

Anti-Metaphysical Readings of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

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Abstract. This paper discusses certain anti-metaphysical readings of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The metaphysical and anti-metaphysical readings can be divided on the interpretations of textual fidelity. The anti-metaphysical readings can be differentiated in taking into account two different understandings with regard to Wittgenstein's pronouncement of *nonsense* in *Tractatus*. One is the logical positivists' understanding of nonsense and the other is the resolute reading of the text that emerged as an opposite to the orthodox or standard reading. The aim of discussing these anti-metaphysical readings is to highlight whether a metaphysical reading is possible.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, nonsense, metaphysics, silence, anti-metaphysical reading

Antimetafizinis *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* perskaitymas

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas antimetafizinis *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* perskaitymas. Metafizinį ir antimetafizinį perskaitymą galima padalinti pagal tekstinio tikslumo interpretacijas. Pagal tai, kaip autoriai suvokia „beprasmybės“ sąvoką Wittgensteino *Traktate*, išsiskiria du antimetafiziniai perskaitymai. Vienas jų – loginių pozityvistų beprasmybės suvokimas, o kitas – radikalus teksto perskaitymas, atsiradęs kaip priešprieša ortodoksiškam arba standartiniam perskaitymui. Šiame straipsnyje antimetafiziniai perskaitymai nagrinėjami siekiant išryškinti, ar metafizinis perskaitymas yra įmanomas.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Wittgensteinas, beprasmybė, metafizika, tyła, antimetafizinis perskaitymas

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*Don't for heaven's sake, be afraid of talking nonsense!
But you must pay attention to your nonsense.*

Wittgenstein 1980: 56

Introduction

Wittgenstein is perhaps the most debated philosopher in contemporary times. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*TLP*) seems to be highly fertile for interpretational debates. There might be two reasons for which it is a celebrated text in its own way among philosophical communities. First and less importantly, the text is so precise in its style but yet unstructured in expressing thoughts. Therefore, most of the interpreters find so much space to contemplate and leave their own impressions on it. The second and most importantly, it is perhaps because as Wittgenstein thought it attempted to solve most of the fundamental philosophical problems. However, unlike his contemporary analytic thinkers like Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, his approach towards philosophical problems is not presented with an explicit coherent thematic style. However, that does not mean that Wittgenstein's philosophical discussions do not have any coherence in themselves. The coherence seems to be abstract and significant but perhaps not quite discernible. Thus, it naturally creates a lot of interpretational debates. Metaphysics is one such philosophical topic where Wittgenstein is considered to be taken differently by his readers/interpreters.

One would easily comprehend the title, "treatise of logical philosophy" (the English translation of the title). It is a work of logical analysis of philosophy in the sense that there is an implied normative meaning of philosophy that *TLP* tries to define in the lines of what can be logically described and what goes beyond that description. It is in this sense the task of philosophy is to sort of differentiate what is beyond possible description and what is within it. If, this is the implied meaning of philosophy presented in *TLP*, can there also be a discussion of metaphysics. The present paper in this way discusses the anti-metaphysical reading of *TLP* as the major point of mention. The aim of the paper, however, is not to protest against the anti-metaphysical readings. It attempts to understand the context of Wittgenstein's project of meaningfulness criterion depicted in *TLP* that divides among senseful, senseless, and nonsensical propositions. The context as some of the readers of *TLP* point out is a methodological one. The methodological context is a reminder of a philosophical task.

The main thesis of the paper is to explore the possibility of metaphysical readings that describes the significance of nonsensical propositions. The discussion of self in *TLP* that gives rise to certain interpretational debates is important to mention in order to emphasize the metaphysical aspect of self. Finally, the paper attempts to debate that the methodological task of *TLP* is not the sole point of Wittgenstein. His reservations about modernity and so called scientific or technological developments which are discussed mostly in *Culture and Value, A Lecture on Ethics*, and very briefly yet in a significant sense

in *TLP* give an indication that the methodological task of *TLP* perhaps aims at enabling the understanding of philosophy.¹

1. The Structure of *TLP*: Meaning and Metaphysics

The structure of the *TLP* is quite aptly described in the introduction of the text by Bertrand Russell. For him, *TLP* describes several philosophical problems regarding language, meaning, logic, and the structure of the world. Thus, the structure of the *TLP* can be broadly divided into two important parts. One is about problems concerning language and meaning. The other is to show the meaninglessness of certain philosophical topics by identifying the logic of the language. Russell observes,

Most propositions and questions that have been written about philosophical matters are not false but senseless. We cannot, therefore, answer questions of this kind at all, but only state their senselessness. Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language (Wittgenstein 1922: XI).

One wonders whether Wittgenstein's whole aim of the book was just to show the senselessness/meaninglessness of our traditional philosophical topics. It is well known that Wittgenstein was not very happy with the introduction of Russell particularly his reading of logical propositions. In one of his letters he boldly mentioned that Russell had misunderstood the crux of the book.

Now 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, which comes to the same, what can be *thought*) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy (see McGuinness 1995: 98).

Therefore, one can argue, it is not just determining a criterion of meaninglessness but there is something beyond this criterion. I shall discuss this in the due course of this paper. The logical syntax of an ideal language used in philosophy would demarcate what can be meaningfully expressed and what cannot be. This point is at least beyond interpretational doubts. But the interpretational doubt remains with the *significance* of meaningfulness or meaninglessness. It is found in *TLP* that there are three types of propositions concerning meaning. They are: i) intelligible propositions, ii) senseless propositions and iii) non-sensical propositions.

¹ Wittgenstein's quest for a philosophical method is not only limited to the aphorism *TLP* 6.54 rather his whole distinction between sayable and showable is also a corollary to the description of philosophy which he continued to *Philosophical Investigations* as calling it as therapeutic. However, one must not consider Wittgenstein's obsession for philosophical method as the method of scientism. Scientism helps modernity to identify ethical values, metaphysical considerations of self and aesthetics etc. as not part of the objective world. Wittgenstein considers these subjects as not part of the world but the purpose is different. For him, these subjects are transcendental. The coherence in critiquing modernity throughout his philosophical journey suggests that for the purpose of clarification of philosophical thought, he makes the distinction between what is sayable and what is showable rather than being hostile to the domain of showable. For detail see Tarai, Ashoka Kumar (2020)

1.1. Intelligible Propositions

Wittgenstein considers intelligible propositions as meaningful propositions. Meaningful propositions have cognitive value in relation to the world external to these propositions. The whole idea of picture theory of meaning is comprehensible because of these meaningful propositions. His notion of language is considered to be the totality of these propositions. The totality of meaningful propositions is language. These propositions are the pictures of reality. They are bipolar in nature. Thus, a meaningful proposition is either true or false in relation to the fact that is there in reality. Anything which is not either true or false is beyond the whole domain of language. Therefore, they cannot be said in language, if they can be said in language, they have to be either true or false. However, these propositions are logically determined to have meaning. They are independent of contexts and subjects.

There is some sort of essentialism to his understanding of language. The ideal language is powered by truth functional logic. It is logic that identifies how a particular meaningful proposition represents or pictures the reality. In this way, Wittgenstein finds a similar corollary to both language and reality. The essence of both language and reality which cannot be expressed in language. He names it as “logical form”, the skeleton of both language and reality. Thus, intelligible propositions because of their logical forms are only capable of making sense. They are most importantly about the contingent reality within the periphery of logical possibilities. The nature of the contingency does not only limit to the empirical actual reality. The meaningfulness of intelligible propositions is confined within the logical possibilities.

A picture depicts reality by representing a possibility of existence and non-existence of states of affairs. TLP 2.201

Thus, it is not only the existing states of affairs that constitute the meaning of the picture (Intelligible proposition) but also the nonexisting states of affairs. But the very nonexistence nature of states of affairs has to be within logical possibility. Therefore, the intelligible propositions are describing a grand view of reality which includes not only the actual state of affairs but also the possible state of affairs.

1.2. Senseless Propositions (sinnlos)

Senseless propositions are propositions about logic. They are not about factual reality. Logical propositions are true or false independent of the factual reality. However, intelligible propositions are true or false depending on what they represent in reality and the very possibility of logic. Unlike intelligible propositions, propositions of logic do not picture anything rather they show the limit of meaningful propositions. Here are the most important lines discussing these kinds of propositions:

Propositions show what they say: tautologies and contradictions show that they say nothing. A tautology has no truth-conditions, since it is unconditionally true: and a contradiction is true on no condition. Tautologies and contradictions lack sense. (Like a point from which two

arrows go out in opposite directions to one another.) (For example, I know nothing about the weather when I know that it is either raining or not raining.) TLP 4.461

Tautologies and contradictions are not, however, nonsensical. They are part of the symbolism, much as "0" is part of the symbolism of arithmetic. TLP 4.4611

Tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality. They do not represent any possible situations. For the former admit all possible situations, and the latter none. In a tautology the conditions of agreement with the world—the representational relations—cancel one another, so that it does not stand in any representational relation to reality. TLP 4.462

Propositions of logic are senseless in the sense they do not themselves have truth conditions. Tautologies and contradictions are unconditionally true and false respectively. Thus, they do not say anything. Therefore, they are senseless. Wittgenstein's understanding of having "sense" refers to only conditionally true or false propositions. Since propositions of logic neither agree nor disagree with reality, they are senseless. But they are not utterly nonsensical propositions. They are being used as a tool to understand the language-reality relationship. Logic is indeed the essence of both intelligible propositions and the reality. Logical propositions are empty propositions. Thus, he states:

Logic pervades the world, the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, "The world has this in it, and this, but not that." For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world, for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well. We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either. TLP 5.61

The above passage expresses the limit of the logico-syntactical possibilities but at the same, it can be held true that the world contains so and so things. Because saying this would include that we are limiting the very *possibilities*. These possibilities are, however, within the framework of a logical syntactical form that represents the very structure of the world. In another way, the limits of logic that are beyond the logical syntactical possibilities are also the limits of the world. The limits themselves cannot be represented which means; they themselves are not thoughts in the *Tractatarian* sense. Logic is not itself a constituent of the world. Therefore, Wittgenstein says:

*Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world.
Logic is transcendental. TLP 6.13*

It does not have *sense* itself but the whole picturing or making *sense* of the world is possible because of it. It is like a transcendental condition of Kantian kind. We can claim that without the idea of senseless propositions that is without the presupposition of logic, there is no understanding of intelligible propositions and thereby no possibility of making sense of the world. However, what goes beyond both the intelligible propositions and logical propositions are known as nonsensical proposition which decipher the possibility of metaphysics.

1.3. Nonsensical propositions (unsinning)

Nonsensical propositions are not having any cognitive value. They do not say anything about the reality. They are not the propositions of logic either. They are the propositions which can't represent or say but can only show. The whole of showable is nonsensical. Hacker calls them pseudo-propositions. They violate the logical syntax. He further adds, they show nothing about the world, neither about its form nor about its content.² The propositions about God, religion, ethics, and aesthetics do not depict contingent reality. They are not bipolar in nature which can be either true or false. Logical positivists hold a similar kind of view about these propositions. Therefore, they reject metaphysics. Metaphysical propositions are nonsensical for them. However, it is important to note in what sense Wittgenstein considers these propositions as nonsensical. Are they literally nonsensical like what positivists consider? Are they more significant to philosophy than intelligible propositions? Wittgensteinian consideration is ambiguous to this point. The ambiguity has opened up the debate among Wittgenstein scholars mainly creating two schools of thought as resolute and standard reading. The *Tractatarian nonsense* is thereby found to be having coincidence in pouncing with logical positivism. It is, however, important to note Wittgenstein's idea of self in relation to the notion of meaning in the *Tractatarian* framework.

1.4. Making sense of self

One of the issues that *TLP* raises regarding the concept of "self" and its relation to "world" consequently created havoc among many Wittgensteinians. However, there is a general consensus among several interpretations that the self is not an object in the world that Wittgenstein conceptualises. This consensus is not about the arguments he provides for this philosophical position or he seems to have provided, it is rather about the philosophical position itself. The philosophical position seems to be unambiguous because his pronouncements in *TLP* concerning the notion of self and its relation to the world are so unavoidable in nature (see *TLP*: 5.6, 5.62, 5.621, 5.63, 5.631, 5.632). The structure of the world is objectively described by dissecting the totality of the world into simple objects. The structural analysis of the world does not mention the self as a constituent element of the world. One would thus be tempted to enquire about the relation between the self and that structured world. It is this temptation that has perhaps contributed different viewpoints to the literature.

J. M. Urmson calls Wittgensteinian rejection of soul as a complex entity as "almost impenetrable obscurity".³ The problem arises perhaps because of the incoherence between Wittgenstein's acceptance of both self or soul which possesses the thought taking clue from the aphorism "5.542" and rejecting the Humean notion of a composite soul. Thought itself is a complex phenomenon, therefore who bears it cannot be simple. The other problem

² See Hacker 1972: 18

³ Urmson 1966: 133

which the interpreters face is that he has accepted a transcendental self which cannot be “said”. To this problem, there are basically three kinds of interpretations such as **1.** The Wittgensteinian notion of self is very much incoherent that it cannot be either simple or complex. **2.** Wittgenstein’s notion of the self is complex. **3.** His notion of the self is both complex and simple i.e. there are empirical realism and transcendental solipsism. The first position is held by Hans Sluga, the second is argued by Perszyk and G. Jan, and C. Lokhorst and the third is the standard reading by many scholars such as P. M. S. Hacker and others.

Wittgenstein, according to Sluga, has tried to give a description of the objective world.

But as he proceeds, he begins to realize that this objective world is specifiable only as a subject’s world describable in the subject’s language. Subjectivity has begun to invade the picture. But that subjectivity has no place in the world for Wittgenstein; it hovers on the boundary of the world and remains thus, in the literal sense, a marginal subjectivity. This attempt to isolate subjectivity outside the world and outside language leads to intolerable strains within Wittgenstein’s thought: strains that eventually make a reconstruction of his whole philosophy necessary (Sluga 1983: 126).

Sluga argues that the self in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is neither simple nor complex because of the above-mentioned assumption, he claims which leads to *intolerable strains*. The self can’t be complex because Wittgenstein himself has rejected it that *....a composite soul would no longer be a soul. (TLP-5.5421)* And since the self is not an object of the world, it cannot be even simple. He further claims,

In another sense, that fact helps us to isolate the self. It helps us to do so by showing that the self cannot be part of the world. The world is the totality of facts, and those, in turn, are eventually made up of concatenations of simple objects. All there is to the world are simples and complexes, the subject is neither, and can, thus, not be part of the world (Sluga 1983:130).

The self is, thus, not part of the representable world. This kind of isolation of self is possible in Wittgenstein’s writing, Sluga assumes, because of his admiration of Schopenhauer. He leaves a possibility that subjectivity can be thought of in the world but not a thing in the world. Moreover, there is no good reason to think that there is a metaphysical self which lies beyond the world. This reading of Sluga is definitely an anti-metaphysical cladding that suggests even if Wittgenstein clearly pronounces a metaphysical self yet it still cannot be defended.

Perszyk, Gerrit Jan, and Lokhorst argue that Wittgensteinian notion of self is complex even if he himself has rejected self being a composite whole. These scholars seem to be very loyal to the criticism that Wittgenstein raised against Russell and Moore about the multiple relation theory of judgment.

It is clear, however, that “A believes that p”, “A has the thought p”, and “A says p” are of the form ““p” says p”: and this does not involve a correlation of a fact with an object, but rather the correlation of facts by means of the correlation of their objects. TLP 5.542

A soul or subject if not complex then cannot have thoughts because thought itself is a complex process. But Wittgenstein believes that a soul cannot represent a fact or even a thought as superficial psychologists think. Jan and Lokhorst argue that the aphorism which rejects the composite soul as a soul has to be rejected. According to them,

The introduction of a soul or subject distinct from the empirical self is completely unnecessary within the framework of the *Tractatus*. Everything which Wittgenstein says about “my language”, “my world”, and the “truth of solipsism” may just as well, nay, better be said without bringing a separate subject into play (Jan and Lokhorst 1991: 338).

So, denying the self as a complex being is like denying the whole mechanism of picture theory of language. For these scholars, the empirical complex self is the necessary condition for making the whole representation of reality possible. In a similar way, Perszyk argues that the aphorism 5.542 and 5.5421 cannot be coherent at all.⁴ One of them has to be rejected. If “5.542” is rejected then the whole thesis of extensionality will be missed. In order to save the language- reality relationship intact, 5.5421 has to be rejected. Therefore, self has to be something very much empirical and complex. This reading is problematic because it has not been able to trace upon the context of Wittgenstein’s denial of a psychological or complex self. The context can be understood through the division between a psychological and a philosophical self. Hacker brings in this distinction quite convincingly by making the case for empirical realism and transcendental solipsism. His interpretation is really important because it has, in my view, done justice to the text by claiming that Wittgenstein never rejects an empirical self and at the same time he also talks about the possibility of a transcendental self that is the subject of philosophy. Hacker comments,

Thus, everything the realist wishes to say can be said; and nothing the transcendental solipsist wishes to say can be spoken of. There will be no practical disagreement between them, nor will they quarrel over the truth-values of propositions of ordinary language. But the analysis of such propositions will manifest the transcendental truths that cannot be said. Wittgenstein’s doctrine in the *Tractatus* is best described as Empirical Realism and Transcendental Solipsism (Hacker 1986: 103-4).

There is actually no incoherence between the empirical realism and the transcendental solipsism. Empirical realism advocates the objectivity of the language–world relationship and transcendental solipsism advocates the self as a limit to the worldly experience. Once it is transcended it can coincide with the world and therefore Wittgenstein can claim. *The world and life are one*. TLP 5.621 The whole solipsistic understanding of self cannot be said in Wittgensteinian sense; since self is the limit of the world. The empirical self is presupposed to uphold the complexities of thought. But it is not the self in philosophical sense that can be represented. Human life as such is beyond representation.

Tractatus is no doubt incomprehensible in some remarks. However, the rejection of metaphysical (philosophical) self to which it often refers would be a gross injustice to the

⁴ See Perszyk 1987

text. There is a showable aspect as Wittgenstein claims, which manifests itself. This can in no way be denied. The self which is the bearer of ethics and is the source of religion troubles Wittgenstein. The psychological self that is the performer (making the utterances) of meaningful propositions is one that is not really important for philosophy. The so-called meaningfulness does not really have *meaning* that could bother Wittgenstein. But it is the meaning of life that bothered him throughout. Thus, the philosophical self is the source of that disquieting.

2. *TLP* and Logical Positivism

One reason historically stands firm that this text was taken as an anti-metaphysical text by logical positivists of Vienna Circle. It was seemingly suiting to philosophical positions. As Anat Biletzki Writes,

The members of the Vienna Circle read the *Tractatus*, discussed it, interpreted it, and used it for their own logical, positivistic, and even empirical ends by discovering, in its mysterious, yet still explicit, pronouncements the formulation of theses and arguments that were conducive to their projects (Biletzki 2003: 42-3).

It is important to note that Wittgenstein's idea of a logical language that can picture the reality yet it cannot describe itself was something that might have definitely encouraged the positivists. One such instance is stated by Biletzki⁵ as how Carnap himself was influenced by *TLP*. One can read *TLP* the way it was received by positivists because of the following *Tractatarian* lines.

It is logic that actually helps language mirroring the world. Therefore, for Wittgenstein meaningfulness is determined if something can be mirrored or pictured by language. In another terminology, he calls it as sayable. The things which cannot be represented by language for example ethics, religion, and aesthetics are transcendental. In another sense, they are nonsensical.

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently, we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language. TLP 4.003

Thereby, metaphysical propositions are nonsensical or pseudo propositions since they do not depict reality. The understanding of logical positivism and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* has similarity with regard to their concept of "meaningfulness". However, Wittgenstein also discussed many other philosophical issues along with this "meaningfulness".

It is natural for logical positivists at that time to celebrate *Tractatus* in their spirit. Wittgenstein, though, was not a member of the Vienna Circle. But he had philosophical discussions with its founding members such as Moritz Schlick and Friedrich Waismann.

⁵ See Biletzki 2003: 43

There is evidence of conversations that Wittgenstein himself rejected the idea of verification of logical positivism. Two such instances can be produced here from Ray Monk's detailed account.

Just because Schlick is no ordinary man, people owe it to him to take care not to let their "good intentions" make him and the Vienna school which he leads ridiculous by boastfulness. When I say "boastfulness" I mean any kind of self-satisfied posturing. "Renunciation of metaphysics!" As if that were something new! What the Vienna school has achieved, it ought to show not say... The master should be known by his work (Monk 1990: 283).

On another occasion Monk finds Wittgenstein's meaningfulness criterion was completely different from logical positivists' verifiability criterion.

...we find the principle expressed by Wittgenstein in formulations that sound every bit as dogmatic as those of the Vienna Circle and of Ayer: "The sense of a proposition is the way it is verified", "How a proposition is verified is what it says... The verification is not one token of the truth, it is the sense of the proposition", and so on. We can, it seems, talk of a "Verificationist Phase" of Wittgenstein's thought. But only if we distance the verification principle from the logical empiricism of Schlick, Carnap, Ayer, etc., and place it within the more Kantian framework of Wittgenstein's "phenomenological" or grammatical investigations (Monk 1990: 288).

Monk's understanding is seemingly right that there is one way we can allude Wittgenstein's meaningful criterion with the logical positivists' verifiability criterion that they are concerned about the truth or falsity of propositions and in a more precise sense, Wittgenstein's reference to obtaining and non-obtaining state of affairs. But the fact remains as that Wittgenstein was not academically agreeing with positivists' rejection of metaphysics since he himself distances from Schlick's idea. His idea of "meaningfulness" was a methodological device to understand the structure of facts and objects of the world just as Monk hints at Kantian method. But his quest was to hunch for the unsayable. The subjects of ethics, religion, aesthetics, and so on are unsayable. This suggestion that is to hunch for the unsayable has, however, brought fiery discussions among Wittgenstein scholars which shall be addressed as interpretational tensions.

3. Sayable and Showable: Some Interpretational Tensions

There are basically two types of interpretations about the *sayable* and *showable* distinction in *Tractatus*.⁶ One is called the orthodox or standard interpretation⁷ which includes the initial interpretations of G. E. M Anscombe, Peter Geach, Hans Johan Glock, Jikko

⁶ See McGinn 1999: 491-2

⁷ This standard interpretation is widely available in the works of many Wittgenstein scholars such as G.E.M. Anscombe in her book *An Introduction to Tractatus*, Peter Geach in his article "Saying and showing in Frege and Wittgenstein", Hans Johan Glock in his book *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, J. Hintikka & M.B. Hintikka in their book *Investigating Wittgenstein*, P.M.S. Hacker in his article "Was Wittgenstein trying to whistle it", David Pears in his book *False Prison*, Sachindranath Ganguly in his book *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: A Preliminary*, Suresh Chandra in his book *Wittgenstein: New Perspectives* and R.C.Pradhan in his book *The Great Mirror: An Essay on Wittgenstein's Tractatus*

Hintikka, P. M. S. Hacker, and David Pears and many other Western scholars along with some Indian interpreters like Sachindranath Ganguly, Suresh Chandra, and Ramesh Chandra Pradhan, etc. The other one is called the resolute interpretation which includes Warren Goldfarb, Thomas Ricketts, Cora Diamond, and James Conant. The former is metaphysical and the latter is therapeutic or anti-metaphysical reading. There is also a middle way of reading which is introduced by Marie McGinn which she names as the elucidatory reading.

The *Tractatarian* distinction of *sayable* and *showable* becomes a hot debate among Wittgenstenian scholars primarily because of the aphorism,

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. TLP 6.54

It can be viewed that the whole *Tractatus* contains broadly two segments such as the project of logical atomism or the picture theory of language as a part of sayable and the whole of logic is at one side of showable which is not mystical to Wittgensteinian understanding; he would consider it as senseless propositions and the idea of God, ethics, self, and religion are at another side of showable and the propositions about them are nonsensical. The aphorism 6.54 claims that those who understand Wittgenstein (his classification of propositions or the sayable/showable distinction) eventually would identify as “nonsensical.” This sense of nonsensical is whether literal nonsensical as positivists claim for metaphysical propositions or significant nonsense that which is more significant than the intelligible propositions as standard readers would argue is the point of debate. To identify the tension, let us briefly point out both standard and resolute reading.

3.1. Standard Reading

Standard reading goes with the conviction of Wittgenstein’s preface of the *Tractatus* that the cardinal problem of philosophy is that things which cannot be said in language can only be shown. This divides the whole text into two parts; first, he tries to make sense of the world with help of logical language. And then he realises that there is a limit to the language and therefore to the reality. The limit thus cannot be said rather it can be shown. There is a metaphysical feature that lies beyond language and reality. The standard reading accepts the metaphysical or transcendental feature as the primary focus of the text. They believe that Wittgenstein’s silence over metaphysical issues is more important than his project of logical atomism.

G.E.M. Anscombe has been very loyal to this distinction and concludes her interpretation of *Tractatus* in Wittgenstenian style,

The man, however, who having been helped by the *Tractatus*, “sees the world rightly, i.e. sees what logic reveals as “shewn” will not attempt to say it, since he knows it is unsayable. As for how much advantage it is to him, Wittgenstein makes no great claim; in the introduction he

said, “The whole meaning of the book could perhaps be summed up as follows: What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what cannot be spoken of we must be silent about.” But his final judgement on the value of the book was this: “It shews how little has been done when these problems have been solved” (Anscombe 1959:173).

Anscombe believes that logic has shown a clear picture that what can be said and what cannot be said. The philosophical problems arise when philosophers try to say something which cannot be said. The unsayable is thought to be the cream that has to be left over in silence. There is a significant metaphysical sense of this silence which Anscombe tries to maintain.

Another standard reader Hans Johan Glock writes,

The real significance of the saying/showing distinction lies in the fact that it holds the two together by proscribing both propositions about the essence of symbolic representation and mystical pronouncements about the realm of value. It is the cardinal problem of philosophy because it transformed Wittgenstein’s conception of subject: (Glock 1996: 330).

Glock’s reading of *Tractatus* is also of similar fashion which means he also holds back the distinction that claims this text is a compiling of both an atomistic understanding of reality and the reality of some other things that lie beyond the understanding of language and therefore the reality. However, this distinction cautions us not to make a wide-ranging sense of logical representation only. The philosophical subject is engrossed with pointing out what is within and what is the limit of within.

Tractatus clearly indicates reading it as a metaphysical or a mystical enquiry. We can reasonably accept that the text does have something to claim about ineffable ideas about metaphysics. This metaphysical reading moreover shall be in conflict with this point that it would not be very much compatible with Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy as he claims,

Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. TLP 4.112

If the *sayable-showable* distinction is a doctrine, it goes against the spirit of Wittgenstein’s conception of philosophy. The criticisms are reflected in terms of later development of *Tractatus* which are being named as resolute or anti-metaphysical readings.

3.2. Resolute Reading

Resolute readers are often identified as new Wittgensteinians. Their interpretations of *Tractatus* are basically critiques of the standard readers who take the distinction of sayable-showable religiously and further claim that the text fundamentally eyes at a metaphysical thesis. The concept “New Wittgensteinians” is compiled in one of the books namely *The New Wittgenstein*. The book contains some of the major resolute readings including Cora Diamond and James Conant. However, with one exception of Peter Hacker’s paper, *Was he trying to whistle it?* a defence of standard reading. An-

ti-metaphysical or resolute readers do believe like metaphysical readers that *Tractatus* initially presents an atomistic understanding of reality that is represented by an ideal language with the help of truth functional logic. It also shows what can be clearly said and what cannot be. The metaphysical truth or the mystical can be only shown. Resolute interpretation warns the readers of *Tractatus* that they must throw away the ladder of nonsensical propositions of metaphysics and mystical after grasping the very division as 6.54 suggests. The other critic that resolute readers uphold that Wittgenstein himself is very critical about theorising. Therefore, to accept the sensical/nonsensical or sayable/showable as a theory would be self-contradictory. Let us review some of the resolute readers' justification for these claims.

Cora Diamond who seems to be the pioneer of the alternative reading of *Tractatus* uses a typical term against the opponent as "chickening out". She, in one of her papers, "Throwing away the ladder" addresses Peter Geach in particular to demystify the story of *Tractatus* that the essence of language or reality cannot be said or can be shown is only to understand the limit. But after the aphorism 6.54, readers are expected to throw away the ladder. However, standard readers still hold the thesis of nonsense or the part of showable very strongly which is what she calls as "chickening out." "To chicken out is to pretend to throw away the ladder while standing firmly, or as firmly as one can, on it" (Diamond 1988:20). Diamond believes that the old Wittgensteinians (standard readers) have not really got hold of the aphorism 6.54. Knowingly they are convicted to their position which holds a metaphysical thesis that there is an essential feature of reality and the transcendental categories that cannot be said even if Wittgenstein himself asks us to throw away the ladder. Diamond's interpretation claims that there is no other way of making sense of the "nonsense" as standard readers commit to make a significant sense of the "nonsense." Therefore, unsayable is clearly unsayable.

James Conant explicitly discusses the "nonsense" (unsinning) of the aphorism 6.54. He thinks Wittgenstein was influenced by Frege. He says,

Mere nonsense is simply unintelligible—it expresses no thought. Substantial nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way—it expresses a logically incoherent thought. According to the substantial conception, these two kinds of nonsense are logically distinct: the former is mere gibberish, whereas the latter involves (what commentators on the *Tractatus* are fond of calling) a "violation of logical syntax." The austere conception, on the other hand, holds that mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is. Along with these two different conceptions of nonsense go two different conceptions of elucidation: according to the substantial conception, the task of elucidation is to "show" something which cannot be said; according to the austere conception, it is to show that we are prone to an illusion of meaning something when we mean nothing. The *Tractatus* is standardly read as championing the substantial conception (Conant 2000: 176-7).

The metaphysical readers have emphasized the second kind of substantial nonsense that seems to be intelligible but logically incoherent. Conant's justification lies in the following lines,

In §6.54, Wittgenstein does not ask his reader here to “grasp” the “thoughts” which his nonsensical propositions seek to convey. He does not call upon the reader to understand his sentences, but rather to understand *him*, namely the author and the kind of activity in which he is engaged— one of elucidation (Conant 2000: 198).

And after doing so Wittgenstein suggests to throw away the ladder which means he cautions readers not to engage in the things which are nonsensical.

So, the resolute readers do not have any problem with the standard readers as long as they only identify the ineffable. However, after identification, they must not be engaged in some sort of metaphysical enquiry to which resolute readers are of the opposite opinion. The ultimate suggestion for how to read *Tractatus* from resolute readers is nothing but to throw away the ladder. This is no doubt a tremendous development in the last three decades as long as Wittgensteinian scholarship is concerned. Moreover, it is not attempted here to counter the resolute reading as such. I would pursue the metaphysical reading from a normative perspective that how Wittgenstein was not only tormented to uphold a method but was also disoriented with the idea of modernity. This shall be elaborated in the last segment of the paper. There is however another important way of reading *TLP* as suggested by Marie McGinn.

McGinn tries to dismiss both the views of standard as well as resolute readers’ claim that making significant sense of “nonsense” and considering nonsense as mere nonsense. She believes that it is elucidation that Wittgenstein was primarily concerned about. Elucidation is a philosophical activity that does not claim to establish substantial theories rather to clarify different concepts and thoughts. She remarks,

It is in just this sense that Wittgenstein’s remarks are to be understood as elucidatory: their utility and significance are exhausted by their power to get the reader to see something familiar and every day in a new light. Once the change in the reader’s perception of pictures has been brought about, the remarks drop away, for they have no factual or descriptive content to sustain them (McGinn 1999:502).

McGinn seems to be influenced by Wittgenstein’s later work *Philosophical Investigations* where she is too much preoccupied with philosophical illuminations. The elucidatory reading of *Tractatus* is methodological for her. However, with these interpretational debates, whether one can still seek for some kind of a metaphysical reading in *TLP* is a question to be pondered here.

4. The Possibility of Metaphysics

Tractatus may have different, quite opposite, and legitimate interpretations. However, it can be argued that Wittgenstein attempted to *show* which he himself cautioned that these things cannot be said clearly. The whole idea of *sayable* is tied with truth functional logic that if it can be said it has to be either true or false in relation to the world. There are two different kinds of categories i.e. 1. The essential feature of reality or language i.e. “the logical form” and logic itself, 2. The limits such as self, God, ethics, and so on. Both these categories cannot

be said (in *Tractatarin* sense which includes only true or false propositions as sayable or intelligible propositions). It is an open question to the scholars of philosophy or particularly of Wittgenstein that “what is the nature of philosophy”. Is philosophy like social or natural sciences only concerned about the empirical phenomenon of reality or something else can be discussed meaningfully as philosophical subject matters? It is fundamental to discuss what should be or is the subject matter of philosophy. Is it the fundamental nature of reality that bothers philosophers, or is it an enquiry into “knowledge” that keeps philosophers busy, or is it an “ought” question or something else? There are in fact many issues strictly disciplinary or interdisciplinary that buy the attention of philosophers.

Tractatus does answer these questions. It mentions just before the much-debated aphorism 6.54 about to keep the ladder or to throw away it.

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, 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. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—this method would be the only strictly correct one. TLP 6.53

If metaphysical statements have to be rejected because they cannot be said, what is left to philosophy is only propositions of natural sciences. The above aphorism is a corollary to anti-philosophy if we take the aphorism literally. However, Wittgenstein might have expressed it ironically because he has realised that it is difficult, having an understanding of the limit, to make others convinced of the possibility of metaphysical statements in philosophy.

It may be remarked that this framework of *sayable* and *showable* tries to divide the philosophical problems into two different structures of metaphysics. The sayable is related to the immanent nature of metaphysics. The showable is related to the transcendent nature of metaphysics. The philosophical questions which deal with the very structure of the world which Wittgenstein starts with can be attempted to answer through language and thereby he develops the much-celebrated picture theory of language. On the other hand, it is the limit of the world or language which cannot be expressed in language that opens the possibility of transcendent metaphysical understandings. But once we start overlapping these two notions we are left with many unwarranted philosophical difficulties.

TLP provides an immanent as well as transcendental view of reality. It discusses immanent metaphysics as far as the description of the structure of the world is concerned. But the showable aspect of the text is definitely metaphysical in a transcendental sense if one discounts the anti-metaphysical reading of it. Wittgenstein, in his writings, was inclined towards metaphysical issues not because of logical compulsion but, I shall claim here, because of moral compulsions. This is connected with his apathy towards the modern scientific view and towards life and world.

The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do not repeat themselves. It is not absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately

be known; there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are (Wittgenstein 1980:56).

Wittgenstein's approach towards understanding the nature of reality is not guided by scientific knowledge; rather it is guided by the limits of scientific knowledge. Metaphysics thus has emerged out of the realization that everything does not end with science and there is the realm of truth beyond science. There is a particular reason for underplaying Wittgenstein's understanding of metaphysics in our age. Hilmy rightly remarks:

There is a deep irony in Wittgenstein's struggle against the scientific intellectual fashions of our age- an irony easily overlooked, but perhaps even more easily misconstrued. A silent feature of the scientific intellectual current of our century has been its opposition to traditional metaphysics (Hilmy 1987:221).

It is perhaps not needed to defend traditional metaphysics in the present context and Wittgenstein does not seem to be doing that either but what is important to take away from *TLP* is that there is some kind of inescapability from metaphysical thinking. Just because modernity that favours a particular kind of scientific intellectual fashion and radically opposes traditional metaphysics does not mean that one needs to shy away from metaphysical thinking. Wittgenstein strongly criticises modern civilisation. He, however, does not discuss the traditional metaphysics as the rationalists had described. But he does metaphysics in his own way and that can be perhaps comprehended if we pay attention to the idea of *nonsense*.

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