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CHAPTER ONE

NON-DISCURSIVITY
IN WITTGENSTEIN’S TRACTATUS:
IS A CONCEPTUALIST READING
OF THE SAYING/SHOWING
DISTINCTION POSSIBLE?

MILTOS THEODOSSIOU

1. Introduction

One of the most difficult concepts in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-
Philosophicus (TLP from now on) remains the notion of showing (zeigen,
sich zeigen). Indeed, the saying/showing distinction harbors all those
features that make it a hard nugget to crack, setting up great obstacles in
the way of straightforward interpretation: it is ambiguous and obscure, yet
promises to pay rich dividends to the philosopher who manages to decrypt
Wittgenstein’s intentions in introducing it. Here we shall concern
ourselves with only one aspect of the distinction, though one that may be
of the greatest relevance for making sense of TLP’s view of logic: namely,
the connection of showing to ineffability, or non-discursivity.

The term “non-discursivity” seems to us properly minimal and
metaphysically non-committal when attempting to interpret the
saying/showing distinction: it allows us to put aside (temporarily or not)
the connotations of “ineffability” and similar terms. Whether showing
means that what is shown is ineffable is plainly a matter of interpretation.
One should not decide in advance how to stand on this issue by
automatically relating showing to ineffability; arguments should be
offered. To the extent that “ineffability” decides the issue in advance, we
prefer “non-discursivity” to “ineffability” or “inexpressibility” as the
proper term for an impartial investigation of the Tractarian showing: the
term simply implies that what is shown is not discursive, does not belong to the level of discourse, with nothing mystical or ineffable being necessarily implied thereby. The positive aspects of the term are to be investigated.

In what follows, we shall undertake this investigation in the context of ongoing debates over the interpretation of the book. We shall pursue certain lines of interpretation initiated by Cora Diamond and James Conant in the 1990s, two philosophers who have opened up an entirely novel approach to the book, reviving interest in it after a decades-long period of silence and dismissal. This approach, the Resolute Interpretation, will guide us in trying to set up a so-called “conceptualist” understanding of showing and the saying/showing distinction. The term “conceptualism” signals our interest in placing the resolute interpretation of the book in the context of the problematic of the Myth of the Given, a theme figuring prominently in analytic discussions of philosophy of mind and perception (in analytic epistemology) during the last twenty years. Inspired by the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars’ work, and developed most fruitfully in the philosophy of the so-called “Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelian” philosopher, John McDowell, the problematic of the Myth of the Given, as well as the conceptualist attempts developed to avoid it, have far greater scope and application—or so we shall argue. Consequently, we shall try to combine three lines of approach to the interpretation of the saying/showing distinction: (a) textual evidence internal to the Tractatus itself, (b) the Resolute Program of interpretation, and (c) the Myth of the Given problematic.

The structure of the paper is therefore as follows. In section 2, we shall try to bring out our questions about “showing” by briefly commenting on certain passages in the Tractatus. In section 3, we shall attempt to place these passages in the context of the problematic of the Myth of the Given. This will allow us to specify in more detail what a conceptualist reading of TLP would involve. In section 4, we shall present our take on the Resolute Interpretation. This will allow us to pinpoint two key notions in TLP, whose analysis is needed for any deeper resolute and conceptualist treatment of the Tractarian understanding of showing: the notion of “logical syntax” and the Tractarian concept of the “logical proposition.” In section 5, we shall briefly mention the debates over the first notion in the recent literature, and comment on them in order to show how they may shed light on a conceptualist understanding of showing. In section 6, we shall expand on this line of thinking in the case of TLP’s “propositions of logic.” Again, the relevant literature will be presented and commented upon. This will enable us to argue that a fully conceptualist understanding of non-discursivity in TLP may not be possible, even on resolute principles of interpretation. Finally, in section 7, we shall sum up our findings and conclude. Tractarian non-discursivity will be shown to be innocent of the standard idea of “ineffability,” namely of non-discursivity with overtones of mysticism and transcendence. Nevertheless, some kind of non-conceptualist Givenness seems to be deeply embedded in TLP’s understanding of logic, a sort of metaphysical transcendence which cannot be overcome. This non-conceptual remainder, however, might simply be taken to be one of the metaphysical premises whose existence in TLP resolute interpreters have no problem acknowledging. Indeed, the non-conceptuality involved may be fruitfully understood as giving rise to Wittgenstein’s so-called “rule-following considerations” in Philosophical Investigations.

2. Showing and the saying/showing distinction

The importance of the notion of “showing” in TLP can hardly be overestimated. Wittgenstein himself highlighted its significance. In a letter to Russell in 1919, he wrote:

I’m afraid you haven’t really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed by propositions—i.e. by language and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy.¹

It is of some interest that Wittgenstein does not confuse here the issue of non-discursivity with the issue of ineffability, inexpressibility, or unsayability, bringing in associations of mysticism and metaphysical transcendence. However, in a letter to Engelmann in 1917, he does write about Ludwig Ulland's poem “Graf Ebenhards Weissdorn” [Count Ebenhard’s Hawthorn]: “And this is how it is: if one does not endeavor to express the unutterable [das Unausgesprochene], then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be—inexpressibly—contained in what has been

uttered". At least without further analysis, this does give one the impression that Wittgenstein is talking of some "deep truth" buried in the poem. Although what precisely Wittgenstein might have had in mind here is not self-evident, his way of putting the matter certainly muddles the waters for anyone attempting to interpret non-discursivity in TLP as non-metaphysically as possible. Furthermore, Unaussprechliches and its cognates appear in TLP as well (for example, in 6.522). On account of this, we shall restrict ourselves primarily to internal evidence, trying to make sense of TLP on its own terms (the way its author presumably wanted it).\(^5\)

There are at least three places in TLP where worries over showing may crop up: over how nonsense works (6.54), how propositions show (4.022), and the notion of the Mystical (6.522). Of course, there are several other places where the notion of "showing," in the sense of non-discursivity, is involved: for example, the object-name relation (3.321), the picturing relation (2.172), the way that something falls under a formal concept (4.126) and the remarks on solipsism (5.62). But it is not difficult to see that for one to properly understand these latter issues one should have available a solid interpretation of the former: clarity on how TLP conceives meaning and sense-making sheds light on the manner in which meaningful sentences have a non-discursive aspect and contributes significantly in determining "what the solipsist means." Clarity on meaning and sense-making has priority here. For the same reason, it is our belief that to understand the notion of the Mystical itself properly, the "Unaussprechliches" of 6.522, it is necessary to be clear beforehand on the first two issues: how nonsense works and how propositions show. Unless, for example, one has a solid understanding of how precisely one avoids confusing nonsense (unsinntigel) with tautologies or contradictions (sinntlos), since according to TLP both are contentless and say nothing, but only the latter show, one will not be able to connect the remarks on the Mystical with the remarks on ethics (6.41-6.422) without conflict.\(^4\)

It is worth expanding a bit on the priority we just attributed to TLP's remarks on meaning and sense-making over other remarks on the issue of showing and the saying/showing distinction. From the way that the book is structured, it is easy to see that TLP's remarks on the Mystical, solipsism and ethics involve an understanding of showing which has been elucidated already in the remarks on meaning and sense-making. The remark, for instance, that "ethics cannot be put into words" (6.421) should not be taken to stand on its own, as if one could get the point of this remark simply by taking it at face value; on the contrary, the specific way that things are put into words according to TLP (4.116), is presupposed. It is easy to forget that TLP broaches primarily issues of logic, not of ethics or mysticism. Consequently, a certain understanding of TLP's standpoint on logic should be deemed necessary before putting the later remarks into work. This is not an original thought; after all, TLP, even if not a treatise on logic, belongs to the philosophy of logic, commenting repeatedly on Russell's and Frege's work. Nevertheless, the intimate way that its standpoint on logic coheres with its standpoint on ethics has not always been appreciated. The non-discursivity involved in sense-making may

\(^4\) We have in mind Russell's "discomfort" here: "The whole subject of ethics, for example, is placed by Mr. Wittgenstein in the mystical, inexpressible region. Nevertheless he is capable of conveying his ethical opinions. His defense would be that what he calls the mystical can be shown, although it cannot be said. It may be that this defense is adequate, but, for my part, I confess that it leaves me with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort" (Introduction to TLP, xxiii-xxiv).

\(^5\) P. M. S. Hacker, for example, writes: "It is common to view the Tractatus as a complete and wholly integrated work, and hence to think that the so-called "mystical" part of the book are "a culmination of the work reflecting back on everything that went before" [Hacker is quoting from a paper by E. Zemach on the Mystical—MT]. This is, I think, at best misleading, at worst erroneous. It is true that these sections of the Tractatus are connected with what went before, although the connection is tenuous. It is also true that they were of great importance to Wittgenstein. It is not obvious, however, that they follow from the earlier sections of the book." In P. M. S. Hacker, Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 101. His justification for this claim is that "the argument in support of the ineffability of ethics is tenuous to say the least. It hangs on nothing more than the non-contingency of the ethical, a point asserted rather than argued. But logically necessary truths are expressible by the senseless propositions of logic. Categorical necessities are reflected in the


\(^3\) This implies a different methodology from P. M. S. Hacker's, for example. Cf. P. M. S. Hacker, "Was He Trying to Whistle It?" in The New Wittgenstein, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). He allows his understanding of external evidence to guide him in the exegesis of TLP. However, exegesis concerns whether TLP makes sense on its own terms, even if by the lights of the later Wittgenstein it is a philosophically flawed book. The exegesis of external evidence should be guided by an interpreter's internally-specified findings, and their impact should be appreciated after an interpretation of TLP has been evaluated on its philosophical merits. This will also make it possible for the reader to form some idea of where exactly the book's philosophical flaws lie.
Chapter One

Determine the impossibility of the "propositions of ethics" (6.42), rather than the other way round: the idea that it is the supposed "ineffability" of ethical value and the Mystical which language has to respect and to which it succumbs, may simply be a figment of the reader's imagination.\(^6\)

The issue of priority brings us closer to the core problematic of our paper. It is widely acknowledged that TLP conceives logic normatively, specifically as an aspect of language which may be made clear via the use of a "sign-language" (3.325), a quasi-mathematical symbolism or calculus, a "logical syntax" whose rules the linguistic signs follow when sense is produced. However, neither the status of logic in relation to language, nor the philosophical role of the Tractarian calculus has found an interpretation similarly acknowledged. Both issues remain admittedly obscure. To put it roughly: if "logic" stands for a transcendent-like structure whose effects, so to speak, are binding on the use of ordinary language, is the calculus supposed to mirror this structure? Or does "logic" live immanently in the use of language, in which case the calculus acts as a useful tool, allowing us to make clear to ourselves the relation we have to our own words, when this relation becomes difficult to fathom on our own? In the first case, TLP would have to be considered as Wittgenstein's contribution to theoretical work on logic, offering to the reader a non-discursive glimpse into the "logical syntax" of our language via an ultimately self-refuting theory of logic. In the second case, however, TLP would contribute to a form of therapy, aiming to dispel the illusions produced by the complexity of our formation-rules of language, but cannot be expressed in language. Any attempt to express them involves the use of formal concepts and hence the violation of rules of logical syntax. But ethical pseudo-propositions are not tautologies or contradictions, and certainly it is not obvious that ethical predicates are formal concepts. If they were, then it would be clear why putative ethical propositions are pseudo-propositions. But equally, if they were, they would incorporate variables taking a range of objects of a given category as their values. But if ethical predicates are formal concepts, what are their correlative 'material' concepts, i.e., the substitution instances of such variables? No clue is given as to what these might be" (Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, 105-6). Apparently, Hacker's difficulty to find a coherent interpretation of the remarks on ethics lies in the logical theory he attributes to TLP. Curiously, this does not make him doubt the attribution, but rather Wittgenstein's reasoning.


Relation to our words, specifically in the domain of philosophy. Nevertheless, in both cases TLP would be an *exercise* in the philosophy of logic: respectively, either as a theoretical one, constituting a third-personal viewpoint on language (from "sideways-on," in John McDowell's felicitous phrase),\(^7\) or a first personal, non-theoretical study of how to get clear, on our own "conceptual capacities" (another of McDowell's often used expressions), about our expectations from philosophy and our desires when we engage in it. Contributing either to theoretical knowledge, or to ethics; this is the dilemma currently facing any well-informed and up to date interpreter of TLP.

As is well-known, standard (textbook) interpretations take TLP as a self-undermining contribution to theoretical knowledge, an exercise in the science of logic. According to these interpretations, the book introduces a metaphysical theory which grounds our language's logical structure on transcendent, ineffable aspects of the world.\(^8\) In this reading, the metaphysical structure of logic is not immanent to language but literally transcends it, making it impossible for language to speak of itself and of its relation to the world: the relationship of the metaphysical structure to ordinary language and the world becomes an ineffable issue. In this way, Wittgenstein's notoriously characterizing, towards the end of the book, what he wrote as nonsense (6.54), is taken by standard interpretations as a purposeful move, on Wittgenstein's part, to consciously violate the theory's logical principles he himself introduced, since according to these same principles, a theory of logic is impossible: its subject-matter, namely language and its relation to the world, cannot be spoken about, cannot be put into words, it is ineffable. In other words, Wittgenstein gleanfully recognizes that TLP in the end refutes itself.

Methodologically speaking, our paper belongs to the second, non-standard camp.\(^9\) Brought into world-wide attention in the 1990s thanks to

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\(^9\) We have attempted to make our commitments explicit in Miltos Theodossiou, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Turning-Points in Interpretation*, in Greek
Chapter One

the brilliant efforts of the American philosophers Cora Diamond and James Conant, inspired by the Harvard philosophers Stanley Cavell and the late Burton Dreben, the non-standard interpretation has flourished into the so-called Resolute Interpretation of TLP. As promised, we shall present our take on it in section 4. For the moment, just to put our cards on the table, we restrict ourselves to the following.

It is our belief that TLP should not be taken to exclude its readers from the philosophical work involved in distinguishing sense from nonsense; on the contrary, without abandoning logic, TLP should be taken to assist the reader in the “climbing” of the Tractarian ladder by showing him or her how the ladder’s rungs are essentially tied to work one has to do oneself: there are no “rungs” without the reader. Wittgenstein, on this interpretation, is very far from constructing theoretical ladder-like structures that anticipate in advance the creativity and the capacity for novelty characteristic of language-using, rational subjects. Wittgenstein’s manner of writing in TLP, akin to proofs in geometry, is another way to see how he aims to motivate his metaphysically troubled reader to make connections, to notice gaps and discover ambiguities, by encouraging one to realize step-by-step one’s own logical capacities. He does not try to numb these same capacities by taking his reader passively on a trip to a realm of “infellable truths” via a fatal, self-undermining contradiction proudly announced in the end of the book, as the standard interpretations have it. He does not try to force the reader’s language into a metaphysical, preconceived (a priori), transcendent-like, linguistic net, violating which damning one immediately to nonsense. On the contrary, Wittgenstein tries to bring the reader’s own conceptual capacities alive in philosophy, to challenge the reader into an enlivening struggle with himself or herself. This should not be taken, however, as a demand on our part for the book’s absolute self-consistency on its negative stance towards metaphysics. The book harbors several methodological biases of the metaphysical kind, the “dogmatism” which the later Wittgenstein will so successfully diagnose in his later work, after the deeply self-educational experience of TLP has fully set in.

This issue of metaphysical bias in TLP will come up again, in the conclusion of our paper. Now it is time to elaborate on the second strand of our questioning, which we aim to bring in our discussion of showing: what a conceptualist reading of TLP involves.

3. The Myth of the Given

The "Myth of the Given" is a phrase employed in the 1950s by the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars in his work, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." He used it to denote, in as broad a way as possible, the idea of immediate and non-inferential apprehension of non-normative structure or non-normatively shaped elements, which, however, are taken to play a normative or guiding role (whether epistemic or epistemological, justificatory or constitutive) in the formation or the identity-constitution of normatively charged items (beliefs, perceptions or meanings). So, for example, "sense-data" may be understood as bits of Givenness employed in the formation and the justification of perceptual beliefs; or "private meanings," of the kind that Wittgenstein himself exposed as mythical in the Philosophical Investigations, if taken to support public language use and to constitute the ultimate normative binding and the meaningfulness of language, may be seen as embodiments of the Myth.10 In further work, Sellars specifies that the Myth is essentially the view according to which "if a person is directly aware of an item which has categorical status C, then the person is aware of it as having categorical status C," and explains that "to reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorical structure of the world—if it has a categorical structure—imposes itself on the mind as a seal on melted wax" (emphasis in the original).11

The problematic of the Sellarsian concept of the Myth of the Given has been extensively developed in the last twenty years, after the publication of John McDowell’s Mind and World. In this book, McDowell deals with the Myth in the specific case of perception and the empirical judgments and beliefs resting on the former. Falling prey to the Myth of the Given, according to McDowell, amounts to appealing directly to something that

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10 Indeed, it was McDowell’s paper on the Private Language Argument (Chapter 13 of John McDowell, Mind, Value and Reality (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998)) that alerted us to the possibility that the Myth of the Given may have wider application in Wittgenstein's work. Although there has been no such application in the case of TLP (at least so far, at least explicitly and to our knowledge), we shall see in section 5 that the Resolute Interpretation has some understanding of the threat of the Myth in interpreting TLP, in essence if not in name.

11 Wilfrid Sellars, "The Lever of Archimedes," The Monist 64 (1981): 11-2. We owe these references to Dionysis Christos, whose upcoming work on the "Myth of the Categorical Given" (Sellars’ later construal of the Myth) has helped us sort out the issues here.
can secure objective purport almost by force: “bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgments,” namely sensations or sense-data, “presences ... outside the conceptual realm altogether.” These non-conceptual presences, supposedly present in perceptual experience, are taken to secure, somehow, our rational connection to the world. McDowell takes special pains in his book to point out that this Myth is just that: a Myth. No matter how heavy the epistemological work it is called upon to do, it actually explains nothing, “it is useless for its purpose,” it borders on incoherence. “How,” McDowell justifiably asks, “could pointing to a bit of the Given justify the use of a concept in judgment?” Consequently, McDowell insists that we introduce a “new notion of givenness.” We should accept no mythical Givens, he suggests, and goes on to encourage us to conceive of perceptual content itself as belonging to the conceptual, to accept that perceptual experiences have conceptual content. The correct formulation of this idea as found in Mind and World is quite tricky: according to McDowell, experience is not supposed to be a proposition, a judgment or a belief; it is something like a proposition. In cases of perception, our senses, our “sensibility” (to use McDowell’s preferred Kantian idiom), already involve something of a propositional nature. They have conceptual content: the content the corresponding proposition or judgment has. So one’s receiving an impression via one’s senses is, as such, a conceptually structured episode. Our conceptual capacities, namely those which are responsible for our drawing inferences, reaching conclusions, making judgments and justifying them, “are already operative in the deliverances of sensibility themselves.” How exactly does this “new notion of givenness” help us overcome the danger of losing our rational contact with the world? McDowell points out that, if properly understood, this very same idea (that experience has conceptual content, namely the same content with the corresponding judgment “that things are thus and so”) also satisfies the demand for direct contact with the world:

[In enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts ... To paraphrase the later] Wittgenstein, when we see that such-and-such is the case, we,

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13 McDowell, Mind and World, 7.
14 McDowell, Mind and World, xvii.
15 McDowell, Mind and World, 6.
16 McDowell, Mind and World, 10.
17 McDowell, Mind and World, 39.
18 McDowell, Mind and World, 29, our emphasis.
threat of the Myth of the non-conceptual Given, makes the risk of the Given palpable: non-discursivity and non-conceptuality seem to be twin brothers, unless we reach some understanding of the former that excludes the threat of the latter. Certainly, “ineffability” or “inexpressibility,” to the extent that they imply a brute, non-discursive, metaphysical understanding of whatever is shown, a non-discursive understanding that “does not draw on capacities required for the sort of cognition in question,” but supposedly transcends them, fall automatically prey to the Myth of the Given. However, without a conceptualist reading of Tractarian non-discursivity at hand, TLP itself seems to come under threat.\(^{20}\) This makes for us the feasibility of a conceptualist reading of showing an urgent matter if we are to proceed in our investigation.

Taking into account the priority of TLP’s remarks on meaning and sense-making over other remarks for the issue of showing and the saying/showing distinction (see section 1), it seems that two roads are open to us at this point. First, to get clear on how TLP construes the relation of nonsense to showing: according to a widespread interpretation that builds on standard, “irresolute” insights, nonsense supposedly “shows” or “conveys” ineffable truths, and this is also what Wittgenstein aimed for in composing the ladder of TLP. Tractarian nonsense, on this interpretation, consists in “the violation of the rules of logical syntax,” thus providing access, directly or indirectly, to the “ineffable.” The “violation,” in other words, somehow, directly or indirectly, manages to “show” or “convey” transcendence. But is this non-conceptualist understanding of nonsense’s “showing” tenable, not only as an interpretation of TLP but also on its own philosophical merit? In order to reach a conceptualist reading of showing, we have to give a negative answer to this question. As we shall see in the next section, this will take us into an examination of the Tractarian notion of “logical syntax”—an examination undertaken in section 4. Secondly, we have to take on directly the showing involved in propositions according to TLP. This involves both the logical propositions (the “propositions of logic”) and the non-logical ones. In order to establish the credentials of a conceptualist understanding of showing in this case, we shall have to provide for an understanding of non-discursivity which excludes any “ineffabilist” connotations. This we shall undertake in section 6. Fortunately, resolute interpreters have already provided access to both roads. Unfortunately, when we examine the case of logical propositions, we shall hit a snag that will make any conceptualist destination unfeasible—or so we shall argue.

4. The Resolute Interpretation

In contrast with previously established TLP interpretation, in the 1990s a new reading of the book was developed by Cora Diamond and James Conant: the so-called “New Wittgenstein” or “Resolute Interpretation.”\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) Again, this is not always appreciated. It is one thing to deny ineffability and the corresponding construal of “showing”; offering a different understanding, however, that avoids even the temptation of ineffabilism, is a different story altogether. For example, in probably the best non-standard reading of TLP available at this time, Eli Friedlander’s Signs of Sense: Reading Wittgenstein’s Tractatus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), we find formulations about “showing” at once helpful in avoiding ineffability and tempting us to bring it back under a different name: “The concept of showing involves a fundamental passivity with respect to meaning. Showing involves something that is already there, which we turn or return to; it is a realm of presence and not a realm of activity that generates projects, anticipations, hypotheses, discoveries, hierarchies, systematization, or enumeration. Showing characterizes our access to the level of form or meaning. Our access to the body of meaning is precisely opposed to our activity of making sense... It is not a representation but a laying out, or presenting, of the ligaments that hold the body together, thus showing the form of the body” (Friedlander, Signs of Sense, 110, emphases ours). “Showing is not intuition, in the sense of a special recognitional capacity... Rather, it is to be thought of as an acknowledgment of the conditions of saying, which means the complete presence of those conditions” (Friedlander, Signs of Sense, 111). “If anything remains from the idea of acquaintance in relation to objects, it should be sought in the understanding that objects are shown. To know an object is to show its form as it appears through language. Showing, like acquaintance, refers us to a certain non-discursive recognition, but it is a term that is freed from all connections to sensibility. It is used solely to characterize our capacity for recognizing the internal relations that constitute the forms of objects, or for recognizing the meaning of the sense we make” (Friedlander, Signs of Sense, 174). “But both Carnap and Russell miss Wittgenstein’s deepest intentions— that form is not the postulation of rules for the use of signs but rather something that must be recovered through the recognition of internal relations between the various propositions we use. Wittgenstein’s notion of showing emphasizes that meaning is revealed through language, and that we can never control the appearance of such meaning but are required to be attentive to it” (Friedlander, Signs of Sense, 185). These formulations seem to bring the “fundamentally passive” and non-discursive yet

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This reading aims to offer an interpretation, according to which the book’s nonsensicality is not to be accounted for via self-refutation or, more generally, because it supposedly violates the principles of an \textit{a priori} logical theory. Rather, Wittgenstein has authored TLP in such a way that our own attempt to go through it, under the impression that it offers a metaphysical theory of logic,\textsuperscript{25} will lead us, on its own, to abandoning it as nonsense—at least, if we are “resolve” enough to put aside the metaphysical prejudices and expectations we ourselves bring to the book. If we truly follow Wittgenstein’s idea of how to read his book, then we shall find that there are purposefully placed gaps of meaning from one proposition to the next or even among sets of propositions,\textsuperscript{25} in such a way that coming up with a straightforward, coherent reading of the book as a treatise, or, equivalently, as a \textit{metaphysical theory of logic}, as the book seemingly aims to provide, turns out to be impossible.

This conclusion is established in stages, with the support of the logical calculus (a “sign-language”) which Wittgenstein introduces. This is not as a logical system or a formal mathematical calculus supposedly founded on and mirroring the transcendent, supra-linguistic structure of the world; rather, it consists in a tool-like formal syntax oriented to the elucidation of an order immanent to language. It merely makes clear the logical articulation and the logical integrity of our well-founded relationship to language by providing us with a way to present it to ourselves perspicuously (somewhat like the language-games the later Wittgenstein employs to bring out the order immanent to our language). This foundation consists in nothing less than our conceptual capacities and our logical

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\textsuperscript{25} “\textit{E}very reader must begin life \textit{qua} reader of the \textit{Tractatus} as a standard reader and climb her way up from there to a different way of coming to understand her task as a reader.” In James J. Conant, “Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism,” in Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond, ed. Alice Cray (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I. T. Press, 2007), 49.

Conant, “Mild Mono-Wittgensteinianism,” 62-3: “A reader is led to an appreciation of the significance of the later cluster of remarks only given an inchoate recognition that the remarks in the earlier cluster do not quite make sense (that they pull themselves apart), and this later appreciation, in turn, enables a full recognition that there is no sense to be made of the remarks in the earlier cluster (that they are simply nonsense).”

Thus, Wittgenstein teaches his readers, via the employment of intentional inconsistencies and well-placed ambiguities in his text, how they themselves, on their own powers, may realize not only that logic needs no grounding in a metaphysical theory, but also that the philosopher has no real need of any theoretical treatment of his or her own language: in trying to offer the latter, TLP presents how the attempt itself collapses into nonsense, \textit{immanently}, in practice, “from within,” so to speak.\textsuperscript{24}

This way of interpreting the book rests heavily on 5.4733, according to which, “if a proposition has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a \textit{meaning} to some of its constituents.” In other words, according to TLP, nonsense is generated because the meaning of certain signs is missing, that is, because of a \textit{lack}. Also relevant here is 6.53: “whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.” If we stick to this understanding of nonsense, we ought to conclude that if TLP itself makes no sense, this can only be because certain signs in its sentences lack meaning—something which has been done on purpose, if the resolute interpretation is to be taken seriously on this point.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, it is not because of an \textit{excess} that nonsense is generated; because, for example, certain logical categories do not fit or cannot co-exist in the same proposition—something which, were it (“\textit{per impossible}”) to happen, would immediately make certain propositions wrongly or improperly formulated in relation to their proper “logical syntax” (wrong fit), or, equivalently, would bring in “violations of logical rules” (transgressions of the “bounds of sense”). According to the resolute

\textsuperscript{24} The expression “from within” should be overcome by the end of the book: no internal-external distinction is supposed to survive. We are unsure whether this insight is always fully appreciated; cf. Milos Theodossiou, Review of Peeling Potatoes or Grinding Lenses: Spinoza and Young Wittgenstein Converse on Immanence and Its Logic by Aristides Baltas, in Greek, Deltadion 29 (2012): 135-45 for an analysis of the seemingly irresolute way Aristides Baltas, for example, in his Peeling Potatoes or Grinding Lenses: Spinoza and Young Wittgenstein Converse on Immanence and Its Logic (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), applies the resolute insights in his reading of TLP.

\textsuperscript{25} Equally significant for the resolute interpretation is 3.3, on the “context principle.”

\textsuperscript{26} This is the idea of nonsense as due to a “category mistake.”
interpretation, this way of conceiving nonsensicality presupposes, ad absurdum, that we may, somehow yet without abandoning logic, make out some kind of “meaning” in nonsense—the “wrong” or “inappropriate” one—and from this conclude that a proposition makes no sense because of its malformed articulation or improper construction. This way of conceiving nonsense, however, would allow us to suppose that isolated words appearing in a meaningless sentence are somehow capable of referring to the meaning they have in other, meaningful contexts, and in this way allow us to see that those meanings do not fit here, in this sentence, they cannot be present here, and this impropriety supposedly makes the sentence nonsensical. But this also makes it totally unclear how one sees, without abandoning logic, a conflict of meaning starting from a sentence that makes no sense: how does one see, how does one recognize the relevant meanings, supposedly available to these isolated words in this nonsensical sentence, meanings which do not fit with each other? How does one recognize the meanings to which the isolated words supposedly refer to, if the sentence is plainly nonsense? This recognition can only be a psychological matter: I am simply reminded of meanings because I am familiar with the shape of the signs, with the appearance of the isolated words—but these psychological associations are not a matter of logic. This way of conceiving nonsense goes against Wittgenstein’s own admonition not to risk getting ourselves entangled “in unessential psychological investigations” (4.1121). Furthermore, if one goes down this road, one essentially makes out of sense and nonsense two equally substantial realms sharing a common boundary or limit. In such a case, however, one should be able to speak with sense on both sides of the limit; but this is absurd: sense belongs to one side only, and there is absolutely nothing on the other. Wittgenstein himself makes this point in the book’s Preface: “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).”

Consequently, when trying to account for the book’s nonsensicality via self-refutation or violations of logical rules, previously established interpretations of TLP wrongly ascribe to it a theory of the logic of our language, a theory supposedly impossible to articulate yet on account of which the author refutes himself. For the resolute interpretation, this reading unnecessarily burdens Wittgenstein with a substantial conception of nonsense.\(^{27}\) According to this substantial conception, as far as and as far as logic is concerned, “nonsense” does not imply nonsensicality plain and simple; on the contrary, the substantial conception has to bring in multiple kinds of nonsense, logically differentiated from each other, in order to handle TLP’s nonsensicality: this latter kind of nonsense, logically different from nonsense plain and simple (mere gibberish), supposedly enlightens us, on account of its special nonsensicality, about the ineffable, metaphysical or logical structure of the world, and is necessary to interpret what it means to climb the Tractarian ladder successfully.

Starting from an entirely different conception of nonsense, which does not commit them to seeing rules (violated or not) where there aren’t any, the resolute interpreters conclude that TLP does not introduce any theory of logic. “Logical syntax,” in this context, should not be understood as a system of (explicit or implicit, “effable” or “ineffable”) rules governing language use and determining a priori the bounds of sense, allowing certain combinations of words and forbidding others. By contrast, logical syntax may be a clarification tool or an auxiliary set of sign-use to clarify the sense of our propositions. Its advantages over the vernacular lies in its making it impossible to employ the same linguistic sign in different ways simultaneously. This helps us recognize the logical role of a proposition’s constituents, or its lack of it in a pseudo-proposition. According to this line of thinking, the clarification promoted in TLP via its purposefully nonsensical sentences does not culminate in the recognition of wrongly formulated (logically speaking) propositions, namely those violating “the rules of logical syntax,” thus allowing us to grasp those ineffable truths allegedly “shown” by correctly formulated propositions, and also enabling us to correct the “logical errors” of the metaphysically-oriented philosopher; far from it. On the contrary, the book is concerned to make patent the nonsense we are tempted to produce if we are attracted to the pictures illustrated in TLP, and to enable us to bring out, in our own employment of the Tractarian tool of logical syntax, how these “philosophical propositions” are no different from gibberish (logically speaking).\(^{28}\) Differing, however, from gibberish in the psychological attraction they exercise on our thinking, still they force upon us the illusion that they uncover a “metaphysical depth,” supposedly “showing” what can only be said:

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\(^{28}\) This implies that any incoherence involved does not lie in the nonsensical sentence itself, as an internal conflict or an unmanageable self-undermining excess internal to it; the incoherence lies in “our desires with respect to the sentence” (Conant, “Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use,” 248).
[W]e are drawn into the illusion of occupying a certain sort of perspective. ... From this perspective, we take ourselves to be able to survey the possibilities which undergird how things are with us, holding our necessities in place. From this perspective, we contemplate the laws of logic as they are, as well as the possibility of their being otherwise. We take ourselves to be occupying a perspective from which we can view the laws of logic from sideways on. The only “insight” the work imparts therefore is one about the reader himself: that he is prone to such illusions.  

To combat these illusions, the book should be read the way one tries to solve a riddle.  

In particular, the reader is invited to exercise those same capacities he or she possesses as a language user, the ones he or she employs in ordinary life when, for example, confronted with a novel text. In such daily uses, one does not know in advance what or even whether the novel sentences make sense. They should be made sense of, however. And this “making sense of” is not a Given, a mere following through ready-made procedures of sense-making, but a riddle-solving given to the reader as a task. 

Similarly, in the *Tractatus* the reader is taught a process of clarification via the useful tool of logical syntax, a process which ends with the reader himself or herself recognizing, in his or her own attempts to make sense of the book’s sentences, that the seemingly metaphysical propositions are plainly nonsense. This re-orientates the reader’s attention, from “ineffable truths” to truths concerning oneself, from words and sentences to one’s own relation with these words and sentences. 

[W]e feel our words are attempting to think a logically impossible thought—and that this involves a kind of impossibility of a higher order 

than ordinary impossibility. But Wittgenstein’s teaching is that the problem lies not with the words (we could find a use for them) ... but in our confused relation to the words: in our experiencing ourselves as meaning something definite by them, yet also feeling that what we take ourselves to be meaning with the words make no sense. We are confused about what it is we want to say and we project our confusion onto the linguistic string. 

*TLP* encourages one, then, to undertake a form of therapy, thus contributing to the enhancement of one’s autonomy in opposition to one’s own metaphysical motivations and attractions: metaphysics, in this case, and the transcendence that goes with it, invading language from sideways on like a brute Given guiding the use of our words, are revealed to be a subterfuge, an evasion of responsibility for the meaning of our words, an evasion of finitude or a covering-up of authenticity. 

What is at stake in *TLP*, then, according to this interpretation, is a matter of ethics. In this way, a philosophy of logic supports one’s ethical self-discovery through a freely undertaken act of reading: engaging the reader oneself to distinguish sense from nonsense, by freely exercising one’s own conceptual capacities in making sense of *TLP*, Wittgenstein allows the philosophically troubled reader to lead himself or herself to the ethical reorientation of his or her own conception of language and the world, of philosophy and ultimately of oneself. One teaches oneself, therefore, to “see the world aright” (6.54). 

On account of the resolute interpreters’ emphasis on the reader’s free exercise of his or her own conceptual capacities when making sense of the book’s conception of logic, we suggest that the foundations for a conceptualist kind of reading have been set. To interpret *TLP* resolutely one has to reject the Myth of the Given, in this case the Given as brute sense-making, a blind and utterly passive following through ready-made procedures of sense-making, taken to “invade” language from sideways on, a Given structure guiding and constraining the use of our words. Where precisely might this Given be found in *TLP*, however? To the

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extent that the temptation of the Given involves the way that TLP conceives of sense-making, one’s attention should be focused on how TLP describes the *rule-bound uses* of language. In other words, one should take care to develop a *conceptualist* notion of the structure doing the normatively charged sense-making work, namely “logical syntax.” The rules of logical syntax, on this interpretation, the way that sense-making works, should not be Given; they should be given to the reader—to all language users—as a *task*, as something to do, as a call for action. This non-foundationalist, non-theoretical understanding of the “rules of logical syntax,” according to which the reader—the language-user—participates actively in sense-making and is not merely following rules passively, determines also the way TLP opposes metaphysics. In this rejection of the Given would lie the conceptualist aspect of the book.

In the following section, therefore, we shall try to substantiate this suggestion by further analysis of the conceptualist conception of the Tractarian logical syntax we have in mind. Afterwards, in section 6, this will allow us to face the non-discursivity of the Tractarian showing head-on.

5. A Conceptualist Construal of Logical Syntax

How might one go wrong in one’s understanding of logical syntax in TLP? What kind of non-conceptualism is threatening us here? What might the Given be in this case? The answer is not straightforward: to the extent that the Given has something to do with TLP’s account of sense-making, an account rich in implications and quite detailed in its construction, locating the precise points where the temptation of the Given may arise takes work; to declare simply that it lies in its conception of logic, is too general, whereas to go into the object-name relation or the sign-symbol one, may lose the forest for the trees.

However, the notion of “showing” and the saying/showing distinction prove crucial here: they help us locate where some of the points of pressure lie. The reasoning is a bit complex:

(A) First of all, as described in the previous section, according to standard interpretations, violating the rules of logical syntax “shows” or “conveys” non-conceptual, non-discursive, language-transcendent and ineffable truths that cannot be said.

(B) Now, resolute interpreters reject this option, insisting that nonsense is simply noise (logically speaking): it *says* nothing, it *shows* nothing, either directly or indirectly; it is simply a *lack* of meaning and any impressions to the contrary are produced by psychological associations we ourselves project onto the linguistic signs.

(C) Nonsense, that is, should be understood literally as “sheer lack of sense,”37 instead of an *excess* brought about by conflict between mismatched logical categories or, equivalently, by a transgression of rules, a misapplication or a violation of “the rules of logical syntax.”

(D) Therefore, the rejection of the non-conceptual Given “shown” or “conveyed” by nonsense supposedly produced by “violations of logical syntax” demands that one show that the construal of nonsense as “violation of rules of logical syntax” does not make sense: it rests on a misleading account of nonsensicality.

(E) So how is nonsense *produced*, according to the resolute interpreters? By one’s abstaining from the process of sense-making.

(F) But sense-making, according to TLP, is tantamount to logical syntax being at work, to its rules being followed. Abstaining from it, then, amounts to depart from following its rules.

(G) So it is crucially important for the resolute reader to clarify how logical syntax works, what following its rules means, in such a way that, indeed, violating its rules makes no sense. This is what it takes to reject the Myth of the ineffable, non-conceptual Given in this case.

In other words, one way to establish the credentials for a conceptualist account of TLP is to clarify how logical syntax works, what rule-following here means, in such a way that violating its rules makes no sense. This is what it means to provide a conceptualist reading of logical syntax.

Fortunately, resolute interpreters have already made great strides in how one should proceed in this matter. In a three way debate between the resolute interpreters, Cora Diamond and James Conant, on the one side, and the most consistent defender of the standard, irresolute interpretation,

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P. M. S. Hacker, on the other, provoked by James Conant’s paper, “Two Conceptions of Die Überwindung der Metaphysik: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein,” it was made abundantly clear what a conceptualist construal of logical syntax involves. Perhaps surprisingly, it implies that the comparison of logical syntax to a rule-bound game akin to chess, for example (a well-rehearsed analogy in the secondary literature), should be rejected. We shall elaborate on this in what follows.

Conant on Carnap, TLP and Logical Syntax

Conant’s aims in his paper of 2001 are ultimately two: first, to bring out how the Logical Positivists misunderstood TLP because the Tractarian standpoint on logic and nonsensicality; and second, to the extent that the same misunderstanding characterizes the standard reception of TLP, no real difference exists between the standard and the positivist interpretation of early Wittgenstein’s thought. Conant argues persuasively that if nonsense is taken literally as sheer lack of meaning, then no rational basis is available to assert further that nonsense is produced because of a violation or a transgression of the rules of logical syntax. For one to assert such a thing would imply that one has construed nonsense not merely as lack, but also as a substantial realm of “a sense that is senseless” (cf. Philosophical Investigations §500), the realm of logically misshapen sentences, the improper, the malformed or incoherently articulated ones, which the rules of logical syntax supposedly exclude, keep away or forbid us to construct. According to Conant, the Logical Positivist Rudolph Carnap missed precisely this point. When, for example, Carnap explains why “Caesar is a prime number” is nonsense, he writes: “[It] is meaningless. ‘Prime number’ is a predicate of numbers; it can neither be affirmed nor denied of a person.” One might reasonably wonder how it is possible for Carnap to recognize in this specific instance the predicate “prime number” on the one side, and the name referring to Caesar on the other, and that one is trying to combine the one with the other; Carnap has plainly admitted that the sentence “Caesar is a prime number” is nonsense (“unsinnig” in the original). How can there be structural conflict here?

Carnap, encouraged by his own (mis)understanding of TLP, seems able to grasp some kind of “illogical” structure in the sentence, in virtue of which he is able to contrast the proper application of the predicate to numbers with its (non-)“application” to people. On this basis, he feels confident to conclude that the nonsensicality of the sentence is produced because of its logical incoherence.

For the resolute interpreter, however, this construal of logical incoherence not only is unnecessarily forced into TLP; it also undermines the book by ascribing to it a doctrine of nonsensicality, according to which nonsense is produced by conflict, contradiction or transgression (for example, among the parts of the sentence or because their manner of proper combination is disallowed by “the rules of logical syntax”). This idea of the production of nonsense as if by excess, so to speak, has its source in a dogmatically introduced theory of legitimate and illegitimate combinations of the parts of a sentence. Carnap seems to take logical syntax as a sort of constitution governing a perfectly lawful logical realm and excluding by force any sentence attempting to violate its boundaries.

In this way, according to Conant, nonsense as sheer lack of sense, is transformed into “substantial” nonsense. Precisely at this point, TLP differs from Carnap’s and the Logical Positivists’ projects. TLP, if read resolutely, lies far apart from any theory of logic akin to Carnap’s: Wittgenstein’s practice aims to liberate the philosopher from metaphysical theory by calling on one to exercise one’s own powers, autonomously, and not to subscribe to the heteronomously imposed principles of some (whether effable or ineffable) “logical syntax.” Thinking this through leads Conant to the conclusion that Carnap has reached the conception of nonsense introduced, decades later, by standard TLP interpretation.

Hacker’s Reply to Conant

P. M. S. Hacker replied to Conant’s charges in his paper, “Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians.” Aiming to put into doubt Conant’s interpretation of both Carnap’s thought and the standard TLP interpretation as a whole, Hacker sticks to his guns and presents his own take on Carnap and Tractarian nonsense. Hacker insists that not only is TLP offering a metaphysical theory of how propositions represent

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34 We remind the reader that “conceptualism” is a term we have introduced in this debate and not one to be found in resolute or irresolute interpretations (at least so far, and to our knowledge). We have explained what we mean by the term in section 3: the rejection of the Myth of the non-conceptual, ineffable Given.


36 See Conant, “Two Conceptions of Die Überwindung der Metaphysik,” 17 for an example of the convergence between Carnap’s reading of TLP and standard TLP interpretation in the case of 4.003.
("picture") the world; in addition, it is precisely this ultimately self-refuting theory, the "picture theory of representation," which separates sense from nonsense. However, Hacker explains that this theory does not conceive of nonsense as a conflict produced by the combination of the sentence's "intelligible ingredients" or of the "meanings of the constituent expressions" but as a departure from proper ways of using linguistic signs (words). These proper ways of going on with signs constitute "logical syntax," the totality of the a priori formal rules of language. This "logical syntax" excludes a priori certain ways of using words as illegitimate and transgressive: both metaphysics, as well as the sentences of TLP, violate these syntactical strictures, the former involuntarily, the latter on purpose.

Consequently, Hacker's reading of TLP offers us a theory which can point out which uses of language are excluded a priori from the realm of sense. In this context, it is quite evident that meaningful sentences and logical laws—the latter, according to TLP, belonging to the Tractarian "tautologies" (6.1, 6.1201)—differ radically from pseudo-propositions, namely metaphysical nonsense and the nonsensical sentences of TLP, since nonsense indeed neither says nor shows anything. Why not? Because, according to Hacker, the "picture theory of representation" excludes such a thing:

Hence the sentence is nonsense, and the expressions in it do not stand for anything, i.e., do not stand for their customary meanings—since the sentence is not a picture of a possible state of affairs. ... [A] pseudo-proposition represents nothing.

It is in this sense that Hacker agrees with Conant on nonsense: nonsense is sheer lack of meaning, plain nonsense—but this is because it does not "represent."

Hacker, consequently, disagrees with Conant on showing. The sentences of TLP, even if plainly nonsensical, nevertheless do manage to "illuminate" Wittgenstein's readers by referring them to meaningful sentences. It is those latter propositions that properly show the transcendent nature of reality, not the nonsensical sentences themselves. Specifically, Hacker attempts to explain this sort of referral in analogy with Escher's drawings which, while presenting to the viewer impossible geometrical relationships in spatial geometry, and in this way those two-dimensional drawings violate the rules of three-dimensional geometry (its "logical syntax," so to speak), still they do manage to implicitly illuminate and refer the viewer to proper three-dimensional logic, without actually showing anything themselves. Similarly, the sentences of TLP, while they picture no possible state of affairs—and thus are nonsensical—, they do manage to illuminate us indirectly, by referring us to meaningful sentences, those that do picture properly state of affairs, and thus do show directly the ineffable logic of the world. The analogy is complete: the

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41 Famously, the construal of logical laws as tautologies is a radical technical novelty of TLP. See Joelle Proust, "Formal Logic as Transcendental in Wittgenstein and Carnap," *Nouss* 21 (1987): 501-20 and Burton Dreben and Juliet Floyd, "Tautology: How Not to Use a Word," *Synthese* 87 (1991): 23-49. As Russell puts it in 1918, explicitly under the influence of Wittgenstein, "Everything that is a proposition of logic has got to be in some sense or other like a tautology" (quoted in Burton Dreben and Juliet Floyd, "Tautology: How Not to Use a Word," 30.) However, it is often neglected that TLP considers that for some purposes contradictions serve equally with tautologies as logical propositions (6.1202). Young Wittgenstein himself writes to Russell in 1913: "a logical proposition is one of the special cases of which are either tautologous ... or 'self-contradictory' (as I shall call it)" (quoted in Dreben and Floyd, "Tautology: How Not to Use a Word," 32).
42 Hacker, "Wittgenstein, Carnap," 17, second emphasis ours.
43 See Hacker, "Wittgenstein, Carnap," 9 and 22. This specific analogy can also be found in Roger M. White, "Throwing the Baby Out with the Ladder: On 'Therapeutic' Readings of Wittgenstein's Tractatus," in *Beyond the Tractatus Wars. The New Wittgenstein Debate*, ed. Rupert Read and Matthew A. Lavery (New York: Routledge, 2011), 42 ("What we have is a crossing of two different, incompatible, ways of talking, in much the same way as in an Escher print we have the crossing of two incompatible techniques of visual representation") and in Denis McManus, *The Enchantment of Words: Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logic-Philosophical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137-8 ("What we come to see is a quite determinate structure or, perhaps better, a structure which is overdetermined in certain specific ways, as one might say that some of Escher's drawings are; we come to see the multiple foundations of that 'structure', the multiple sources of sense upon which it draws and which provide it with its characteristic and specific pseudo-logic"). It is important to note that all such analogies rest on the idea of nonsense as a sort of internal conflict, presupposing a certain kind of seeing mysteriously providing access to nonsense's "pseudo-logic," as McManus puts it. Evidently, this is not nonsense as sheer lack of sense.
sentences of TLP are taken to work in analogy to the "geometrically impossible" Escher drawings, which point to the proper, three-dimensional geometry indirectly, by violating or transgressing it. Nonsense is indeed sheer nonsense; but, plainly, according to Hacker, some nonsense may actually do plenty of logical work.

Diamond's Intervention

Cora Diamond, in her paper "Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein's Tractatus," contributed to the Conant-Hacker debate by accepting Hacker's emphasis on rules as ways of going on with signs, thus by-passing the issue of "substantial" nonsense that was Conant's own worry. "What is at issue in the debate about logical syntax in the Tractatus," she writes, "is whether logical syntax fixes rules for the use of a sign as its correct use." And she goes on to explain:

According to Hacker, Wittgenstein held in the Tractatus that we produce nonsensical pseudo-propositions when we use signs in ways which contravene the rules of logical syntax for the signs. The resulting pseudo-propositions are nonsensical because they use signs in ways which are excluded by the rules. *The signs thus used do not indeed have their usual meaning, or any other meaning; but the source of the nonsensicality of the would-be propositions in which they occur is the use of signs in contravention of the rules.* ... [If] logical syntax fixes rules for the use of a sign as its correct use, then a sufficient condition for a sign's being used incorrectly, a sufficient condition for the use to be a proscribed use, is that the sign is not, in some combination, being used in accordance with those rules. But then one may reasonably wonder whether departing from some set of rules for the use of a sign can ever be a sufficient condition for the nonsensicality of the would-be proposition of which the sign, so used, is part.

Diamond focuses her attention on Hacker's idea, according to which, the syntactical rules of logical syntax, in virtue of the logical theory they embody, are automatically capable of excluding certain unfamiliar uses of language as nonsense. What troubles Diamond about Hacker's position is that he considers it possible for one to recognize nonsensicality—the departure from established syntactical rules—merely by comparing the use of a sign with the available rules. If the available rules do not cover the use, indeterminacy ensues; does that make the use automatically illegitimate? Diamond answers, quite reasonably, that the use may be just an unfamiliar or a novel use of the sign, a *novelty:* a use not anticipated by the established rules, yet a perfectly meaningful one.47

Boldly put, Diamond is really pointing out that the *rules of language should not be conceived in analogy to the rules of a game such as chess.* 48 Unlike chess, language rules are not given *a priori,* simply to be applied passively by us. Diamond ends up charging Hacker with dogmatic preconceptions about sense-making; he has simply decided in advance to read TLP metaphysically, projecting onto it a reading of logical syntax which makes the reader's active participation in the work irrelevant. Thus excluding the reader from the work, an a priori logical theory takes the reader's place, setting the "bounds of sense" and anticipating in advance all legitimate uses—in precisely the way rules work in a game such as chess. Nonsense, on this interpretation, is taken to be a departure from *what the theory dictates,* and not something *we ourselves,* intentionally or not, have abstained from doing. This standpoint allows Hacker to imagine that he recognizes in nonsensical sentences "violations of the rules of logical syntax"—thus making it possible to introduce in his reading of TLP the kind of nonsense that does "illuminating" work. Conant proves right, therefore, when he implies that this "illuminating nonsense" presupposes a sideways on view on language, a place from where one imagines that the anticipatory surveyability of legitimate and illegitimate uses of language is possible. This makes us prey to a given theory that sets in advance boundaries to our uses of language. Diamond, however, shows in detail that nowhere in TLP does Wittgenstein explicitly or implicitly deny that a divergent use may actually constitute, for example, a novelty. This makes the standard interpretation, according to Diamond, arbitrary and dogmatic.49

In our terms, Diamond's intervention allows us to conclude that *logical syntax and its rules should not be taken as Given:* a conceptualist reading of logical syntax is what Diamond is trying to set out. Rejecting a

45 Diamond, "Logical Syntax," 78, our emphasis.
46 Diamond, "Logical Syntax," 82, our emphasis.
47 Diamond, "Logical Syntax," 83-4. On page 87 Diamond gives as an example of such "divergent" uses in the way refugees, who do not speak proper English and thus "violate" English grammar, still make perfect sense to English speakers. In Greece this is a quite common phenomenon, perhaps even ordinary.
49 Diamond, "Logical Syntax," 86.
metaphysical reading of TLP's logical syntax, the reader recognizes that in TLP language use may have many more uses than the two officially acknowledged by the standard interpretation, namely one according to logical syntax and one violating it.

Consequently, the Givenness of a logical syntax which anticipates sense and nonsense makes it very difficult for one to understand the possibility of new logical laws. A theory of meaning should not be taken to anticipate all creative uses of language; using linguistic signs is not like playing chess, after all. Yet standard interpretations consider it legitimate to assume that Wittgenstein in TLP offers a theory of meaning which immediately sets up limits to the creativity of the subject: once set up, supposedly this theory may be used also to determine nonsense, simply because a use diverges from established uses according to the theory. However, it is unclear how this may be carried through in practice: it is up to us to come up with new logical laws (novel rules governing novel uses of signs) at any time, thus making it possible to employ signs in ways we had never imagined before. Standard interpretations try to avoid this possibility by projecting an a priori theory of sense onto TLP, anticipating all uses in advance. Novel uses are possible, but only if they accord with what the theory has already dictated. This cannot satisfy, however. As Diamond puts it:

That Hacker takes the rules of logical syntax to play a role within language comparable to the role of those constitutive rules of chess which define valid moves, i.e., that the analogy he wants is between a game like chess and language ... is, I think, plain in his essay. [But] even on Hacker's view of the analogy, there is an important difference between the case of the rules of a game and the case of the rules of logical syntax, since on Hacker's account of logical syntax, there appears to be room for the possibility of providing new rules of logical syntax, room (that is) for the stipulation of further uses of words which already have an established use. But the point would then be that the game is thereby in a sense reconstituted with the newly stipulated rules; the set of rules still excludes (does not allow as valid moves within the language) any uses of any words not in accordance with those rules. The fact that Hacker's analogy does leave room for some modification of language by newly stipulated rules does not alter the fact that the analogy is meant to make clear that uses of a word not in accordance with the established rules of logical syntax of the language are thereby identifiable as illegitimate. The analogy, thus understood, fits closely with Hacker's account of how rules of logical syntax determine the "bounds of sense."50

Furthermore, the Givenness of logical syntax encourages us to think of nonsense as akin to logical laws. Let us say that a novel use of language is introduced. All such uses, according to TLP, are to be thought of as new rules governing the use of signs, or, equivalently, as new "logical laws." As mentioned above in passing, logical laws according to TLP are tautologies; here, a tautology not imagined previously. Being a tautology, it says nothing. Yet, on the standard interpretation, nonsense also says nothing: it does not "represent," as Hacker puts it. To quote again his own words: "the sentence is nonsense, and the expressions in it do not stand for anything, i.e., do not stand for their customary meanings—since the sentence is not a picture of a possible state of affairs. ... [A] pseudo-proposition represents nothing."51 Hacker here claims that nonsense is nonsense because it does not "represent" ("the sentence is not a picture of a possible state of affairs"). However, even by his own lights, this formulation holds properly for tautologies (or contradictions), not for nonsense: by definition, the "picture theory of representation" applies only to meaningful sentences and logical propositions. Just because a sentence does not "represent" in the customary way ("the expressions in it do not stand for anything, i.e., do not stand for their customary meanings") does not make it immediately nonsensical; it may simply be a tautology we had not thought of before, or even an unfamiliar way to depict a state of affairs (an unfamiliar "method of projection," in TLP's terminology). Why stick to customary ways?

The Givenness of Logical Syntax?

Having gone through the recent debates in the secondary literature over the interpretation of logical syntax, we have arrived at a first conclusion in our investigation on non-discursivity: logical syntax and its rules admit of a conceptualist reading if language use is not conceived in analogy to playing a game such as chess. This excludes nonsense from any kind of non-discursive showing, direct or indirect, even vaguely similar to the showing attributed by TLP to propositions. In this way, we believe we have taken care of one issue where Givenness may be thought to arise in TLP, namely the case of nonsensical sentences. However, there is still work to be done, since, as we have already made clear, the temptation of non-discursive Givenness may also arise in the case of the kind of showing belonging to propositions (meaningful sentences) and logical laws. We shall examine this case in the following section. We shall find that

50 Diamond, "Logical Syntax," 86, all emphases are ours.

51 Hacker, "Wittgenstein, Carnap," 17, emphasis in the original.
although the showing of propositions may be handled in conceptual q
terms, the showing of logical propositions may not be accommodated in
similar terms.

6. Meaningful Sentences and Logical Propositions in TLP

It is of great interest to note that one’s commitment to the Resolute
Interpretation, according to which no “ineffable remainder” is acknowledged
by Wittgenstein in TLP, does not imply that one should reject the notion of
showing altogether. This should not surprise us; after all, TLP introduces
the notion along with other equally controversial terms, and, at least prima
facie, there is nothing in its specific way of introduction that makes it hang
on the resolute/irresolute exegetical debate: “showing” is just another term
for the reader to go through and “overcome” by the end of the book.

However, it is particularly easy to see why the notion of “showing”
may be taken to create trouble for the Resolute Interpretation. Having
rejected all associations of ineffability and unsayability, the resolute
interpreters find themselves obliged to explain (or explain away)
Wittgenstein’s apparent commitment to “things that cannot be said,” to
“Unaussprechliches” and “things that manifest themselves” (6.522). This
would seem to be an impossible task; it appears, almost by definition, that
“showing” cannot be given a resolute interpretation. But, as we have
intimated in the beginning of our paper, closer inspection of the matter
shows that Wittgenstein in TLP is not actually committed to ineffability,
but to non-discursivity. “What can be shown cannot be said” (4.1212),
says. As we explained in section 4, Wittgenstein does not actually imply in
TLP that showing straightforwardly entails mysticism, ineffability and
inexpressibility, in the sense of metaphysical truths accessible only via
one’s failure to put them in words, via the “violation of the rules of logical
syntax” and therefore the production of a special kind of nonsense. As we
shall explain in this section, neither does he write that propositions
perform the rather mysterious feat of “making manifest” ineffable
contents, denizens of a realm to which language has no access. On the
contrary, according to what Wittgenstein actually writes in TLP, whatever
is shown or displayed (the “logical form of reality” (4.121), for example,
or “the pictorial form” (2.172), expressions which need interpretation, not
philosophical defense as such) inhabits the realm of language and does
not abandon logic: “What signs fail to express, their application shows.
What signs slur over, their application says clearly” (3.262). Although
Wittgenstein’s sentences need interpretation (including, of course, the ones
we just quoted), they certainly do not force us to locate showing beyond
language, but only beyond discursivity (or “propositionality”)—yet, the
kind of “beyond” here is precisely at issue.

Conant and Diamond suggest some ways in which this exegetical task
might be pursued:

Resolute readers are not obliged to throw away [non-discursive showing]
while throwing away the idea of [ineffable showing] as part of a Tractatus
theory involving our supposed access to a special realm, the denizens of
which are supposed to be officially unthinkable, but somehow graspable
(in a way that doesn’t count officially as thinkable) when “shown”. All a
resolute reading commits one to here is: (1) drawing the distinction in such
a way that it applies only to sinvoll and simlose Sätze and never to
unsimlig propositional signs; and (2) drawing it in such a way that showing
ceases to require an irresolute waffle between wanting to claim that the
content of that which is shown cannot be said (because that’s what
Wittgenstein says) and wanting to hint at what the content in question is (in
ways that, in effect, turn it into a kind of quasi-sayable quasi-content). ...
This still leaves it open to different resolute readers to develop different
understandings of how showing works.

Consequently, a resolute understanding of showing involves
demonstrating both (a) “how showing ceases to require an irresolute
waffle between wanting to claim that the content of that which is shown
cannot be said and wanting to hint at what the content in question is,” and
(b) “drawing the distinction in such a way that it applies only to sinvoll
and simlose Sätze and never to unsimlig propositional signs.” In the
previous section, we explained how nonsense should not be taken to point
to ineffable and supra-linguistic truths, on pain of falling prey to the Myth

53 The Tractatus shows what it shows (i.e. what it is to make sense) by letting
language show itself, through das Klarwenden von Sätzen,” James J. Conant, “The
Method of the Tractatus,” in From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives in Early
54 Conant and Diamond, “On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely,” 66. Instead of the
inserted “ineffable”/“non-discursive” terms, Conant and Diamond write “showing”
in scare quotes and italics respectively. We believe they draw essentially the same
distinction.

52 As Conant and Diamond have noted: “One reason why people who accept a
standard reading have generally taken resolute readers to reject altogether the very
idea of showing is that they assume that the only possible understanding of it takes
it to be a matter of revealing an ineffable content” (“On Reading the Tractatus
Resolutely,” 65).
of the Given. This takes care of (a). In this section, we continue our investigation into showing as non-discursivity in the case of (b) ("sinnvoll and sinnlose Sätze") in order to test whether a fully conceptualist understanding of TLP is possible on this matter. However, if the conclusions we are going to reach in this section are valid, a fully conceptualist grasping of Tractarian non-discursivity may not be feasible.

**Meaningful sentences**

Let us first review in brief TLP's threefold distinction, in relation to showing, figuring centrally in the case of meaningful sentences. This will enable us to clarify how one might set up a conceptualist reading of "showing" in this case.

**The saying/showing distinction**

A central feature of TLP is that a meaningful sentence, namely one which bears on the way the world is, on how things stand, not only says something but also shows what it says (this double function of meaningful sentences in TLP is well-known, if not notorious): "A proposition shows how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand" (4.022).

**The form/content distinction**

What a meaningful proposition shows is non-propositional: it shows what constitutes it as a sentence with sense—namely, its "logical form," which, according to TLP should be distinguished from its content (4.12). Form is what makes a sentence bear on the world, gives it sense; to that extent, form cannot be the content of a sentence: it is always what makes a sentence meaningful (4.121).56

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55 The distinctions that follow should be understood primarily as notional distinctions, not substantial ones. Whether we have the right to take them as substantial ones is what is at issue. However, in this area even notional distinctions may be disallowed, since resolution implies (correctly) that such "notional" distinctions ultimately make no sense.

56 A very attractive elaboration of this point, taking "form" as the precondition or condition of meaning, and setting up a resolute reading of the entire TLP on this basis, may be found in Eli Friedlander's *Signs of Sense: Reading Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

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**The sign/employment distinction**

Furthermore, what is shown, yet, being non-propositional, cannot be said, namely logical form, may be traced to the use of the proposition. We might put this point as follows: whatever a meaningful sentence shows, it shows it immanently57 in the use in which its signs are put, provided the use of the sentence makes sense: "In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense" (3.326); "A sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logicosyntactical employment" (3.327); "What signs fail to express, their application shows. What signs slur over, their application says clearly" (3.262).

Evidently, the key notions for a conceptualist reading of the "showing" appropriate to meaningful sentences, once the option of non-discursivity has been acknowledged, are "logicosyntactical employment" (3.327), "use with sense" (3.326) and "application" (3.262). Coordinating the use of "showing" in accordance with these terms makes it possible for a resolute interpreter to insist on taking showing to be a performance entirely immanent to language. According to this reading, what is shown by a meaningful sentence is shown in the meaningful use one reserves for it; in the conceptual shape (the "logical form") of what one does with it. What is shown, what is exhibited, in other words, is practical knowledge of its use, mastery of using it correctly, "with sense." This emphasis on a kind of know-how extinguishes one's temptation to appeal to the Myth of the Given in order to explain what is shown.

It is quite obvious that this line of thinking is perfectly suited to the needs of a conceptualist reading such as the one we are after: what is

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57 For a reading of TLP that builds on this point (a so-called "Radical Immanentist" reading by its author, drawing far-reaching connections to Spinoza, Marx, Heidegger, McDowell, Kuhn, Lacan, Althusser and others), see Aristides Baltas, *Peeling Potatoes or Grinding Lenses*. For some reservations, concerning mostly its self-avowed resolute credentials, see my review of the book in Theodossiou, Review of *Peeling Potatoes or Grinding Lenses*.

shown is nothing Given; it consists in a know-how, a non-propositional knowledge, yet conceptually shaped, since it involves no supra-linguistic Given. Showing happens in language, immanently, in the sense that every meaningful sentence embodies or reflects the actualization of conceptual capacities in the form of practical knowledge of its place in the logical space of inferences and so on.

The Propositions of Logic

As explained in section 4, the rule-bound uses of language may be brought out and made clear via the use of a formal calculus, a “sign-language”—a logical syntax. The normatively shaped, sense-making work, is found in the use of meaningful sentences. Meaningful sentences and their rule-bound use are “internally connected,” we might say; and logical syntax helps us see these connections. However, the rule-bound uses of language have an additional aspect as well: not only do they embody a structure of inferences and patterns of rule-bound relationships among themselves; the structure itself is not arbitrary, its rules are not stipulated arbitrarily. On the contrary, the structure is lawful: these laws are precisely what we (and TLP, cf. 6.123 and 6.3) call logic: “If we know the logical syntax of any sign-language, then we have already been given all the propositions of logic” (6.124).

We present TLP’s standpoint on logical propositions by applying the threefold distinction we presented in 5.1 to their specific case and noting the differences.

The saying/showing distinction

In Wittgenstein’s “sign-language,” the propositions of logic are tautologies” (6.1): they do not say anything (6.11), in the sense that they have no bearing on how the world is (“It is raining or it is not raining” does not say anything about how things stand). Nevertheless, being propositions, they show something. They show that they say nothing: “Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing” (4.461).

The form/content distinction

Tautologies, being contentless, saying nothing, yet nevertheless showing (that they say nothing), may be taken to be pure form. By this we mean that, according to TLP, logical laws are purely formal: “All theories that make a proposition of logic appear to have content are false” (6.111). However, a positive spin can be put on this: being purely formal, characterized by pure formality, the propositions of logic may be taken to show their own non-propositional standing in the world: similar to the contentful, yet non-propositional (logical) forms shown by meaningful sentences, “[t]he fact that the propositions of logic are tautologies shows the formal—logical—properties of language and the world” (6.12). It is noteworthy that, having said that, Wittgenstein immediately proceeds to demonstrate the kind of non-propositional standing he attributes to the propositions of logic: not the “ineffable,” transcendent kind, but simply the kind of immanent use their signs have. “The fact that a tautology is yielded by this particular way of connecting its constituents,” he writes, “characterizes the logic of its constituents. If propositions are to yield a tautology when they are connected in a certain way, they must have certain structural properties. So their yielding a tautology when combined in this way shows that they possess these structural properties” (6.12).

The sign/employment distinction

Since, according to TLP, what a meaningful sentence shows, namely its logical form, can be traced to its logical role, to its “use with sense,” one might be forgiven for expecting that the same will hold for the tautologies in which the propositions of logic consist. That is, one may expect that TLP locates the logical form of the logical laws thoroughly in their immanent use. TLP, however, explicitly denies this: the “use” characteristic of laws has no bearing on the world, on how things stand; the use of meaningful sentences, by contrast, does. Logical laws are tied to the “logical skeleton” of the world, to its formal features, and in that sense they take the rule-bound use of language, the use of meaningful sentences, for granted: “The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it. They have no 'subject-matter'. They presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense; and that is their connection with the world” (6.124). We might be tempted to suppose that laws, in contrast to the immanent use of meaningful sentences, have something of the transcendent.

It is clear that something about the world must be indicated by the fact that certain combinations of symbols—whose essence involves the possession of a determinate character—are tautologies. This contains the decisive point. We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and that some things are not. In logic it is only the latter that express:
but that means that logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself. (6.124)

On account of this, in contrast to the use (Gebrauch) of meaningful sentences, TLP specifies the “immanent use” of logical laws or the logically guided employment of signs (3.262) with the term “application” (Anwendung):

5.552 Logic is prior to every experience—that something is so.

5.5521 And if this were not so, how could we apply logic?

5.557 The application of logic decides what elementary propositions there are.

What belongs to its application, logic cannot anticipate.

It is clear that logic must not clash with its application. But logic has to be in contact with its application. Therefore logic and its application must not overlap.

The passage numbered 5.557 seems to be especially troubling for anyone interested in a conceptualist reading of “showing.” It seems to be raising the specter of metaphysical transcendence at precisely the point where logic touches on the world: on pain of the Myth of the Given, this cannot be the whole story. Yet, TLP explicitly says that logic is “prior” to its application; in other words, it is “prior” to the actual use of meaningful sentences. It can be applied to that use, it guides it, if that is the way we want to put it. But there is no overlap with it. The normatively shaped application of logic apparently carries some kind of excessive Givenness over the immanent use of language.

**Hitting a Snag**

For one to take these first impressions seriously entails questioning the grounds for a fully conceptualist meaning of “showing”; that is, it raises questions about how the logical forms of tautologies exhaust themselves immanently in the case of the propositions of logic. Being tautologies, these propositions show (that they say nothing) and have a logical form. Being propositions, they ought to show their form immanently, in the “use” they have in language. Yet they have application, not just a “immanent use”: they presuppose rule-bound uses of language in order to shape them up, so to speak, logically. Precisely for this reason, they simply cannot exhaust themselves immanently in the actual use of language. But where else might a resolutely oriented reader look to trace out the structure of logic?

The temptation at this point to diagnose some kind of metaphysical transcendence, an “ineffable remainder” in TLP, grows quite strong. To put it roughly: were the non-propositional “showing” to transcend discursivity, namely actual language-use, it would transcend the actualization of our conceptual and logical capacities. The ensuing Givenness of logic would infect our logical standing in the world; following logic would be a kind of “unfreedom.” Non-propositionality would turn into non-conceptuality, in the sense that the showing appropriate to logical laws would refer us to a brute Given invading language from sideways on, to guide us in the normatively shaped use of our words. We might say: “If we know the logical syntax of any sign-language, then we have already been Given all the propositions of logic” (6.124).

It seems that the Myth of the Given confronts us head on at the point where the guiding role of rule-following takes shape in TLP. If TLP indeed falls prey to the Myth of the Given at this point, then it places concepts on the one side (the normatively shaped, rule-bound language use) and an (“intellectual,” non-sensible) intuition (Anschauung) on the other, in virtue of which one grasps non-conceptually, non-reditually, the guiding thrust of rule-application, of rule-following. TLP would support the view, according to which, as Conant has put it already in 2001 (though in a different context), “the names which occur in a proposition, on the one hand, and ‘the logical form’ of that proposition, on the other, make (at least notionally) separable contributions to the meaning of the proposition”; 59 one side contributing immanently, the other transcendentally. This would simply destroy the chances for a fully conceptualist reading of TLP’s understanding of showing. Non-propositionality and non-discursivity would collapse into non-conceptuality and ineffability.

To present the issue in no uncertain terms: can a resolute reading of TLP avoid the Myth of the Given at the point where the manner of the exercise of the normative force of logical laws on language use comes into question? This line of questioning may be summed up as follows:

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59 Quoted in Kremer, “Mathematics and Meaning,” 279.
(a) the propositions of logic are tautologies
(b) tautologies are contentless yet have logical form, which cannot be
discursively articulated but can be shown
(c) what is shown by a proposition can be traced to its logical role (the
place it occupies in the logical space), to its “use with sense”; but
(d) logical propositions do not have a “use with sense” (they do not
occupy a place in the logical space like meaningful sentences do);
they have application (they are the scaffolding of the logical space)
(e) So they do not show “immanently”; logic and its application make
contact but they do not overlap.
(f) What kind of showing do they do, then?

Some ways out and why they fail

In the secondary literature, aspects of the above line of questioning
have been reached via a different route. Specifically, similar questions (on
how tautologies show) have been raised in connection with the
differentiation of tautologies and nonsense. TLP characterizes the former
as “lacking sense” (simuls, 4.461), the latter as “plain nonsense” (einfach
unsinnig, Preface); the former are pure form, the latter have neither
(logical) form nor content. Both are contentless (they say nothing). But if
both say nothing, why are they not equally nonsensical?

Confronted with this question, and having rejected all theoretically
grounded answers (for example, the “picture theory of meaning” or
“bipolarity”), resolute interpreters build on the “practical understanding”
interpretation of “showing” (see 6.1 above) and explain how tautologies,
contrary to nonsense, have a useful practical role to play in the
organization of language use. Tautologies may be understood to have an
auxiliary function in language, akin to definitions, mathematical equations
or even scientific laws: none bear directly on the world, on how things
stand, yet have a guiding role to play in the meaningful
sentences which do take a stand on how the world is.60 In this indirect
way, tautologies have a “showing” function, perhaps the way that rulers or
color-charts have a function in helping one to come up with meaningful
sentences about the world (“This wall is 3m high,” “this wall is painted
white”), though they themselves say nothing about how things actually
stand.

This line of thinking leads resolute interpreters to a rather neat and
homogeneous solution concerning what “showing” means in TLP: whether
they bear on reality or not, all propositions show their logical form
immanently, in the way they are “used with sense,” namely in the practical
mastery of the use of the sentence or the word at issue. As explained in
section 6.1, this way allows us to avoid Givenness in the non-discursivity
characteristic of the propositions of logic. Givenness, in this case, would
appear in one’s taking the “notional”61 separation of meaning and logical
form as a substantial separation, each making absolutely independent
contributions to sense-making (a gap between concept and intuition.)

Therefore, one might insist that a satisfying answer along resolute lines
may be at hand even in the case of logical propositions, provided we do
give in to the temptation to see showing as anything but practical
know-how: logical propositions show in being applied to language-use—and
only there. There is no other “place” to look for what logic shows—it
exhausts itself in being applied to language. Indeed, TLP itself might seem
to make this kind of move available, since it suggests that logical syntax,
which embodies logical propositions (6.124), becomes immediately
available (though not immediately open to view, 4.002) once language-use
(how signs signify, which is shown, and thus a practical matter) is solidly
in place: “The rules of logical syntax must go without saying, once we
know how each individual sign signifies” (3.334).

However, it seems to us that this way of solving the problem of
showing still leaves open the question of logic’s “application”: is practical
mastery of the use of a sentence or a word all that logic’s “application” in
TLP consists in? If so, then how is one to take logic’s priority to its
application? Why would Wittgenstein emphasize that “logic must not
clash with its application” (this would be superfluous, if logic is taken to be
at work only in its application) and what does it mean to say that logic
and its application “must not overlap” (5.557)? One cannot paper over

60 See the references in note 58. “If a proposition is shown by a logical calculation
to be a truth-functional tautology, the tautology may be kept, as being the record of
the calculation, and can then also come in handy in making inferences,” Cora
Diamond, “Wittgenstein and What Can Only Be True,” 33. She also talks of
tautologies as “aids to representation,” “apparatus propositions,” “preparatory
propositions” or “accommodatory propositions.” On page 14, she also writes of
“the idea of a kind of logical ‘before’, where what belongs to grammar comes
‘before’ the application of language.”

61 With the qualifications elaborated in note 55.
such differences on this point. There is some uncertainty left concerning the way that logic applies to language use: “logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself” (6.124). Formulations such as these seem to forcefully imply that logical propositions do not exhaust themselves in their application, they do not show immanently, but somehow stand apart from language use, guiding it from afar, so to speak, instead of inhabiting it immanently, in the flesh. It is precisely this uncertainty over logic's standing in the world that tempers us to diagnose the Myth of the Given being at work in Wittgenstein’s thought.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated the issue of non-discursivity in Wittgenstein’s TLP. This issue becomes somewhat urgent once one realizes that even a resolute understanding of TLP may not exclude the mythical Givenness characteristic of supra-discursive conceptions of “showing” (sections 3 and 4). Such doubts were allayed in the course of our investigation in the case of nonsense (section 5) and meaningful sentences (section 6.1); but they came back with a vengeance in the case of logical propositions (section 6.2). At that point, the suspicion that TLP's notion of “showing” falls prey to the Myth of the Given, on account of logic’s Given “transcendence” over its application, became difficult to put aside.

There is a way, however, to put a positive spin on the state of aporia we have found ourselves in. We may reformulate the point of the previous section as follows: when TLP assumes that logical propositions are not only a matter of practical mastery but also (in some unspecified sense) stand apart from language use, in order to apply to it and guide it, without overlapping with it in any way, this assumption may simply be TLP's own way of acknowledging that logical propositions do not display the variability characteristic of ordinary, linguistic ("empirical") phenomena. Phenomena may surprise us, logic cannot; not because logic is Given, but because logic does not reduce to its application, to language use. Therefore, in talking of logic's application as a "non-overlap" with logic itself, TLP may be simply trying to draw the reader's attention to the insight that logic is irreducible to its "empirical" application. This would be a harmless way to defend a robust "transcendence" of logical rules: their "transcendence" would be an indication of their "dignity," of their guiding role, their irreducibility to variable language use—in brief, of their normativity.

Nevertheless, it seems to us that Wittgenstein in TLP does not yet know how to handle successfully this "transcendence" of the rules. Forbidding logic almost by force to overlap with its application; insisting that it should not come into conflict with it (although no reasoning has been actually given to exclude this possibility); these formulations infect Wittgenstein’s book with metaphysical connotations difficult to hide entirely under the resolute carpet. According to TLP, even on a resolute interpretation, the self-constitution (or self-identity) of a logical proposition does not involve an essential reference to its application: the logical proposition is allowed to stand apart from its application, to not overlap with it, in such a way that no activity of the subject is involved ("logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself")—6.124). This is enough to make a conceptualist reading of TLP and a conceptualist notion of "showing" rather unfeasible.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the non-conceptualist gap we have located in TLP, through which the Given may supposedly be glimpsed, concerns logic's manner of application to the world. If such a gap indeed exists in TLP, then language-use is conceived as a "medium" through which logic may be glimpsed as precisely Given. It is well-known that the later Wittgenstein will spend a lot of his philosophical energy in efforts to "repair" exactly this point. Indeed, a formulation he provides, in order to describe one of his philosophical targets in Philosophical Investigations, captures quite accurately the non-conceptualist conception of logic we have unearthed in TLP:

The strict and clear rules of the logical structure of propositions appear to us as something in the background—hidden in the medium of the
understanding. I already see them (even though through a medium): for I understand the propositional sign, I use it to say something. (§102)

Both in *Philosophical Investigations* and elsewhere, Wittgenstein will devote a significant part of his later work to restore full immanence to logic: even logic’s application (the way a rule is applied) will shed all connotations of metaphysical transcendence, by being understood as “as an aspect rather than a precondition of our practices.” This will allay any remaining doubts about the given normativity and the priority characteristic of rules, without appealing to their Givenness in the form of “railways into infinity” or “super-mechanisms” untouchable by how things stand in the world. This will also abolish any need to bring in the independent contribution of an (intellectual, non-sensible) intuition (see *Philosophical Investigations* §186) supposedly capable of guiding us in how a rule determines its application. A fully conceptualist reading of the rules’ application, therefore, may be found in the work of the late Wittgenstein. To show this, however, would take us too far from the concerns of this paper.

In closing, we should note that the failure of a fully conceptualist reading of *TLP* should not be taken to imply the undermining of resolute interpretations in general. The uncovering of metaphysical bias in *TLP* is nothing new; neither does it go against resolution. Resolution does not attempt to provide an entirely non-metaphysical interpretation of *TLP*; its acknowledged task consists in providing a self-consistently non-metaphysical interpretation of *TLP* according to early Wittgenstein’s lights. Taken this way, the conclusions we have reached in this paper confirm this general orientation in interpretation. Cora Diamond herself, already in 1991, made it clear that *TLP* harbors metaphysical biases and,

despite the book’s many insights, it should not be taken to be free of philosophical flaws. She wrote:

[T]here is a sense in which the *Tractatus* might be described as metaphysical, even though it is not concerned with features of reality underlying sense, with things that are the case although they cannot intelligibly be said or thought to be the case. It is metaphysical . . . not . . . about what there is, external to language or thought, but about what they essentially are (despite appearances), and about what we can do, what it must be possible to do. The belief that *there must be a certain kind of logical order in our language* (the belief reflected in our seeing that order as already there, given the understanding we have of the signs we use (*Philosophical Investigations*, I, §101-2)); this is a belief also in what we must be able to do, given that we understand sentences and use them, where using them is saying things in determinate logical relations to each other. . . . [Yet] what is metaphysical there is not the content of some belief but the laying down of a requirement, the requirement of logical analysis. We do make sense, our propositions do stand in logical relations to each other. And such-and-such is required for that to be so.

More recently, Diamond and Conant provided a list of the metaphysical biases which they consider as present in *TLP*. Among them, one is of special concern to us here: “Antecedent to logical analysis, there must be this logical order—one that is already there awaiting discovery—and it is the role of logical analysis to uncover it.” This shows that the kind of Givenness we have unearthed in *TLP* is not one whose presence the resolute interpreters would deny. On the resolute interpretation, according to early Wittgenstein’s lights this kind of Givenness was not taken to be metaphysical:

The metaphysical commitments at issue here are, however, not of a sort that early Wittgenstein, at the time of writing the *Tractatus*, would have taken to be metaphysical. Indeed, most of them would not have been taken by him to be theoretical commitments at all, let alone ones that were somehow peculiarly his. Rather, he would have regarded them as pertaining to matters that become clear through the process of clarifying propositions, and, in particular, through the adoption and application of a perspicuous notation—a notation that enables one to avoid “the

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63 As Minar puts it in Edward Minar, “Rule-Following, Practice, and Agreement,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, ed. Marie McGinn and Oskari Kuvula (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 280. A key insight needed in order for Wittgenstein to accomplish this is found in *Philosophical Investigations* §242: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definition but also (quiver as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so” (our emphasis). We have been greatly helped on this issue by Cora Diamond’s “Rules: Looking in the Right Place,” in *Wittgenstein: Attention to Particulars. Essays in Honour of Rush Rhees (1903-89)*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Peter Winch (New York: St. Martin’s, 1989).


66 Conant and Diamond, “On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely”, 83, emphasis in the original.
fundamental confusions” (“of which the whole of philosophy is full,” 3.324) by furnishing an absolutely clear way of expressing thoughts. His aim, in writing that book, was to bring metaphysics to an end; and the method of clarification he thereby sought to practice, to achieve that end, was to be one that was itself free of all metaphysical commitments. 67

To sum up, then: the failure of a fully conceptualist reading of TLP on showing and the saying/showing distinction should not be taken to imply the weakening of the resolute reading of TLP; on the contrary, it strengthens it. 68

References


68 This paper has been very long in the making. Vasso Kindi, Costis Cvecoa and Stelios Virvidakis deserve special thanks for their encouragement and support of the project. Its basic idea (bringing the Myth of the Given to bear specifically on TLP interpretation) came to me in a conversation with Jim Conant in a conference organized by the University of Patras in 2011. Though he is undoubtedly totally unaware of this, I gratefully acknowledge the inspiration. Sections 4 and 5 draw on my contribution to a paper co-written with Kostas Loukos and published in Greek in the refereed philosophical journal Devolution. The ideas found there were first presented in the Second Panhellenic Conference of Philosophy of Science in Athens in 2012. Comments by Vasso Kindi, Stavroula Tsinorema, and the participants in Vasso Kindi’s postgraduate seminar on “Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Science” in 2012/13 are gratefully acknowledged. Section 6 was presented to the Ongoing Seminar on the Theory and Epistemology of the Social Sciences (The K. Psychopaidis Seminar) of the Kapodistrian University of Athens in February 2015. Comments on that section by Alkis Lavranou, Stephanos Dimitriou, Vangelis Bitzoris, Maria Pourmab, Christina Katsari, and Dionysios Chistias have greatly improved the paper. Last but not least, debts should be acknowledged to Aristides Baltas for an hour-long public exchange we had in 2012 on his book on the Tractatus. Thanks are also due to the editor of this volume, Sotiris Mitarexis: his patience and generosity have been hugely appreciated. All mistakes, if any, are of course solely mine.


