Ludwig Wittgenstein between Analytic Philosophy and Apophaticism

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INTRODUCTION

AN APOPHATIC WITTGENSTEIN—
OR A WITTGENSTEINIAN APOPHATICISM

SOTIRIS MITRALEXIS

This volume constitutes an attempt to initiate an inquiry into a subject that has been repeatedly hinted at, but hitherto never thoroughly researched through this particular hermeneutical lens. Namely, the relationship between Ludwig Wittgenstein's "analytic stance" towards philosophy and the inherently apophatic nature of his epistemology. In using the term "apophaticism," a term deriving from Christian and—more preeminently—Byzantine philosophy and theology, we are not merely referring to the theological "via negativa" or to tendencies towards mysticism, but rather to a comprehensive epistemological *stance* irrespective of a particular civilizational setting. According to Christos Yannaras' seminal definition of apophaticism *as an epistemology*, it consists in

> (1) the denial that we exhaust knowledge in its formulation; (2) the refusal to identify the understanding of the signifiers with the knowledge of what is signified; and (3) the symbolic character of every epistemic expression: its role in bringing together atomic experiences and embracing them within a common semantic boundary marker, a process which allows epistemic experience to be shared, and once shared to be verified.[1]

The argument is that the more dominant currents in Byzantine thought rely on such an epistemological *stance*, which becomes most explicit in the case of defining (or *not* defining) its ontological model's uncreated

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[1] Christos Yannaras, *Relational Ontology* (Brookline Mass.: HC Press, 2011), 9.

Other,[2] while actually being the implicit precondition in most instances of applying epistemological criteria. However, apophaticism *as a comprehensive epistemology* does not need to be confined to the historical context of the pre-modern civilization in which it primarily reigned.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's work can be approached as a particularly efflorescent case of the implementation of an implicitly (and at times explicitly) *apophatic* epistemology. As such, this volume's claim is that such an approach would not merely provide elucidations on apophatic epistemologies, but rather shed potentially valuable hermeneutical light on Wittgenstein's work, functioning as an epistemological thread running through it. Consequently, the focal points here consist of questions concerning knowledge and its disclosure, ineffability, non-discursivity, the function of language, the limits of my language as the limits of my world, the language of religion, and so on. However, the contributors of this volume do not necessarily adhere to a strict and exclusive understanding of apophaticism or epistemology as it has been portrayed above. Rather, these questions, considerations, reflections and concerns have provided the impulse for most of the chapters that follow. The present volume is an attempt to shed more light on the apophatic aspects of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy by including a broad spectrum of different approaches, with contributors ranging from Wittgenstein scholars to Patristics scholars—and beyond.

In the first chapter, **Miltos Theodossiou** is concerned with the connection of the Tractarian concept of *showing* to ineffability, or non-discursivity. The specific framework in which the examination of this issue is undertaken belongs to the wider thematic area of the so-called "Myth of the Given," a line of questioning opened up by the work of the American philosopher John McDowell. The aim of the chapter is to provide a reading of the *Tractatus—*a "conceptualist" reading—according to which any traces of non-discursivity in the book should not fall into the Myth. The author, however, concludes that such a reading cannot fully accommodate the *Tractatus*' view of logic as separate from its application in ordinary language. Nevertheless, the failure is instructive, since it allows us to understand better Wittgenstein's later views on language.

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[2] A prime example for this would be the fifth chapter of the Areopagite corpus' *Mystical Theology*—in Clarence Edwin Rolt, trans., *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 200-1.

Chryssi Sidiropoulou begins by engaging with Wittgenstein's criticism of dichotomies such as *truth* and *formulation* or expressions of a dualism such as *understanding of a word* and *knowledge of its signified reality*. This Wittgensteinian critique is itself part of Wittgenstein's apophaticism rather than a refutation thereof. She argues that there is room for the ineffable in Wittgenstein's thought in highlighting the impossibility of an absolute perspective available to us. In this, all descriptions are given within a given language-game and so intrinsically embedded in a specific—finite—spatiotemporal set of limitations. Our realization of the latter enables us to acknowledge that there will always be something "ineffable" and thus apophatic, in the sense of something transcending our possibilities of expression within our language-game, but which could be available to others within different limitations or possibilities open to them—leading us to *apophatic descriptions*.

In the next chapter, **Pui Him Ip** attempts to show that the apophatic impetus underlying the early Wittgenstein's philosophy could be identified most lucidly in light of the *Lecture on Ethics*, a text that could act as an interpretative key for Wittgenstein's early thought as a whole. We find that Wittgenstein's insistence on the nonsensicality of ethical propositions springs from his desire to elucidate clearly the presence of the paradox at the heart of the ethical. But more than that, the impetus behind the "ladder" —the call to throw away the propositions of the Tractatus—could be identified from Wittgenstein's desire for his readers to bypass a mere recognition of the paradox and accept the ethical imperative to stop trying to run against the boundary of our language. Drawing from the work of Von Wright, the author interprets these results in light of Wittgenstein's lifelong concern for human culture and concludes that Wittgenstein's apophaticism was driven by a deep concern for the transcendence of human values, lest they are manipulated by man.

Following this, **George A. Sivrides** associates Wittgenstein's *ethics* with Kierkegaard's, in order to trace ethics as *apophatic knowledge* and as a foundation of thought itself. Initiating from the ineffability of ethics in Wittgenstein, he points to the categories of the aesthetic, of the ethical and of the religious conduct in Kierkegaard, to conclude with the conception of language as practice which constitutes the apophatic sense of thought.

From a theological standpoint, **Haralambos Ventis** attempts to reclaim the conceptual validity of theological statements from the widely endorsed attacks occasioned by Wittgensteinian immanentism. He argues

that the exercise of a critical theology is very essential to the health of religions, affording as it does the latter's main chance for self-criticism—a vital feat, given the non-falsifiable nature of religious claims and the intolerance they can encourage.

In the sixth chapter, **Nicholas Loudovikos** offers an indirect reading of Wittgenstein through Gregory Palamas' and Thomas Aquinas' readings of Aristotle. He thus provides us with an approach to Gregory Palamas' distinctions and categories as an unexpected interpretative key both for some of the metaphysical and some of the non-metaphysical aspects of Wittgenstein's thought.

Beginning with a consideration of Wittgenstein's account of aspect-dawning, **Michael Grant**'s paper endeavors to show how the opposition between the particular and the universal or general is displaced in Wittgenstein's thought by a concern for the singular, a concern irreducible to the oppositions and dichotomies on which philosophy has tended to rely. Wittgenstein's thought is characterized not by a movement from particular to general or general to particular, but by a more paradoxical and less easily characterized movement of singularities, one that goes from particular to particular. It is the consequences of this order of thought as they bear on an understanding of the language of religion that the paper seeks to bring out.

The initial inspiration for this volume's initiative did not emerge from tracing apophaticism in Wittgenstein, but from "tracing Wittgenstein" in apophaticism. During my study of Maximus the Confessor's thought (7th century), I came across many ideas that strongly reminded me of Wittgenstein's 20th century aphorisms. To cite an example, Maximus the Confessor follows Wittgenstein's advice; he does not speak of what cannot be said, reminding the modern reader of *TLP* 7. The Patristic commentator speaks of God (and, to be precise, of everything) "according to the measure of our language (for it is not possible for us to transcend it)."[3] In utter respect for the realism of language, the Church Father declares that God does not exist, for his existence is completely beyond everything that

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[3] *Scholia in De Divinis Nominibus*, in *Corpus Dionysiacum Band 4,1. Ioannis Scythopolitani prologus et scholia in Dionysii Areopagitae librum 'De divinis nominibus' cum additamentis interpretum aliorum*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2011), 189 B (p. 122, fn.): "τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς ἡμετέρας γλώσσης ἀκολουθῶν (οὐ γὰρ ὑπερβῆναι ταύτην δυνατὸν ἡμῖν)."

we call "being" and "existence."[4] For Maximus this is not a mere rhetorical device: he explicitly writes that "nonbeing is properly meant with regard to [God], since he is not among beings."[5] Any designation concerning God and the sense of the world cannot but be incorrect, as it emerges from within the limits of our world. The mode of existence (τρόπος ὑπάρξεως) of creatures cannot be the same or comparable to the mode of existence of their source of being, to the mode of existence of the uncreated, and nothing at all can be said about it, as it resides beyond the limits of createdness—a notion usually described by the radicalism of the *created/uncreated* distinction. Ludwig Wittgenstein's genius provides us with another *language* to express this from a quite different perspective, in saying that "the sense of the world must lie outside the world" (*TLP* 6.41). Wittgenstein explains:

> In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world. (*TLP* 6.41)

For thinkers such as Maximus, the question of the *sense* of the world is the question of its *cause,* the question about God. However, "the limits of my language signify the limits of my world" (*TLP* 5.6): to signify in language what lies *beyond* the limits of my world, the extremities of which in a Maximian ontology would be the limitations of createdness, would be impossible—it would be *non-sense*.

> For since it is necessary that we understand correctly the difference between God and creatures, then the affirmation of being beyond being [ὑπερεῖναι, ὑπερούσιος] must be the negation of beings and the affirmation of beings must be the negation of being beyond being. In fact both names,

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[4] Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia,* in *S. Massimo Confessore. La mistagogia ed altri scritti,* ed. Raffaele Cantarella (Florence: Testi Cristiani, 1931), proem.109: "[…] because of his being beyond being, [God] is more fittingly referred to as nonbeing."

[5] Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones et dubia,* ed. José H. Declerck. Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 10 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 2.14.4-6: "Κυρίως γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ λέγεται τὸ μὴ ὄν, ἐπειδὴ οὐδέν ἐστι τῶν ὄντων." Translation by Despina Prassas, in *St Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 155.

being and nonbeing, are to be reverently applied to [God] although not at all properly.[6]

For nothing whatsoever, whether being or nonbeing, is linked to him as a cause, no being or what is called being, no nonbeing, or what is called nonbeing, is properly close to him. He has in fact a simple existence, unknowable and inaccessible to all and altogether beyond understanding which transcends all affirmation and negation.[7]

This *stance* towards knowledge and language permeates Maximus' *Lebensanschauung* and marks his work, an epistemological realism "beyond affirmation and negation." Of course, neither of these elements *is* Wittgenstein in the most strict sense. However, the question persists: if the reader, engaging in a welcome anachronism, finds Wittgenstein in apophaticism, then how and in which way would he or she trace apophaticism in Wittgenstein, if at all? It is from such questions that the idea and intention for this volume initially emerged.

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[6] Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia*, proem.110-115. Translation in George C. Berthold, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985, 185.

[7] Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia,* proem.120-12, trans. in Berthold, 186. See also *Ambigua,* MPG 91, 1128 B, 1129 C.

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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 Uhland'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 Unaussprechliche*], then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be—inexpressibly—*contained* in what has been

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters. Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey, and Sraffa*, ed. Brian McGuinness and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 124.

uttered!"[2] 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.)[3]

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 (*unsinnig*) with tautologies or contradictions

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[2] See Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), 6-7 and 83-4.

[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.

(*sinnlos*), 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.[5] The non-discursivity involved in sense-making may

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[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' parts 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. Categorial necessities are reflected in the

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 us 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.

[6] On this point, see the interesting exchange of Kremer and Sullivan (Michael Kremer, "Mathematics and Meaning in the *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Investigations* 25 (2002): 272-303 and Peter M. Sullivan, "On Trying to Be Resolute: A Response to Kremer on the *Tractatus*," *European Journal of Philosophy* 10 (2002): 43-78.

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 founds 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 gleefully 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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[7] This phrase already appears in James J. Conant, "The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege and the *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1991): 157.

[8] See P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and David Pears, *The False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987 and 1988), among others.

[9] We have attempted to make our commitments explicit in Miltos Theodossiou, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Turning-Points in Interpretation*, in Greek

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 actualize 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 "ineffable 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 damns 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.

(Athens: Eurasia Publications, 2007). Our debt to Diamond's and Conant's thinking, as well as to McDowell's work, cannot be overestimated.

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 categorial status C, then the person is aware of it *as* having categorial status C," and explains that "*to reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world—if it has a categorial 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 Christias, whose upcoming work on the "Myth of the Categorial 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."[12] 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,"[13] it borders on incoherence.[14] "How,"
McDowell justifiably asks, "could pointing to a bit of the Given justify the
use of a concept in judgment?"[15] Consequently, McDowell insists that we
introduce a "new notion of givenness."[16] 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."[17] 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:

> [I]n 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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[12] John McDowell, *Mind and World. With A New Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press, 1996), 24.
[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.

and our seeing, do not stop anywhere short of the fact. What we see is: that such-and-such is the case. … Wittgenstein's aphorism can be reworked like that *for any conceptual shaping of subjectivity*.[18]

Insisting on the rejection of this Myth everywhere in philosophy where there is a risk of succumbing into it, McDowell several years later provided a succinct formulation of it as follows:

> Givenness in the sense of the Myth would be an availability for cognition to subjects whose getting what is supposedly Given to them does not draw on capacities required for the sort of cognition in question.[19]

For the purposes of our paper, we will call any understanding of our normative relation to the world that succumbs to the Myth of the Given (construed as above), *non-conceptualist*, and, equally, any conception avoiding the Myth, *conceptualist*. In this context, we should note how this last way of (re)conceiving mythical Givenness allows for far greater scope in the Myth's application: it is not tied down to a specific normative domain but, on the contrary, it holds for any kind of "availability for cognition"; "for any conceptual shaping of subjectivity," as McDowell puts it; it makes no distinction between material and form—any which of them may be conceived as Given—or between a rule and its correct manner of application—again, both may be understood as Given—and therefore, *it allows us to bring the Myth to bear on TLP's understanding of logic*.

Putting pressure on *TLP* on that score, however, is not as straightforward as it may first appear. This is because the points of pressure, if available, are not so easily found. *TLP* and the logical structure it argues for— whether in the shape of a mirroring "logical syntax" or in a conception of our relation to language—employs a very rich and complex picture of how words and propositions are "given"; deconstructing this picture takes some work. We shall undertake this task in what follows. At present, we restrict ourselves to a brief account of our thinking on this matter.

As we will endeavor to show in sections 4 and 5, we believe that the appropriate point of pressure in *TLP* lies in the conception of showing and the saying/showing distinction. Its appropriateness consists precisely in its non-discursivity. Non-discursivity, when brought into contact with the

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[18] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 29, our emphasis.

[19] John McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given," in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 256.

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

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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

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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non-special "recognition of the conditions of saying" too close to the Givenness of meaning.

[21] See *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) and, more recently, *Beyond the* Tractatus *Wars. The New Wittgenstein Debate*, ed. Rupert Read and Matthew A. Lavery (New York:

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 *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,[22] will lead us, on its own, to abandoning it as nonsense—at least, if we are "resolute" enough to put aside the metaphysical prejudices and expectations we ourselves bring to the book. If we truly follow up 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,[23] in such a way that coming up with a straightforward, coherent reading of the book as a treatise, or, equivalently, as a *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

Routledge, 2011) and Silver Bronzo, "The Resolute Reading and Its Critics. An Introduction to the Literature," *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3 (2012): 45-80. The second chapter of Miltos Theodossiou, *The Philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Turning-Points in Interpretation*, in Greek (Athens: Eurasia Publications, 2007), is a detailed presentation of the resolute interpretation and the relevant debates on it.

[22] "[E]very reader must begin life *qua* reader of the *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 Crary (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I. T. Press, 2007), 49.

[23] 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)."

mastery of language that comes with our being logical beings endowed with language-using abilities honed by learning and imparted by culture.

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, *immanently*, in practice, "from within," so to speak.[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 *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 *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.[25] Therefore, it is not because of an *excess* that nonsense is generated; because, for example, certain logical categories do not fit or cannot co-exist in the same proposition[26]—something which, were it ("*per impossibile*") 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

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[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. Miltos Theodossiou, Review of *Peeling Potatoes or Grinding Lenses: Spinoza and Young Wittgenstein Converse on Immanence and Its Logic* by Aristides Baltas, in Greek, *Deucalion* 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*.
[25] Equally significant for the resolute interpretation is 3.3, on the "context principle."
[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 to refer 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 and as far as

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[27] See James J. Conant, "Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use," *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1998): 222-50.