synonyms)? Thus, a detailed account should be given, and in the light of the *Investigations*, in what sense we should take what 5.5563 says: “In fact all propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order” and why this “utterly simple thing” is “the truth in its entirety”. Yet I cannot go into this, I just note that in my reading the *Investigations* nowhere denies the existence of logical form in language and world. What it denies is that logical form would be the “essence” of, the regulating force of, and the limiting power behind, meaning.

I would like to interpret logical form as our very *sense* of reality itself: when I encounter tables, chairs, people etc. around me, I have a sense – for Wittgenstein, a very concrete, so *not abstract* sense – even before any interpretation, that they *are* and they are identical with themselves, and that is, in my reading, what logical form consists in. Logical form goes “so much without saying”, its

“understanding comes so much from itself” (it is so *selbstverständlich*) that it belongs to the realm of the ineffable.

The First Person singular perspective emerges, in my (implied reader’s) reading, not so much out of nonsense, as Diamond thinks, but from the careful survey of the logical scaffolding of both language and world, the scaffolding which is the same for both of them.¹⁰ The First Person singular, culminating in the 6.54: “anyone who understands me”, is the other end on the scale of the impersonal *versus* the personal: logical form is the most impersonal, it has most of the tone and pitch: “this is how things (persons) are in the world, they stand in this-and-this order, I am *here* and they are *over there, outside* of me”; here I measure my relative distance, my *stance from* the world (of course, this is measured out in and through language, too). That *me* of 6.54, at almost the very end of the *Tractatus*, pleading for understanding, as it were, marks – as Diamond aptly recognises – the most personal at the other end of the impersonal-personal scale. What Diamond does not wish to acknowledge is that the Third Person perspective is not only important in order to be overruled by the First Person one in this drama so as it may be discarded as nonsensical. Getting rid of the Third Person, the chief perspective of the standard reading would be like trying to get rid of my experience and sense of reality. Similarly, getting rid of the First Person, the main perspective of the resolute reading would be like trying to get rid of the sense of myself. Thus, I think it is very significant that the *me* (*I*) of 6.54 is after the experience of having “been”, having “gone through the phase of being the metaphysical subject”, the metaphysical subject which consists in the realisation that it is not *in* the world but the limit of the world (*TLP* 5.632), thus also marking the limits of language (*TLP* 5.6). Yet the metaphysical subject is still impersonal, it is still conceived of in the Third Person perspective: it may be one with the world, but has not been adopted by the intimate *I*, i.e. by the one who is *intimately me*, who is whom I believe, or would like to be “truly” me, who is far from being a “general subject” but

¹⁰ The very but obscurely trivial and the obscurely mystical, mysterious, also coincide, or at least converge in/around one point, on a certain level. Logical form does have the power of levelling values, and this is no surprise: without that, language would not be a public institution.

who is *uniquely* who *I* am as nobody-else-*but-me*¹¹ and would like to talk nonsense (perhaps is even liberated to talk nonsense) only this *I* understands, or only a few (or one) who have (has) had the same or similar thoughts to the thoughts of this *I*.

8. Personal and impersonal perspectives – an example from Camus: The Plague

To illustrate how the First Person *personal* perspective emerges from the Third Person *impersonal one*, i.e. how in my reading the *I* of 6.54 emerges from logic, let me draw a parallel between the technique of presentation in the *Tractatus* and the special perspectival narrative technique of Albert Camus in his novel, *The Plague*. Through this example I hope to show how the “indifferent” perspective of the Third Person may give rise to the “personal-*I*” perspective, where the – implied, but clearly indicated – *I* has a genuinely *ethical* stance. I am inclined to say that in both Camus’s novel and in the *Tractatus*, the *I* is the ethical perspective itself.

After an introductory chapter (Camus 1960: 5-8), in which the author of the novel tries to clarify his task, chapter 2 starts with the following sentence: “When leaving his surgery on the morning of 16 April, Dr. Bernard Rieux felt something soft under his foot” (9). And since the novel’s central hero is Rieux, we of course often read sentences describing his activities, behaviour, what he said etc. For example: “‘People always talk’, Rieux replied. ‘That’s only to be expected’” (53); “When leaving the hospital two days after the gates were closed, Dr. Rieux met Cottard in the street” (68). “For the first time Rieux found that he could give a name to the family likeness which for several months he had detected in the faces of the streets” (234). Yet this customary, detached, Third Person point of view is further complicated by regular shifts in perspective, for example sometimes still a Third Person Singular voice narrates, yet it can also be taken as a First Person Singular narrator talking about

¹¹ For the understanding of the personal, I am throughout greatly indebted to the works of Stanley Cavell, cf. e.g. “Othello and the Stake of the Other” (Cavell 1987: 133-135).

himself in the Third Person: “At this stage of the narrative, with Dr. Bernard Rieux standing at the window, the narrator may, perhaps, be allowed to justify the doctor’s uncertainty and surprise” (34). At the same time, presumably the same voice sometimes takes a First Person Plural point of view, e.g. talking of Oran, the Arabic city where the plague is raging, and its inhabitants as belonging to an “us (we)”: “It is noteworthy that our townspeople very quickly desisted, even in public, from a habit one might have expected to form...” (61).

The big surprise comes in the first sentence of the last chapter (Part 5, Chapter 5): “This chronicle is drawing to an end, and this seems to be the moment for Bernard Rieux to confess that he is the narrator” (246). One of the reasons he mentions for resorting to this technique is that he wished to adopt “the tone of the impartial observer” to give a “true account” while keeping “within the limits that seemed desirable”. “For instance”, he tells us, “in a general way he [Rieux, who, let us not forget, has now also become a *kind* of *I*-narrator] has confined himself to describing only such things as he was enabled to see for himself, and refrained from attributing to his fellow-sufferers [in the plague] thoughts that, when all is said and done, they were not bound to have” (246). Thus, he has adopted this stance for ethical purposes, in order not to misrepresent anything. So he rather represented himself *amidst* the people he tried to save as a medical doctor: the implied author is the narrator, but also a character at the same time, *thus* being Third and First Person, simultaneously (this type of narrative technique comes closest to what Gérard Genette called “autodiegetic narration”) (cf. Phelan and Rabinowitz 2008: 546). He never utters the personal pronoun “I”: even on the remaining seven odd pages of the novel, he will refer to himself as Dr. Rieux, i.e. from the Third Person Perspective. Still, in the confession at the beginning of chapter 5 in Part 5, this “I” still makes its indirect appearance, as if one’s right to identify him- or herself as “I” were to be granted when one has suffered with his people, and has done everything to save them. It is as if “Dr. Rieux”, the “he” were entitled to come to First Person self-identification after he has been willing to represent him- or herself *in* the world, impersonally, as a

part of the world, as if he were “a fact” (factor?) of it, too, among other fact(or)s. It is as if the “I” was earning his right to call himself “I”, to talk in a *personal* voice precisely with telling a story about himself from the Third Person perspective while being a “Third Person” himself. It is as if he were earning his right to be “I” with the impartial and truthful narrative and the Third Person Perspective *itself*. It is as if the Third Person perspective were a necessary condition (perhaps even in the logical sense of “necessity”) to find the stance of the personal *I*, which coincides with the genuine ethical perspective.

I perceive a similar gesture in the *Tractatus*: the personal “I” may come when the “implied author” has given a truthful picture of the world (as “he has found it” cf. *TLP* 5.61)¹², has represented himself as a Third Person, but rather as an “it” than a “he or she”: as an “it” (a kind of “object”) who is part of the world.¹³ And this had to be done from a Third Person Perspective; he has, so to speak, “passed unnoticed” as part of the world (he did not “stick out”) all through this process, and *then* his voice, as it were, may take a turn, and go from the *impersonal* “throat and mouth” of an “it”, into the “throat and mouth” of the *personal* “I”. But the Third Person impersonal Perspective is absolutely necessary for this process, because that will eject, as a springboard, as it were, the “it” into the “I”.

Thus, having taken my cue from *The Plague*, I wish to conclude that one of the most ingenious features of the *Tractatus* is Wittgenstein’s ability to see a strong connection between the utmost impersonality, the utmost Third Person perspective of logical form on the one hand, and the utmost personal in the “I”,

¹² “I am my world. (The microcosm.)” (*TLP* 5.63).

“There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being the method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book. —” (*TLP* 5.631).

¹³ This is, of course, the way the “personal I” finds “my” way into the “Author’s Preface” as well: e.g. “Here I am conscious of having fallen a long way short of what is possible”; “I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points the final solution of the problems”, etc. (*TLP*, p. 5).

the utmost First Person perspective, on the other. The important thing to see is that the Third Person is indispensable for finding the First Person: they are interrelated with the force of logical necessity. It is equally significant that going from “he-she-it” to “I” is a *process* that cannot be evaded or dodged: it is only working one’s way through the Third Person Perspective, and precisely *while* working one’s way through it that one may find his voice as “I”, the genuinely ethical stance of one’s own, which can be nobody else’s but *that* person’s, and thus *is* the ethical stance itself.

The connection between the Third and the First Person perspectives, I would further like to claim, is established in the *Tractatus* through the force of the word carrying the force of logical necessity: the word *must*.

9. *Must* (Muß): *conclusion*

When discussing pictorial form – and, as we will shortly see, what Wittgenstein says about pictorial form will turn out to be true of, and applicable to, logical form, too – he makes frequent use of the modal auxiliary *must*: “There must be something identical [*muß etwas identisch sein*] in a picture and what it depicts, to enable the one to be a picture of the other at all” (2.161). What a picture must [*muß*] have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in the way it does, is its pictorial form” (2.17). “What any picture, of whatever form, must [*muß*] have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality” (2.18). The use of *must* is not accidental: it expresses the acknowledgement that our only way to approach logical form is to take the indirect road, to infer to it, since, as has already been pointed out, logical form cannot directly be represented: it shows itself but it cannot be put into words, it cannot be “known with reason”, it cannot be interpreted and analysed; it shows itself but it cannot be given a shape or form in language. As 4.12. declares:

Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must [*muß*] have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.

In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside of logic, that is to say outside the world.

“What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language” (4.121, emphasis original), yet there *must*, with the force of *logical necessity*, be logical form, otherwise we would not be able to represent at all.

However, *must* does not only re-appear in the most famous, 7th paragraph of the *Tractatus*: “What we cannot speak about we must [*muß*] pass over in silence” but also when Wittgenstein says something positive about ethics in 6.422:

When an ethical law of the form, ‘Thou shalt...’ [*Du sollst...*] is laid down, one’s first thought is, ‘And what if I do not do it?’ It is clear, however, that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the consequences of an action must [*muß*] be unimportant. – At least those consequences should not be events. For there must [*muß*] be something right about the question posed. There must [*muß*] indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must [*muß*] reside in the action itself.

(And it is also clear that the reward must [*muß*] be something pleasant and the punishment something unpleasant).

I take the significance of the above passages to be that ethical laws “traditionally” put (“Thou shalt (not)...” or “You should (not)...” or even “You must (not)...”) lack precisely the force of necessity, that of *logical necessity* when we have no other alternative. Wittgenstein is looking for a stance where there is only one thing to do and that is necessarily the *right* way, in a sort of “absolute” sense, as he puts it later in his *Lecture on Ethics* (Wittgenstein 1993: 38-40). However, this “only one right thing to do” will – in my reading – be utterly and thoroughly, i.e. in the absolute sense *personal*: it will apply only to the absolutely *personal I*, the most personal First Person Perspective I have found through, and in, the Third Person Perspective. The content of *my* ethical law (“my” in the sense that it drives me, and only me, but I *must* live up to it) is not even,

properly speaking, “known” to myself, as it cannot be put into words: it can only make itself manifest in my life (of course, there is no guarantee that it does). Yet its force is the force of *logical* necessity, it compels me with the force with which I concluded: “there *must* be logical form, though it cannot be put into words, it shows itself, it makes itself manifest”. The *must* of the most impersonal Third Person Perspective and the *must* of the most personal First Person Perspective thus coincide: I think *this* is the ethical stance from which the world *and* my life can, or could, and simultaneously, must be seen in the *absolutely* right way, i.e. without any possibility of the “wrong”.

Is this stance, both for the implied reader of Wittgenstein, and the implied author of this paper: i.e. *me*, hopelessly in the realm of the ineffable? And is it bound to be suffocated by nonsense?

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Biographical note

Géza Kállay is Professor of English Literature at Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, where he teaches English drama, Shakespeare, and literary theory. He also teaches literature and philosophy at IES, Vienna. He defended his PhD at the University of Leuven in 1996. With Fulbright grants, he studied, under the sponsorship of Stanley Cavell, at Harvard University in 1995, while in 2004-05 he was visiting professor of literature and philosophy at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has published seven books in Hungarian, and over seventy articles in Hungarian and English on Shakespeare, the relationship between philosophy and literature, and analytic philosophy.