Introduction

dichotomy between science and interpretation, which allows each way of speaking to realize the possibilities of clarity and perspicuity appropriate to it, and which allows each conceptual problem to be solved with the tools that it calls for, in the language-game which is its proper home. Long ago, Peter Winch also pointed in the direction of such a possibility:

The scientist, for instance, tries to make the world more intelligible; but so do the historian, the religious prophet, and the artist; so too does the philosopher... It is clear that in very many important ways, the objectives of each of them differ from the objectives of any of the others... But it does not follow from this that we are just punting when we speak of the activities of all these enquirers in terms of the notion of making things intelligible. That no more follows than does a similar conclusion with regard to the word 'game' when Wittgenstein shows us that there is no set of properties common and peculiar to all the activities correctly so called... On my view, then, the philosophy of science will be concerned with the kind of understanding sought and conveyed by the scientist; the philosophy of religion will be concerned with the way in which religion attempts to present an intelligible picture of the world; and so on... The purpose of such philosophical enquiries will be to contribute to our understanding of what is involved in the concept of intelligibility, so that we may better understand what it means to call reality intelligible.17

It is just such a conception of understanding, one which takes into account the unities and differences between its manifold forms, that Winch was centrally concerned to explicate, in various ways, throughout much of his writing. With affection and respect, we dedicate this volume to his memory.


I

Two Conceptions of Die Überwindung der Metaphysik
Carnap and Early Wittgenstein

James Conant

For me personally, Wittgenstein was perhaps the philosopher who, besides Russell and Frege, had the greatest influence on my thinking.

Rudolf Carnap, "Intellectual Autobiography"

I cannot imagine that Carnap should have so completely and utterly misunderstood the last sentences of my book—and therefore the fundamental conception of the whole book.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, letter to Moritz Schlick, 8 August 1935

This paper has two aims: first, to show that if most commentators on Wittgenstein are correct in the views that they attribute to Wittgenstein, then Carnap is a far more important philosopher (and one whose thought is far closer to that of Wittgenstein) than is generally acknowledged in such commentaries, and second, to suggest that the views that are thus attributed to Wittgenstein in such commentaries, although they are to be found in some of the writings of Carnap, are not to be found in the writings of Wittgenstein—not even those of early Wittgenstein. In broadest outline, the sort of reading of Wittgenstein I have in mind might be put as follows: Wittgenstein seeks to show that the utterances of metaphysicians are nonsense by exposing them to be logically (or conceptually) flawed, where these flaws are to be traced to specifiable infringements upon the conditions of meaningful discourse. Put this broadly, the preceding summary can serve equally well as an outline of currently standard readings of Wittgenstein's early work or of his later work. If Wittgenstein's early work is under discussion, it will be said that these infringements arise through violations of "the principles of logical syntax"; if Wittgenstein's later work is under discussion, it will
be said that they arise through violations of "the rules of grammar." What such readings have in common is the idea that Wittgenstein seeks a method which would enable him (a) to expose the sentences of metaphysicians as intrinsically nonsensical, and (b) through the application of such a method to demarcate meaningful from meaningless discourse. Such readings attribute to Wittgenstein a particular conception of nonsense—which I will call the substantial conception of nonsense. This conception of nonsense distinguishes between two different kinds of nonsense: mere nonsense and substantial nonsense. 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" or (what commentators on Wittgenstein's later work are fond of calling) a "violation of grammar." The substantial conception of nonsense can be contrasted with another conception of nonsense which I will call the autere conception of nonsense. According to the latter, mere nonsense is, from a logical point of view, the only kind of nonsense there is.

The two aims of this paper stated above can now be rearticulated as three: first, to show that Carnap's method of philosophical analysis presupposes the substantial conception of nonsense; second, to argue that the method of Wittgenstein's Tractatus can be understood only in the light of his commitment to an autere conception of nonsense; third, to suggest that the Tractatus seeks to expose as a misunderstanding the very "understanding of the logic of our language" most commonly attributed to it.

CARNAP ON THE OVERCOMING OF METAPHYSICS THROUGH THE LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE

Carnap repeatedly explicitly acknowledges that his understanding of the nature of metaphysics is enormously indebted to the Tractatus and

1 I think that this is true of Carnap's work from Der Logische Aufbau der Welt on, but considerations of space dictate that I restrict my argument in this paper to a particular phase of Carnap's career.

2 I think the same claim can be made with regard to the method of philosophical clarification practiced in Wittgenstein's later work, but considerations of space also preclude me from defending that claim here.

Die Überwindung der Metaphysik

that he takes himself to be borrowing from (what he takes to be) ideas of the Tractatus in elaborating his own successive attempts to mount a critique of metaphysics. Due to the considerable influence of Carnap's own ideas on several generations of analytic philosophers, subsequent commentators on the Tractatus have, often unknowingly, read Wittgenstein's work through Carnap's spectacles, construing the Tractatus's often quite distinctive notions along more familiar Carnpian lines and importing additional Carnpian terminology to fill in the gaps in Wittgenstein's original exposition.

Before I attempt to illustrate this, it should be noted that, for the purposes of this essay, I am going to focus narrowly on one particular phase of Carnap's thought. Carnap's thought about metaphysics—about what metaphysics is, what gives rise to it, and what means should be employed to eliminate it—passes through at least the following four broad phases: (1) the Der Logische Aufbau der Welt phase, (2) the (comparatively brief) verificationist phase, (3) the logical syntax phase, and (4) the semantic frameworks phase. As Carnap's own philosophical views evolve so does his understanding of what is most significant and enduring in Wittgenstein's contribution to philosophy. With the transition to each of these phases of his thought, Carnap's understanding of both the sources and of the proper mode of treatment of metaphysics undergoes, each time, a considerable evolution. Nonetheless, Carnap continues, throughout all four of these phases of his thought, to express considerable indebtedness to Wittgenstein—and, in particular, to Wittgenstein's Tractatus—not only for having shown that metaphysical problems are Scheinprobleme, but for having shown what kind of problems such problems are and how they are to be diagnosed and dissolved. Thus a comparison of the sort that this paper seeks to furnish—between Carnap's critique of metaphysics and that of the Tractatus—must not pretend to be able to treat Carnap's thought on these matters as a single homogeneous whole. One must distinguish between the various distinct Tractatus-inspired projects that Carnap pursues in the course of his career, and examine the relation between the Tractatus and each of these phases of Carnap's thought separately.

3 That Carnap took his views on what metaphysics is and how it is to be overcome to be influenced by Wittgenstein is evident from his generous references and acknowledgments to the Tractatus. See e.g. The Logical Structure of the World (Berkeley University of California Press, 1969), esp. pgs. 129-152; 197-295; The Logical Syntax of Language (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927), esp. pgs. 282-41; and "Intellectual Autobiography," in P. A. Schilpp, ed., The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap (Carbondale, Ill.: Open Court, 1941), esp. pgs. 249-41.

4 This overview could be considerably refined: within each of these phases (especially the last), Carnap's philosophy undergoes further shifts in doctrine.
It would be an interesting project to trace the successive shifts in Carnap’s view of what the Tractatus should be credited with having anticipated in each of his own successive understandings of the proper method of exposing and eliminating metaphysics. But that is not the project of the present paper. The aim of this paper is to exploit certain features of Carnap’s misunderstanding of Wittgenstein as a foil to furthering our understanding of Wittgenstein. It will therefore suffice, for the comparatively limited purposes of this paper, if we confine ourselves to an examination of the third of the above phases of Carnap’s thought—the logical syntax phase—and, primarily, to the earliest expression of that phase of his thought. The three most important publications in this phase of Carnap’s thought are "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language," "Philosophy and Logical Syntax," and "The Logical Syntax of Language." All three of these works purport to be developing and applying the method of philosophical elucidation that Wittgenstein advanced in the Tractatus. There are, however, substantial differences of doctrine and method across these three closely allied works. In what follows, my references to Carnap will pertain only to his views in "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language," unless otherwise noted.

The word "elimination" in the title of Carnap’s essay is Arthur Pap’s translation of the German word Überwindung, which might be better translated "overcoming" or even "subjugation." In the final sentence of §6.54, it is said of the reader of the Tractatus that er muß diese Sätze überwinden: he must overcome [or defeat] these sentences—the sen-

1 As already indicated, Carnap, throughout this phase, took himself to be following Wittgenstein’s lead: "It was Wittgenstein who first exhibited the close connection between the logic of science (or ‘philosophy’, as he calls it) and syntax ... . He has shown that all the so-called sentences of metaphysics are nonsense." (The Logical Syntax of Language, p. 212).


4 Carnap thus, interestingly, sits in upon and takes up into the title of his essay the very word (from the closing lines of the Tractatus) which—once translated into English or French—has often been ascribed to him as a commentator’s advance reading of the Tractatus diametrically opposed to Carnap’s own. Pears and McGuinness translate überwinden as "transcend," but they (what I call in "The Method of the Tractatus" the "indefeasibility interpretation" of the work—on which it is to be considered a reading which is reinforced through their translation of scheitern in the next sentence (which calls merely for silence) as an injunction to the reader to "to pass over [something] in silence" (see "The Method of

tences which serve as elucidations in that book are, eventually, to be recognized by the reader as nonsense. How faithful an inheritance of Wittgenstein’s project (to reach his reader’s to "overcome" the sentences of the Tractatus) is Carnap’s project of "overcoming" metaphysics? In a footnote to the essay, Carnap writes: "For the logical and epistemological conception which underlies our exposition, but can only be briefly intimated here, cf. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus." In order to begin to get a sense both of how Carnap takes his own views in this essay to derive from Wittgenstein and how standard readings of the Tractatus owe more than they think to Carnap’s reading of that work, consider §4.403 of the Tractatus:

Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but nonsensical ... Most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language."

On what has become the standard interpretation of the Tractatus, this passage is interpreted to mean (i) that "the nonsensical pseudo-propositions of the philosophers" are nonsensical because they "violate the Tractatus," in Eric H. Reck, ed., From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). These mistranslations are mirrored in Gillies-Gonzalez Granger’s French translation of the Tractatus (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) in which überwinden is rendered dépasser ("to go beyond") and scheitern is rendered garder le silence ("to keep silent" [in the sense of observing a rule of silence]). These translations are philosophically consequential: talk of "transcending" or "going beyond" only makes sense where there is a beyond, and talk of "passing [something] over in silence" or "guarding one’s silence [with respect to something]" only makes sense where breaking one’s silence is a possibility. My aim in noting these counter-intuitive features of certain standard translations of the Tractatus is not to give aid and comfort to Carnap’s reading of the work, but merely to prepare the way for the claim that these translations foreclose the reading of the text for which this essay as a whole is concerned to make room—a reading according to which the work as a whole aims to show that much "transcendence" of "the limits of language" (of the sort which these translations invite us to imagine is possible) is revealed to be a pernicious description of a possible state of affairs upon which we have failed to confer a Sinn, thus revealing that (as Wittgenstein’s Parole puts it) "what lies on the other side of the (supposed) Sinn will be einfach Unsinn."
rules of logical syntax,” (a) that this is what philosophers need to be brought to see about their pseudo-propositions, (b) that this requires that they be instructed in logical syntax (so as to be able to identify such violations), and hence (c) that "the misunderstanding of the logic of our language" which is the source of the confusions of philosophers is to be traced to their present inability to identify such violations. This (standard) interpretation of the Tractatus is broadly Carnapian: it takes the Tractarian project of uncovering nonsense (Unsinn) to be a project of uncovering instances of substantial nonsense, it takes Tractarian logical syntax to be a combinatorial theory governing the legitimate employment of signs or symbols, and it takes Tractarian elucidation to consist in the specification of ill-formed sequences of signs or symbols. In the following pages we will be concerned to recover the original sense of each of these three pieces of Tractarian terminology—"nonsense," ‘logi-
cal syntax’, ‘elucidation’—each of which has, due to the Carnapian inflection it has acquired, become all but inaudible to the ears of con-
temporary commentary. We will proceed by examining the senses of each of the terms as they respectively figure in the Carnapian and Tractarian projects of Überwindung der Metaphysik.11

Let us begin with Carnap on nonsense. Carnap distinguishes two kinds of unsinnige pseudo-propositions:

(i) those which contain a meaningless word or words;
(ii) those which contain only meaningful words, but put together in such a way that no meaning results.12

I will refer to these as type (i) nonsense and type (ii) nonsense respectively. Metaphysically nonsense, Carnap thinks, can occasionally be traced to an unwitting attraction to type (i) nonsense. He speculates that some stretches of metaphysical discourse about "God" are of this sort. They involve a simple failure to settle on any specific meaning for

11 I have no wish to deny that EMLAL contains a number of ideas that represent a self-conscious effort on Carnap's part to depart from what he takes to be Wangensteen's teaching. My discussion of Carnap's essay will be intentionally and unpomposely par-
tial, focusing only on those aspects of its doctrine which rhyme with aspects of accept-
ed interpretations of the Tractatus.

12 Here is Carnap on the two kinds of pseudo-statements:

There are . . . those pseudo-statements which contain a meaningless word. But there is also a second kind of pseudo-statement. They consist of meaningful words, but the words are put together in such a way that nevertheless no mean-
ing results. The syntax of a language specifies which combinations of words are admissible and which inadmissible. The grammatical syntax of natural languages, however, does not fulfill the task of elimination of senseless combinations of words in all cases. (EMLAL, p. 60)

the term 'God'. In such cases, the metaphysician, in point of fact, sim-
ply does not know what he means by 'God' but nonetheless continues to employ the term under the impression that it does have a definite and familiar meaning.13 The tools of logical syntax only play an indirect role in the exposure of type (i) nonsense. Such an employment of the term 'God' can be seen to be nonsense from the fact that it fails to satisfy "the first requirement of logic": the requirement that one be able to specify how it occurs meaningfully in elementary statements of the form "x is a God." The diagnosis and cure of type (i) nonsense does not require any detailed attention to the logical structure of the speaker's propositions; and, indeed, strictly speaking, type (i) nonsense has no (fully) determinate logical syntax. All that is required to "overcome metaphysics" in such a case is to bring the speaker to realize that she is unable to provide a specification of the meaning of the word in ques-
tion. Carnap is of the view that an unwitting attraction to type (i) non-
sense accounts for a certain portion of the pseudo-statements of meta-
physicians. But, more often, a metaphysician does know what he means by each of her words. When a speaker is able to specify what each of her words mean (i.e. how it occurs in elementary propositions), and yet sense fails to result from the combination of her words, then the source of the failure is to be traced (not to an absence of meaning on the part of one of the constituents of her propositions, but rather) to the illicit character of the combination—to its being a case of type (ii) non-
sense. Type (i) nonsense is mere nonsense; it is literally unintelligible: it contains (at a point where something with meaning should be) a void. Type (ii) nonsense is substantial nonsense; it is not literally unintelli-
gible: we know what each of the parts of the proposition mean—the trouble lies with the composite which they form. Carnap thinks it is often not evident to speakers of a natural language that type (ii) sequences are meaningless because the sequences in question do not violate the excessively permissive combinatorial rules of ordinary grammar. Their accord with the rules of ordinary grammar masks from view their true underlying character. The point of translating a type (ii)

13 Carnap is not of the view that all discourse involving the term 'God' is of this sort. He distinguishes (EMLAL, pp. 66–67) between four sorts of usage: (a) type (i) nonsense; (b) the mythological usage—in which 'God' has a determinate meaning, occurs in empir-
ically verifiable statements, and refers to a kind of physical being with specifiable prop-
erties whose possibility and existence is a possible topic of scientific inquiry; (c) the theological usage which involves an oscillation between uses (a) and (b); and (d) cases in which a definition of 'God' is furnished but involves type (ii) nonsense.
sequence of words into logical notation is to bring to the surface what natural-language syntax obscures from view. In the case of type (ii) nonsense, what is classified as nonsense is, strictly speaking, not a grammatical or logical unit of a language, but a mere mark on paper (or noise) or sequence of marks (or noises). What about the case of type (ii) nonsense? What is here classified as nonsense—a string of marks (or noises) or what the string of words says (something with semantic content)? In the third paragraph of his essay, Carnap writes:

In saying that the so-called statements [Sätze] of metaphysics are meaningless, we intend this word in its strictest sense... In the strict sense... a sequence of words [Wortreihen] is meaningless if it does not, within a specified language, constitute a statement [gar keinen Satz bildet]. It may happen that such a sequence of words looks like a statement [Satz] at first glance; in that case we call it a pseudo-statement [Scheinsätze]. Our thesis, now, is that logical analysis reveals the alleged statements [Sätze] of metaphysics to be pseudo-statements [Scheinsätze].

There are two possible readings of this passage. I will call them the weaker reading and the stronger reading respectively. In the quotation above, I have presented the text of Arthur Pap's translation of this passage. Pap's translation, on the whole, encourages the weaker reading. Thus translated, the passage might appear to claim that the problem with metaphysical propositions is that, given what they mean, they fail to assert anything—they fall short of being statements. This would suggest that the class of "sequences of words" properly classified as "propositions" is wider than that of "statements." We see what the parts of the metaphysician's statement mean, but they do not add up to a coherent whole and therefore fail to state anything. Some propositions have what it takes to be a statement, some do not; metaphysical propositions are of this latter sort. Carnap's original German seems, however, to invite a stronger reading. Carnap (in the original German) appears to wish to claim that the so-called "propositions" (Sätze) of metaphysics are not even propositions; they are only apparent propositions (Scheinsätze)—mere strings of words masquerading as propositions. When Carnap says that they are meaningless, he "intend[s] this word in its strictest sense"; and the import of this would appear to be that, in the strict sense, only "a sequence of words" (Wortreihen) can be meaningless—not a proposition. A sequence of words is meaningless, if, within some specified language, it fails so much as to form a proposi-
Let us take as examples the following sequences of words:

1. "Caesar us and"
2. "Caesar is a prime number"

The word sequence (1) is formed counter-syntactically; the rules of syntax require that the third position be occupied, not by a conjunction, but by a predicate, hence by a noun (with article) or by an adjective. The word sequence "Caesar is a general", e.g., is formed in accordance with the rules of syntax. It is a meaningful word sequence, a genuine sentence. But, now, word sequence (2) is likewise syntactically correct, for it has the same grammatical form as the sentence just mentioned. Nevertheless (2) is meaningless. "Prime number" is a predicate of numbers; it can be neither affirmed nor denied of a person. Since (2) looks like a statement yet is not a statement, does not assert anything, expresses neither a true nor a false proposition, we call this word sequence a "pseudo-statement". The fact that the rules of grammatical syntax are not violated easily seduces one at first glance into the erroneous opinion that one still has to do with a statement, albeit a false one. But "a is a prime number" is false if and only if a is divisible by a natural number different from a and from 1; evidently it is illicit to put here "Caesar" for "a". This example has been so chosen that the nonsense is easily detectable. Many so-called statements of metaphysics are not so easily recognized to be pseudo-statements. The fact that natural languages allow the formation of meaningless sequences of words without violating the rules of grammar, indicates that grammatical syntax is, from a logical point of view, inadequate.\footnote{EMLAI, pp. 67-8.}

We are offered two "sentences" here: (1) "Caesar us and" and (2) "Caesar is a prime number." The first is an example of something that is not even well formed by the lights of the syntax of natural language; the latter is well formed by those lights but nonetheless involves a violation of (the more stringent principles of a proper) logical syntax. In considering the example which Carnap himself here offers of a violation of logical syntax—"Caesar is a prime number"—what kind of a thing are we meant to be considering? Are we meant to be considering a mere sequence of words or what this sequence of words says? Carnap's interest here is evidently not confined to the words considered as mere marks on paper. He wants us to consider this as a sequence each of whose constituents has a determinate meaning. He wants to say that in ordinary language it is possible to form the nonsensical sentence (c) by combining the underlined portions of the (meaningful) propositions (a) and (b) below:

\footnote{This is by no means an uncontroversial example of nonsense: Freg would have regarded it not as nonsensical, but as simply false.}
James Conant

EARLY WITTGENSTEIN'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN SIGN AND SYMBOL

Here are the first two of Frege's three principles (which he presents at the beginning of his Grundlagen der Arithmetik):
[1] always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective;
[2] never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition.

The methodological import of these principles is developed in the Tractatus through the claim that in ordinary language it is often the case that the same sign symbolizes in different ways. The distinction between sign and symbol as it is drawn in the Tractatus is introduced as part of the commentary on §3.3, which is the Tractatus's reformulations of Frege's second principle.15 Section 3.3 runs as follows: "Only the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning." Then, beginning immediately thereafter (with §3.31), comes the following commentary:

Every part of a proposition which characterizes its sense I call an expression (a symbol).

(The proposition itself is an expression.)

Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression.

An expression is the mark of a form and a content.

An expression presupposes the forms of all propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions.

([§3.31–3.311])

An expression has meaning only in a proposition. ([§3.314])

I conceive the proposition—like Frege and Russell—as a function of the expressions contained in it. ([§3.318])

The sign is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the senses. ([§3.31])

Two different symbols can therefore have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common—they then signify in different ways. ([§3.317])

I say "reformulation of Frege's second principle" (rather than restatement of it) because the Tractatus is concerned to reform Frege's distinction between Sinn and Bedeutung. Section 3.3 is worked as it is precociously in order to mark a departure from Frege in this regard. In the following discussion, I will ignore this difference in Frege's and Wittgenstein's understandings of the context principle.

---

15 A number of commentators have attributed to the Tractatus the view that a special mental act (of intending to mean a particular object by a particular word) is what endows a name with meaning (see e.g. P. M. S. Hacker, Insight and Illusion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 73–83; Max Black, A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 114–115; Norman Malcolm, Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticisms of His Early Thought (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 67–82). There is, however, no reference anywhere in the Tractatus to a distinct act of meaning through which a Bedeutung is conferred on a sign. The passage from the Tractatus most commonly adduced to provide a semblance of sexual support for this psychologistic attribution is §3.31, which Peirce and McGuinness translate as follows: "The method of projection is to think of the sense of the proposition." So translated, this remark can be taken to refer to an act of thinking and to ascribe an explanatory role to such an act. The Ogden translation is more faithful: "The method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition." Rush Rhees glories this (quite properly, I think) as: "The method of projection is what we mean by "thinking" or "understanding" the sense of the proposition." Rhees comments: "Peirce and McGuinness read it [i.e. §3.31] ... as though the remark were to explain the expression 'method of projection'. [On the contrary], 'projection', which is a logical operation, is ... to explain 'das Denken des Satzes-Sinnes'. The 're' after 'Projektionsmethode' might have been italicized" (Discussions of Wittgenstein (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 78). Rhees's point here is that the last sentence of §3.31 has the same structure as e.g. the last sentence of §3.30: the expression is on the left and the explanation is on the right—the other way around. (Acknowledging the justice of Rhees's criticism, and finding it more natural in English to place the explanation on the left, McGuinness later recanted his and Peirce's original translation of §3.31 and proposed the following translation instead: "Thinking the sense into the proposition is the method of projection." McGuinness then goes on to offer the following useful summary of the actual point of the passage: "Thinking the sense into the proposition is nothing other than so using the words of the sentence that their logical behavior is that of the desired proposition." "On the So-Called Realism of the Tractatus," in Irving Block, ed., Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 69–70.) The point being made here in the work about "thinking" is an illustration of a general feature of Wittgenstein's method. What the Tractatus does throughout is to explicate putatively psychological explanations in terms of logical explanations. The Malcolm/Black/Hacker reading of §3.31 takes Wittgenstein to be explaining one of the central logical notions of the book in terms of a psychological notion, thus utterly missing the way Wittgenstein here takes himself to be elaborating and building upon Frege's first two principles.

Although the notion of Sinn which figures in the context principle (only the Sinn has sense; only in the context of a Sinn has a name meaning) is of a certain kind of a
Wittgenstein says, "is that in the symbol which is perceptible by the senses" (what is now sometimes called the sign design). The symbol is a logical unit, it expresses something which propositions—as opposed to propositional signs—have in common.69 Once transposed into a proper logical notation, it would be manifest which of the following three propositions have a propositional symbol in common:

(a) Socrates was bald.
(b) Socrates, who taught Plato, was bald.
(c) A philosopher whose teacher was Socrates was bald.

It would become clear, from the manner in which these three propositional symbols were expressed in the notation, that (a) and (b) have a propositional symbol in common (though they have no three-word sequence in common), and that (a) and (c) have no propositional symbol in common (despite their having the sequence of words 'Socrates was bald' in common). Taken together, (a) and (b) furnish an example of how in ordinary language different sequences of signs can have the symbol in common; and, taken together, (a) and (c) furnish an example of how in ordinary language the same sequence of signs can have no symbol in common, and thus how the same signs can belong to different symbols. Wittgenstein comments on these features of ordinary language:

symbol, the term 'Satz' in the Tractatus flows between meaning (1) a propositional symbol [as e.g. in §§3.22 and §3.28] and (2) a propositional sign [as e.g. in §§3.47 and §6.54]. It is important to the method of the Tractatus that the recognition that certain apparent cases of (1) are merely cases of (2) be a recognition that the reader achieves on his own. Consequently, at certain junctures, the method of the Tractatus requires that the reader remain provisionally neutral as between (1) and (2).

69 Wittgenstein's notion of an expression or symbol (that which is common to a set of propositions)—as opposed to a sign (that which is common to what Fregie calls forms of words)—builds on Frege's idea that what determines the logical segmentation of a sentence are the inferential relations which obtain between the judgment that the sentence expresses and other judgments. Language (Sprache) is Wittgenstein's term for the totality of such propositional symbols; and logical space is his term for the resulting overall network of inferential relations within which each of these propositional symbols has its life. Section 3.28 was based on the notion of Sätze as propositional symbols developed in §§5.51ff. ("The thought is the sign of a sign. The totality of Sätze is the language.") Language (Sprache) in the Tractatus refers to the totality of possible propositional symbols. One might think of this as Wittgenstein's attempt to follow Frege's example (in his exchange with Kenny about concepts) by "keeping to the strictly logical use" of a word, here the word 'language'. It is trivially true, if one employs this idiom, that there is only one language—though there are, of course, countless alternative systems of signs which may differ widely from one another in their respective expressive powers (and thus in how much and which aspects of the Sprache they are each able to express).

Die Überwindung der Metaphysik

In the language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways—and therefore belongs to two different symbols—or that two words, which signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition. Thus the word "is" appears as the copula, as the sign of equality, and as the expression of existence; "to exist" as an intransitive verb like "to go"; "identical" as an adjective; we speak of something but also of the fact of something happening.

(In the proposition "Green is green"—where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective—these words have not merely different meanings but they are different symbols.)(§3.323)

It is worth elaborating how Wittgenstein's example in the last paragraph illustrates the point of the first paragraph of §3.323. The propositional sign "Green is green" can be naturally taken as symbolizing in any of three different ways41—and hence can be understood as an expression for any one of three different thoughts:

(a) Mr. Green is green
(b) Mr. Green is Mr. Green
(c) The color green is the color green

One way of noticing how the same sign symbolizes differently in each of these three cases is to focus on the word 'is'. In each of the propositions expressing each of these three different thoughts, the sign 'is' symbolizes a different logical relation. In (a), the sign 'is' symbolizes the copula (a relation between a concept and an object); in (b) we have the 'is' of identity (a relation between objects); in (c), we have the 'is' of coextensionality (a relation between concepts).42 In the ordinary language

41 The ensuing expression of this example only really works if we assume all the letters of the sentence to be capitalized so that we have no orthographic clues as to when the expression 'GREEN' is being used as the proper name of a person and when as a concept expression.
42 The sequence of (a), (b), and (c) nicely brings out a further asymmetry between sign and symbol. In the rendition of (b) into logical notation, we might think of the sign 'is' as corresponding to the sign 'a' in the ordinary language version of (b); that is, we might think of these two signs ("is", "a") as symbolizing the same relation (the relation of identity). But in the rendition of (a) into logical notation, there is no candidate for a sign that corresponds to 'is'—there is here nothing which is the sign which symbolizes the copula. The Tractatus draws five morals from this: (M1) a method of symbolizing is not simply a matter of a sign naming an item of a particular logical category; (M2) a symbol is expressed not simply through a sign but through a mode of arrangement of signs; (M3) not every logically significant aspect of a mode of arrangement of signs corresponds to an argument place (into which a different sign can be substituted); (M4) it is not the case that each method of symbolizing requires the employment of a distinct sign to express the method of symbolizing (a method of symbolizing can be expressed through a mode of arrangement of signs, such as the method of symbolizing the copula
version of (a)—"where the first word is a proper name and the last an adjective"—‘green’ can be seen to be not merely ambiguous with respect to its meaning (the way ‘bank’ is in ‘The bank is on the left bank’), but ambiguous with respect to its logical type; ‘these words have not merely different meanings but they are different symbols.’ The point of the example is to show us that we cannot gather from the notation of ordinary language how a given sign (e.g. ‘green’, or ‘is’) symbolizes in a given instance. Wittgenstein suddenly follows this example with the observation: ‘Thus there easily arise the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full)’ (§3,134). In a proper Begriffsschrift, a different sign would express each of these ‘different methods of symbolizing,’ thus enabling us to identify the sources of certain confusions. In §3,134, Wittgenstein immediately goes on to say that in order ‘to avoid such errors’ we require a symbolism which obeys the rules of logical grammar.

In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein argues that there will always be room for a question as to whether a given sign, when it occurs in two different sentences of ordinary language, is symbolizing the same way in each of those occurrences. And this question cannot be settled simply by appealing to the fact that the same word (sign) ordinarily occurs (symbolizes) as a name28 nor by appealing to the fact that if I were asked what I meant when I uttered one of those sentences I would reply that I meant the word in the same sense as I have on other occasions; nor by appealing to the fact that, on this occasion of utterance, exert a special effort to mean the word in the same way as before. How can this question be settled? Wittgenstein says: ‘In order to recognize the symbol in the sign we must consider the context of significant use’ (§3,136).

We must ask ourselves on what occasion we would utter this sentence and what, in that context of use, we would then mean by it.

in modern logical notation: (M4) for certain methods of symbolizing, the employment of a distinct sign is required.

---

28 This is not to claim that it is possible to understand a sentence, if none of its constituent signs symbolize in the manner in which they symbolize in other sentences (Hence Tractatus, §4,10: “A proposition must use old expressions to communicate new.”). It is only to claim that not all of the constituent signs must symbolize in a prece- 29 dented fashion, but an unprejudiced usage of a sign will only be intelligible if the con- 30 stituent fashion in which they are used. 31

---

31 One standard way of contrasting early and later Wittgenstein is to say that later Wittgenstein rejected his earlier (allegedly truth-conditional) account of meaning—on which considerations of use have no role to play in fixing the meaning of an expression—in favor of what gets called "a see theory of meaning." Our brief examination

---

of §3,136 should already make one wary of such a story. The popularity of this story rests largely on an additional piece of posted history, according to which the Tractatus advances the doctrine that it is possible (and indeed, according to most readings, seman- 32
tically necessary) to use the meanings of names prior to and independently of their use in propositions (either through ontic definitive or through some special mental act which endows a name with meaning; see n. 31). This putative teaching of the Tractatus is standardly taken to be the primary target of the opening sections of Philosophical Investigations. But the whole point of §3,133–134 of the Tractatus is that the identity of the object referred to by a name is only fixed by the use of the name as a set of signifi- 33

The appeal to thus already plays a critical role in Wittgenstein’s early account of what determines both the meaning of a proposition as a whole and the meanings of each of its “parts.” With respect to this topic, the opening sections of Philosophical Investigations are properly seen as recapitulating and extending a critique of Russellian doctrines already begun in the Tractatus. The reason for this should be noted that Heidegger’s last sentence contains a metaphor and thus would be more faithfully rendered into English by something that contained an
James Conant

What basis does Carnap have for suspecting these statements of Heidegger's of being nonsense? One suspects that what initially brought them under a cloud of suspicion is that they are not obviously even grammatically well formed. The same word ("nothing") which ordinarily signifies a particle (used to form negative existential statements) appears in this text sometimes in the grammatical role of a substantive, sometimes in that of a verb. Carnap introduces the example by saying:

"Let us now take a look at some examples of metaphysical pseudo-statements of a kind where the violation of logical syntax is especially obvious, though they accord with historical-grammatical syntax."{27}

This nicely summarizes the two features that Carnap wants his example simultaneously to possess: first, it is well formed by the lights of ordinary grammatical syntax; second, it is comparatively obvious nonetheless that it is ill formed by the lights of a proper logical syntax. But the worry that immediately comes to mind is that the example manages to possess the second feature to the conveniently glaring degree that it does precisely because it does not possess the first. Carnap therefore goes to some lengths to attempt to demonstrate that the word 'nothing' sometimes occurs in sentences of ordinary language in a manner which might lead one to mistake it for a noun. Carnap even furnishes the reader with an elaborate chart which purports to demonstrate how someone might be misled by features of surface grammar into thinking that he was employing the word 'nothing' in a grammatically unobjectionable manner when, in reality, employing it in the logically illicit manner of a Heidegger. To mention only one of the countless problems with this "demonstration," it overlooks the fact that the syntax of ordinary German marks the distinction Carnap claims it fails to track: in order to employ a term as a substantive in German one has to capitalize it (and thus employ a term which is orthographically distinct from a term which denotes a logical particle) and Heidegger, in the proper fashion, in accordance with ordinary grammatical syntax, clearly distinguishes between his substantival and non-subsistival uses of the terms 'nichts' and 'das Nichts' in his text. But even if one takes Carnap's analysis to be sound as far as it goes, it still remains hard to see how Heidegger's text is supposed to furnish an illustration of Carnap's theory. Reading through this remarkably peculiar passage from Heidegger, one ought to be moved to expostulate: this is supposed to be an example of how metaphysical nonsense remains undetected until brought to the surface through the application of the principles of logical syntax? Whatever one thinks of its independent merits, Carnap's elaborate analysis of the different contexts in which the term 'nothing' can occur in ordinary language is scarcely credible as an account of how Heidegger is led to employ the word 'nothing' as he does here. It won't do to say of Heidegger's sentences that "the fact that the rules of the grammatical syntax of ordinary language are not violated [is what] seduces one into the erroneous opinion that one still has to do with a statement."{28} Such a diagnosis would be blind to the stunningly virtuosic character of Heidegger's employment of the word, even when judged by the allegedly comparatively permissive lights of ordinary grammatical syntax. This virtuosity renders Heidegger's text utterly unsuitable as an example of that of which it was allegedly introduced as an example: the surreptitious misuse of language. It is hard to credit the hypothesis that the author of this text has been led astray by the surface grammar of ordinary language; for precisely what puzzles and challenges us in Heidegger's assertions is their peculiar surface grammar. The disclosure that language is under some extraordinary pressure in this text does not wait on the application of the principles of logical syntax. Heidegger is evidently speaking here in an unusual way: openly forcing his reader to reflect on how his words are meant.

Carnap's analysis clings nonetheless to the supposition that Heidegger's words are employed by him in nothing other than their usual senses. The problem then becomes one of seeing how it is that this author could imagine that he was employing the words in their usual senses. Carnap sees this problem. Here is his first line of response:

In view of the gross logical errors which we find in [Heidegger's text] ... we might be led to conjecture that perhaps the word "nothing" has in Heidegger's treatise a meaning entirely different from the customary one. And this pre-supposition is further strengthened as we go on to read there that anxiety reveals the Nothing, that the Nothing itself is present as such in anxiety. For here the word "nothing" seems to refer to a certain emotional constitution, possibly of a religious sort, or something or other that underlies such emotions. If such were the case, then the mentioned logical errors ... would not pertain. But the

---

{27} EMLA, p. 69.
{28} EMLA, p. 67.
DIE ÜBERWINDUNG DER METAPHYSIK

depends upon an appeal to Heidegger's psychological intentions in employing the sign. Carnap proceeds towards his conclusion in just the manner that Frege and Wittgenstein seek to expose as confused: first, Carnap notices how the sign is used in a previous context of use; then, secondly, he attempts to establish what is meant in a subsequent context of use by appealing to an intention to employ the same sign in the same way as in the original context; and finally, he imagines that the existence of the postulated intention can fix the meaning of the sign in the subsequent context, enabling it to continue to symbolize in the same way (regardless of its logical role within the subsequent context). Carnap here succumbs to (what Frege calls) *psychologism*. Psychologism? Carnap?

The putative achievement of the identification of cases of Carnapian type (ii) nonsense can be said to involve a lapse into psychologism in this sense: it takes the meaning of a word to be fixed by something independently of its logical role in a construction to which it makes a contribution. Admittedly, no part is played in Carnap's theory by a claim to the effect that the correct way to determine what someone means is to determine something about their psychological state of mind while writing or uttering a sequence of words. Nonetheless, when Carnap claims that he knows what Heidegger must want to mean—that is, when he claims that he knows that in Heidegger's case "the combination of 'only' and 'nothing else' shows unmistakably that the word 'nothing' here has the usual meaning of a logical particle that serves for the formulation of a negative existential statement"—his ability to know this rests on a tacit appeal to Heidegger intending the word 'nothing' here to have the meaning of a logical particle in each of its several occurrences throughout this sequence of sentences. Carnap's ability to know this about Heidegger's sentences cannot rest on anything that Carnap's theory officially sanctions as a method of determining the meaning of an expression: namely, the logico-syntactic behavior of the expression in the context of a proposition. Thus, to say that Carnap succumbs to psychologism, in this extended sense of the term, is not a matter of attributing to him a commitment to a certain kind of theory—say, a theory which accounts for what it is to mean a particular expression in a particular way by appealing to a psychological act performed by the speaker of that expression, or to the presence of certain psychological associations in the mind of the speaker, and so on. Carnap, who in this respect—as in so many others—is a faithful student of Frege's, would immediately repudiate any theory which rested on such an appeal. The formulation of the charge here as one of psychologism must seem perverse, if one fails to appreciate that this formulation
invokes a particular philosophical understanding of the realm of the psychological, and with it a peculiar (Fregean and early Wittgensteinian) employment of term ‘psychological’—one which Carnap himself, following Frege, claims to adopt—in which the category of the psychological gets its content from its contrast with that of the logical.22 All extra-logical determinants of (what the metaphysician mistakes for a kind of) “meaning” are, Carnap himself declares, merely psychological. (Thus Carnap concludes that, though metaphysical pseudo-propositions lack “theoretical content,” they possess “psychological content” qua expressions of psychological feelings or attitudes.)23 Precisely because he has deprived himself of any logical basis for a segmentation of Heidegger’s sentences into their logical components, and yet persists in believing that he knows what Heidegger must mean (when he says things like “We know the nothing”), Carnap can be charged—in accordance with his own extended, Fregean use of the term ‘psychological’—with lapsing into psychologism. In this extended sense of the term ‘psychologism’, one lapses into psychologism whenever one takes oneself to be able to settle the meaning a word imports into a construction independently of the word’s logical contribution to that construction.

Even if an appeal to Heidegger’s intentions could suffice to settle what Heidegger’s sentences mean, how can Carnap be so sure that in Heidegger’s passage the sign ‘nothing’ is “intended” by Heidegger to symbolize the same way throughout its successive occurrences? How can he be sure that Heidegger’s later uses of the word do not represent the expression of an intention to employ the word ‘nothing’ in a linguistically innovative yet (potentially) intelligible manner?24 Carnap recognizes that he needs to say more here; and his way of dispensing with this worry ought to come as a surprise. We can be sure, Carnap tells us, that Heidegger means to employ the word ‘nothing’ in the aforementioned self-defeating fashion because Heidegger is someone who self-consciously aspires to speak nonsense. It is actually Heidegger’s aim, in these sentences, to (try to) jam the negative existential quantifier first into an argument place that can only accommodate an object expression, then into an argument place that can only accommodate an expression for a first-level function, and so on.25 The attribution of such an intention would be uncharitable in the absence of any evidence suggesting that Heidegger does possess such an extraordinary aim. Carnap (imagines he) possesses a way of ruling out any alternative comparatively charitable construal.26 He has evidence which shows that

22 Indeed, Carnap himself concedes that Heidegger is no longer using the sign to symbolize in the same way as in the earlier sentences in the remarkable final sentence: “The Nothing itself nothing.” In German, this sentence reads “das Nichts selbst nichts” (EMLAS, p. 233). There is simply no established usage, of any sort, for the sign ‘nichts’. Carnap remarks “[W]here we confront one of those rare cases where a new word is introduced which never had a meaning to begin with” (EMLAS, p. 71). Why not draw the same conclusion about “das Nichts”? Carnap never explains why the presence of the last sentence in Heidegger’s text doesn’t threaten his classification of the previous sentences as type (ii) nonsense. Presumably, he would want to try to claim that two distinct sorts of cases are to be distinguished here: the last sentence is type (i), whereas the others are all type (ii). But this raises the question: how does he know the other sentences aren’t type (i)? In the absence of some criterion for distinguishing these cases, Carnap’s chosen example threatens to fail to illustrate what it is supposed to illustrate: namely, how to identify real live cases of type (ii) metaphysical nonsense as simultaneously distinct from both cases of type (i) nonsense and sinnlosse sentences.

23 Carnap’s argument here still rests on the claim that Heidegger’s intentions fix the meaning of the word ‘nothing’ in his sentences—only now the appeal is to a very different sort of intention on Heidegger’s part: an intention to violate the logical structure of language on purpose.

24 Someone might object that the claim that Heidegger intends to speak nonsense does not play a weight-bearing role in the argument of Carnap’s essay, and that I am attaching too much significance to Carnap’s observation (EMLAS, p. 71–2) that Heidegger does so intend. It is true that the claim is not represented by Carnap as playing an important role in his argument. But his argument nonetheless requires it. Faced with the choice of (i) attributing to someone the intention to fail to make sense, and (ii) attributing to him the intention to use words in an unprecedented but potentially intelligible manner, any sound theory of interpretation will prescribe that we settle for (i) only if we have excellent grounds for preferring it over (ii). If Carnap is unable to rule out the possibility of a more charitable construal of Heidegger’s sentences, then his entire analysis stands under threat of failing to make contact with Heidegger’s text. He therefore needs an argument for why we should go with (i).
Heidegger intends to speak nonsense. Heidegger elsewhere in his work, Carnap tells us, explicitly avows the intention to speak nonsense that Carnap here attributes to him.

The evidence that Heidegger means to speak nonsense is drawn from the same essay of Heidegger's from which Carnap's original exhibit is drawn. Carnap quotes the following passage from Heidegger:

"... The fundamental rule of thinking commonly appealed to, the law of prohibition of contradiction, general 'logic,' destroys this question. ... If this power of the understanding in the field of questions concerning Nothing and Being is broken, then the fate of the sovereignty of 'logic' within philosophy is thereby decided as well. The very idea of 'logic' dissolves into the whirl of a more basic questioning." 18

This evidence, Carnap claims, shows that "the author of the treatise is clearly aware of the conflict between his questions and statements and logic." 19 Carnap concludes: "Thus we find here a good confirmation of our thesis; a metaphysician himself states that his questions and answers are irreconcilable with logic and the scientific way of thinking." 20 Carnap here "confirms" his claim that Heidegger speaks nonsense by relying on statements of Heidegger's-statements which Carnap evidently takes himself to be able to understand (and hence which he presumably takes to make some sort of sense). Carnap needs this additional evidence to show that he is not reading Heidegger uncharitably. Unless he assumes that his additional evidence is reliable, Carnap is unable to evocate the objection that Heidegger's use of the word 'nothing' might represent a linguistically innovative use of the word. But, once he has his additional evidence in hand and assumes it to be reliable (which he is obliged to assume if it is to serve its intended purpose), then, in response to the question "How do you know Heidegger speaks nonsense?" Carnap does not need to look beyond this one piece of evidence to settle the matter.

The presumption behind Carnap's procedures initially appeared to be that no one would intentionally speak nonsense. The original idea was supposed to be that if the nonsensical character of the metaphysician's utterances were made evident to him, he would no longer be attracted to them. It is hard to see how Carnap can attribute to the author of a purportedly typical case of metaphysical nonsense an intention to speak nonsense without abandoning his original claims concerning how to diagnose and cure metaphysical nonsense (or at least

---

18 Quoted in EMLAI, pp. 72-3.
19 EMLAI, p. 72.
20 EMLAI, p. 71.
an attention to (what he calls) their syntax. He wants to apply his analytical tools directly to the metaphysician's words considered in isolation from possible contexts of use.

**NONSENSE IN THE TRACTATUS**

The following passage from Baker and Hacker offers a fairly standard story of how an appeal to the rules of syntax in the *Tractatus* gives way in the work of later Wittgenstein to an appeal to the rules of grammar:

Wittgenstein had, in the *Tractatus*, seen that philosophical or conceptual investigation moves in the domain of rules. An important point of continuity was the insight that philosophy is not concerned with what is true and what is false, but rather with what makes sense and what traverses the bounds of sense... [What he called 'rules of grammar']... are the direct descendants of the 'rules of logical syntax' of the *Tractatus*. Like rules of logical syntax, rules of grammar determine the bounds of sense. They distinguish sense from nonsense... Grammar, as Wittgenstein understood the term, is the account book of language. Its rules determine the limits of sense, and by carefully scrutinizing them the philosopher may determine at what point he has drawn an overdraft on Reason, violated the rules for the use of an expression, and so, in subtle and not readily identifiable ways, traversed the bounds of sense.44

I agree with Baker and Hacker that Wittgenstein's later conception of grammar is the heir to his earlier conception of logical syntax. But I disagree with their characterizations of these conceptions. Indeed, their characterizations fit Carnap's views far more comfortably than Wittgenstein's.44 The idioms which Baker and Hacker employ in the above passage—"determining the limits or bounds of sense," "determining the point at which these bounds are traversed," "violating the rules for the use of an expression"—have, as we have seen, a natural place in the exegesis of Carnap's doctrines. Consider the following pair of passages from Baker and Hacker:

Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' serve only to distinguish sense from nonsense... They settle what makes sense, experience settles what is the case... Grammar is a free-floating array of rules for the use of language. It determines what is a correct use of language, but is not itself correct or incorrect.

What philosophers have called 'necessary truths' are, in Wittgenstein's view, typically rules of grammar, norms of representation, i.e., they fix concepts. They are expressions of internal relations between concepts... Hence they license (or prohibit) transitions between concepts, i.e., transitions from one expression of an empirical proposition to another.44

Each of the phrases italicized in the above passages marks a moment in which Baker and Hacker attribute to later Wittgenstein an instance of the sort of understanding of "the logic of our language" that he was already seeking to exercise in his early work—one which conceives of the possibilities of meaningful expression as limited by "general rules of the language" (he they called "rules of logical syntax" or "rules of grammar") and which imagines that by specifying these rules one can identify in advance which combinations of words are licensed and which prohibited. And, indeed, not only much of Baker and Hacker's rhetoric but many of their attempts to apply (what they take to be) Wittgenstein's methods to particular examples of philosophical confusion are strikingly reminiscent of moments in Carnap's writings.

Consider the following example:

If someone (whether philosopher or scientist) claims that colours are sensations in the mind or in the brain, the philosopher must point out that this person is misusing the words 'sensations' and 'colour'. Sensations in the brain, he should remind his interlocutor, are called 'headaches', and colours are not headaches; one can have (i.e., it makes sense to speak of) sensations in the knee or in the back, but not in the mind. It is, he must stress, extended things that are coloured. But this is not a factual claim about the world (an opinion which the scientist might intelligibly gain); it is a grammatical observation... Such utterances are not false (for then they could be true) but senseless.44

Baker and Hacker's analysis of "Colors are sensations in the mind" here closely parallels Carnap's analysis of "Caesar is a prime number." Just as the expression 'prime number' cannot be predicated of an expression denoting a person, so 'colours' cannot be predicated of an


44 It would be a mistake to think that the crucial difference between my interpretation of Wittgenstein and that of Baker and Hacker is that whereas they, on the one hand, think that when Wittgenstein wrote his early work he thought that there were ineffable truths that cannot be stated in language and later came to see that this is misconceived, I, on the other hand, think that already in his early work he thought this misconceived. The most important difference between their reading and mine is that I think that Wittgenstein (early and late) thinks that the view that they attribute to later Wittgenstein is a disguised version of the view that they attribute to early Wittgenstein. I take the continuity in Wittgenstein's thought to lie in his expos of the austere conception of nonsense; they take it to lie in his expos of the substantial conception.

44 Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity, pp. 40, 169. I am indebted to Martin Guzachany for drawing these two passages to my attention.

44 Ibid. p. 73.
expression denoting a sensation. The nonsensicality of the statement is to be traced to an attempt to combine terms in an illegitimate manner and the nonsense is to be exposed by invoking a principle (now called a principle of “grammar”) that forbids such a combination.

Baker and Hacker’s understanding of such cases of violating the rules for the use of an expression—like Carnap’s understanding of type (ii) nonsense—rests on affirming something that the Tractatus is centrally concerned to repudiate: the possibility of identifying the logical (or grammatical) category of a term outside the context of legitimate combination—of identifying the manner in which a sign symbolizes in a context in which the reference of the parts of a sentence does not determine the reference of the whole. This repudiation is explicit in the following series of remarks:

Logic must take care itself.
A possible sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic it also permitted. (“Socrates is identical” means nothing because there is no property which is called “identical”. The proposition is nonsensical because we have not made some arbitrary determination, not because the symbol itself is impermissible.)

In a certain sense we cannot make mistakes in logic. (§5.473)

We cannot give a sign the wrong sense. (§5.473a)

Frege says: Every legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense; and I say: Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and if it has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts.

Even if we believe that we have done so.

Thus “Socrates is identical” says nothing, because we have given no meaning to the word “identical” as adjective. For when it occurs as the sign of equality it symbolizes in an entirely different way—the symbolizing relation is another—therefore the symbol is in the two cases entirely different; the two symbols have the sign in common with one another only by accident. (§5.473b)

These remarks express in an extremely compressed fashion some of the central ideas of the Tractatus. Let us begin by looking at the example (“Socrates is identical”) and the commentary on it which Wittgenstein offers here. It is the sort of combination of words that Carnap would be tempted to analyze as an instance of type (ii) nonsense—as an attempt to employ the identity sign (i.e., an expression which symbolizes the relation of identity between objects) as if it were a concept expression. Wittgenstein says in this passage that the nonsensicality of the string is due not to an impermissible employment of a symbol, but rather to our failing to make a determination of meaning. Wittgen-

stein’s refusal to accept a Carnapian analysis of the matter here is not due to some peculiarity of the example. Wittgenstein says: “If it has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts.” The “only” here signals that for Wittgenstein all apparent cases of type (ii) nonsense are (in the words of §6.14) “eventually to be recognized” as cases of type (i) nonsense. Carnap’s own example could be substituted for Wittgenstein’s without affecting the point of the passage. On the Tractarian view, if “Caesar is a prime number” has no sense, “this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts” (§5.4735)—regardless of how strong our inclination may be “to believe that we have done so.”

LOGICAL SYNTAX IN THE TRACTATUS

Logical syntax, in the Tractatus, is concerned neither with what Carnap calls “logical syntax” nor with what Russell calls “a theory of types.” To express the same point in the idiom of the Tractatus: logical syntax

The following two excerpts from §§5.473–5.475 are potentially misleading and might appear to conflict with what I say about the point of the passage:

(1) “Socrates is identical” means nothing because there is no property which is called “identical” (§5.473).

(2) “Socrates is identical” says nothing, because we have given no meaning to the word “identical” as adjective (§5.473).

The point of remark (1)—about “identical” naming an unspecified property—is to offer a suggestion intended to enable us, based on the surface grammar of this peculiar string, to find a way to see a symbol in the sign. There is an invitation present in the pattern of ordinary language for us to try to read the sign in this way (as if the model of “Socrates is happy”). But we can only go so far in this direction. We can assimilate “Socrates is identical” to an established pattern (and thereby recognize the symbol in the sign); but we still do not yet know what the sentence says, because there is no established use of “identical” as a concept expression. When Wittgenstein talks in remark (1) about a property, he is talking about a method of symbolizing. When he talks in remark (1) about “identical” as adjective, he is referring to a feature of the “external form” (§5.403) of certain sentences—a grammatical surface pattern—of ordinary language (a certain sort of configuration of signs). The term “adjective” in §§5.473 and in §5.475 refers to a feature of the surface grammar (the sign-structure) of ordinary language—not a proper logical category. The point here is about the sign “identical,” not the symbol. Consider sentences (a) and (b):

(a) Socrates and the teacher of Plato are identical.
(b) Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle are happy.

As it occurs in sentence (b), “identical” has the same surface grammar as an adjective such as “happy.” This is what Wittgenstein means when he says in §§5.473 that “identical” sometimes appears as an adjective.
is concerned neither with the proscription of combinations of signs nor with the proscription of combinations of symbols. It is not concerned with the proscription of combinations of signs, because Tractarian logical syntax does not treat of (more) signs; it treats of symbols—and a symbol only has life in the context of a significant proposition. It is not concerned with the proscription of combinations of symbols, because there is nothing to proscribe."—"Every possible proposition is legitimately constructed" (§5.475). Tractarian logical syntax treats of the categorically distinct kinds of logically significant components into which \textit{sinnvoll} \textit{Sätze} can be segmented—such components being the sorts of components they are only in virtue of their participation in a possible proposition.

Two years after his "Elimination of Metaphysics" essay, in his book \textit{The Logical Syntax of Language}, Carnap writes that logical syntax "should have no reference to the meaning of signs." This means: logical syntax is concerned with strings of \textit{uninterpreted} signs—that is, strings of (more) marks on paper. In Carnap's work, from \textit{The Logical Syntax of Language}, on "logical syntax" treats of a class of formal structures—combinatorial structures generated by sequences of signs—where "formal" means formal in the Hilbertian sense: void of semantic content or structure. "Formal" for Wittgenstein means pertaining to

"There is therefore an asymmetry in the attitude of the Tractatus toward these two sorts of proscription. The latter sort (i.e., the proscription of combinations of symbols) rests on philosophical confusion; the former does not. The Tractatus clearly thinks it is desirable for certain purposes (and for systems of notation which facilitate those purposes) to introduce principles which prescribe combinations of signs [e.g., a \textit{Begriffsschrift} does]. But there is reason to think that the Tractatus would not look favorably upon a general reform of natural language based on principles that sought to prescribe sequences of natural language icons. §§5.404 and 5.585 taken in conjunctive yield: "Our everyday language is part of the logical organism and no less complicated than it . . . and in perfect logical order, just as it is."

It is important that natural languages be able to tolerate the sorts of inventive use of signs exemplified in a mild way by Frege's example about "Vierma" [see On Concept and Object]." Collected Papers (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, p. 246), with a reservation by Heidigger's employment of 'nothing', and by Wittgenstein's own remarks (in §§5.475-5.479) about the possibility of giving 'identical' an adjectival use.

The \textit{Logical Syntax of Language}, p. 156, Carnap goes on to cite Tractatus, §§33 as evidence that he and Wittgenstein are in agreement on this point. For an excellent discussion of what Wittgenstein does not say Carnap does think logic is, see Michael Friedman, "Carnap and Wittgenstein's \textit{Tractatus}," in W. W. Tait, ed., \textit{Early Analytic Philosophy} (New York: Open Court, 1996).

This is not obviously what "logical syntax" means in EMLAL. (most of what Carnap says about Heidigger's employment of 'nothing'—see the passage from Carnap the reference for which is given in n. 33—makes no sense if he is only concerned with the sign 'nothing,' but it is not altogether clear what "logical syntax" means in this essay. The closest he comes in EMLAL to a definition of logical syntax is to say: "The syntax of a language specifies which combinations of words are admissible and which
grammar would enable us to see more clearly the logical structure of ordinary language—and thus the ways in which ordinary language itself fails to reflect its own logical structure in a perspicuous manner. These remarks occur in the context of his discussion of how ordinary language allows the same sign to symbolize in different ways and the same symbol to be expressed by different signs. He goes on to say:

Thus there exist the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full).

In order to avoid these errors, we must employ a symbolism which excludes them, by not applying the same sign in different symbols and by not applying signs in the same way which signify in different ways. A symbolism, that is to say, which obeys the rules of logical grammar—of logical syntax. ($53.354-3.357$)

In order to understand this passage, we need to distinguish clearly between two different things one can mean by the expression “violation of logical syntax”:

1. **substantial nonsense**—the result of putting an item of one logical category in the place where an item of another category belongs;
2. **cross-category equivocation**—the result of allowing different occurrences of the same sign to symbolize items of a different logical category.

Carnap’s appropriation of Tractarian logical syntax, in its talk of “violations of logical syntax,” conflates these two kinds of “violation,” as have many commentators after him. This allows $53.354-3.357$ to appear to offer textual evidence for the claim that the *Tractatus* holds that “the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full)” ($53.354$) are due to “violations” of the first kind, when all that is at issue are “violations” of the second kind. The point of a

---

Some version of this thought—and, with it, the insight that this might be the way out of the problems that plagued Russell’s philosophy—came to Wittgenstein remarkably early. Already in January 1913, he was writing Russell as follows: “[Every theory of types must be rendered superfluous by a proper theory of the symbolisms . . . What I aim must be is not however the correctness of my present way of analysis, but of the fact that all theory of types must be done away with by a theory of symbolisms showing that what seem to be different kinds of things are symbolized by different kinds of symbols which cannot possibly be subsumed in one another’s places.” (Wittgenstein, *Notesbooks, 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 221.)


When Wittgenstein argues in his later writings that we cannot give a word a “senseless sense” (e.g. *Philosophical Investigations*, 500), he is reiterating the Tractarian point that we cannot give a sign “the wrong sense.” Not only does Wittgenstein never speak in the *Tractatus* of “violations of logical syntax,” but later Wittgenstein only occasionally mentions the idea of “violations of grammar” and always in the service of encouraging the reader to be puzzled by what such a thing could be, e.g. “How can one put together logically ill-assorted concepts [in violation of grammar *gegen die Grammatik*], and therefore non-sensically and significantly ask about the possibility of the combination?” (*Philosophical Grammar* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p. 390).
equivocation exhibited by an uncontextualized sentence of ordinary language such as “Green is green” is not possible in a *Begriffsschrift*.

One can, of course, if one wants, call this sort of cross-category equivocation a “violation of logical syntax” (though Wittgenstein himself never speaks in this way) but, if one chooses to speak in this way, one should be clear that what is at issue in those passages where Wittgenstein alludes to the differences between ordinary language and “a logical grammar” (§5.331) are differences in notational perspicuity between various kinds of symbolism.

The preceding conclusion (that the only “logical” defects of ordinary language to be corrected by “a proper logical syntax” are defects in its notational perspicuity) runs counter to the widespread assumption that the early Wittgenstein—like Frege, Russell and Carnap—is an ideal language philosopher. This assumption is encouraged by the Pears and McGuinness translation of §4.172:

> A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations.

Philosophy does not result in ‘philosophical propositions’, but rather in the clarification of propositions.

Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and give them sharp boundaries.

It certainly sounds here as if the role of an elucidation is to introduce clarity into propositions which prior to elucidation lack clarity: elucidation renders what is logically cloudy and indistinct precise and sharp.

The interpretative assumption underlying the standard reading of this passage is that this transformation of thoughts (that are initially cloudy and indistinct) is effected through their transposition into a medium which, unlike ordinary language, permits the expression of precise and sharp thoughts. But Wittgenstein repudiates just such an understanding of §4.172 in his correspondence with Ogden. Wittgenstein rejects “the clarification of propositions” as a translation of *das Klarwerden von Sätzen,* and, after several exchanges, suggests instead: “the proposi-

---

8 Wittgenstein’s point in deriving alternative logical notations in which certain signs (e.g., logical connectives [logische Operationssymbole]) are made to disappear is to devise a language which suits his elucidatory purposes in philosophy. Wittgenstein’s aim is to free us from the philosophical confusion which the outward form of our language lends us into by showing us that we can dispense with such signs. It is not to encourage us, outside the context of philosophical elucidation, to prefer a language which dispenses with such signs. On the contrary, according to the Tractatus, the outward form of our language is already carefully suited to our everyday purposes in communication (see §3.203).


10 Ibid. p. 21. Ogden’s translation, as published, has: “The result of philosophy is not a number of ‘philosophical propositions’, but to make propositions clear.” This came about as a response to Wittgenstein’s initial suggestion that *das Klarwerden von Sätzen* be rendered (instead of “the clarification of propositions”) as “the getting clear of propositions” (ibid. p. 38). Ogden, having convinced Wittgenstein that this isn’t much help, tried “to make propositions clear.” Wittgenstein (in his annotations of Ogden’s revisions) changes this to “that propositions become clear.” But Ogden still finds this unclear and awkward English to boot, thus prompting Wittgenstein’s more illuminating (though even more awkward) suggestion on LO, p. 42.

11 The Tractatus articulates an expressivist conception of logic, in so far as it conceives of logical syntax as an instrument for (1) explicating the logical structure of thought and thus enabling (what the Tractatus calls) *das Klarwerden von Sätzen,* (2) revealing specifically logical vocabulary (such as the logical constants) to be linguistically optional and thus subject to “disappearance,” and (3) perspicuously representing the inferential relations between thoughts.
propositions of ordinary language. But there is no conflict. For, according to the Tractatus, it is the logical imperspicuity of ordinary language which leads us to believe that it is able to accommodate a kind of thought which is not, just as it is, logically completely in order. Section 3.335 recommends a notation which eliminates the sort of notational imperspicuity ordinary language tolerates in order to help us perceive how the logically imperspicuous character of ordinary language seduces us into thinking that ordinary language tolerates the expression of logically flawed thoughts. The Tractatus wants to show how Frege’s theory of Begriffschrift—his theory of a logically perfect language which excludes the possibility of the formation of illogical thought—is in fact the correct theory of symbolism überhaupt. Language itself, the Tractatus says, prevents the possibility of every logical mistake ($5.4731$).

Ordinary language is in this respect already a kind of Begriffschrift. What for Frege is the structure of an ideal language is for early Wittgenstein the structure of all language. In his remarks clarifying his emendations of Ogden’s initial attempt to translate $5.5563$, Wittgenstein explains:

By this [i.e. $5.5563$] I mean to say that the propositions of our ordinary language are not in any way logically correct or less exact or more confused than propositions written down, say, in Russell’s symbolism or any other Begriffschrift. (Only it is easier for us to gather their logical form when they are expressed in an appropriate symbolism.)

Already in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein’s interest in a logical symbolism is not that of someone who seeks to overcome an imperspicuity in ordinary thought through recourse to a more precise medium for the expression of thought. The Tractatus is interested in successors to Frege’s Begriffschrift (in what the Tractatus calls “logical grammars”) because such systems of notation exclude a multiplicity of kinds of use for individual signs, allowing one to see in a more perspicuous manner what kind of logical work (if any) a given term in a given sentence is doing. It allows us to see how—and, most importantly, whether—the signs we call upon (in giving voice to the thoughts we seek to express) symbolize. The advantage of a logical symbolism, for the Tractatus, lies not in what it permits (or forbids) one to say, but in the perspicuity of its mode of representation: in how it allows someone who is drawn to call upon certain words to see what it is if anything he is saying. The reason ordinary language can lead us philosophically astray is not to be traced to its (alleged) capacity to permit us to formulate illogical thoughts (i.e. to give a sign the wrong sense). Rather, it is to be traced to the symbolic imperspicuity of ordinary language—our inability to read off from it what contribution, if any, the parts of a sentence make to the sense of the whole. It is this lack of perspicuity in our relation to our own words which allows us to imagine that we perceive a meaning where there is no meaning, and which brings about the need for a mode

mentation as a criticism later Wittgenstein directs against his earlier work is in fact already developed in the Tractatus as a criticism of Frege and Russell.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that this employment of Begriffschrift (as a tool for the perspicuous representation of the logical structure of sentences of ordinary language) for the purposes of philosophical clarification—though by no means Frege’s primary reason for developing his ideography—was nonetheless envisaged by him from the start as one of its possible applications: “If it is one of the tasks of philosophy to break the domination of the word over the human spirit by laying bare those misconceptions which through the use of language all but unavoidably arise, then my ideography, if it is further developed with an eye to this purpose, can become a useful tool for the philosopher.” (Begriffschrift, Preface, eighth paragraph; my translation.) And, when advertising the virtues of his Begriffschrift, Frege not infrequently remarks upon the value it could have in this regard for philosophy: “We can see from all this how easily we can be led by language to see things in the wrong perspective, and what value it must therefore have for philosophy to free ourselves from the domination of language. If one makes the attempt to construct a system of signs on quite other foundations and with quite other means, as I have tried to do in creating my concept-script, we shall have, so to speak, our very noses rooted into the false analogies in language.” (Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy, ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 62.)

The Tractatus sacrifices all the other ends to which Frege and Russell sought to put a Begriffschrift to the sole end of notational perspicuity. Early Wittgenstein champions a logical syntax which avoids a plurality of logical constants because such a plurality frustrates the sole application which the Tractatus seeks to make of a logical syntax: to allow the logical form of propositions to appear with complete clarity. A plurality of logical constants frustrates this end in two ways: first, it permits the same thought to be rendered in diverse ways, and second, it obscures the logical relations between propositions.

See also $5.03$ and $5.4731$. 
of perspicuous representation of the possibilities of meaning available to us."

"CAESAR IS A PRIME NUMBER" REVISED

In the passage that Carnap quotes from Heidegger, Heidegger begins one of his questions by asking "Does the Nothing exist because . . .?" Carnap seize on this talk about the Nothing existing as a particularly flagrant case of type (ii) nonsense. Carnap remarks:

Even if it were admissible to introduce 'nothing' as a name or description of an entity, still the existence of this entity would be denied in its very definition . . . This sentence therefore would be contradictory, hence nonsensical [unannim] were it not already senseless [einsinn].

Carnap here implicitly distinguishes between two levels of nonsense: a sequence of words which is merely lacking in sense ("senseless") and one whose sense requires something which is logically prohibited ("nonsense"). Thus he seems to take himself here to be able to identify the kind of sense that the sequence of expressions "The Nothing exists"

44 I have summarized the method of the Tractatus here in such a way as to highlight a further important continuity between early and later Wittgenstein. Both early and later Wittgenstein trace our philosophical failures of meaning to our tendency to transfer an expression without transferring its use (in the language of the Tractatus) to employ the same sign without transferring the method of symbolizing. Thus both have an interest in finding a mode of perspicuous representation—a mode of representation which makes perspicuous to a philosophical interlocutor (c) the context of use within which a word has a particular meaning (in the language of the Tractatus the contexts within which a sign symbolizes in a particular way), (a) how the meaning shifts as the context shifts, (b) how "it very often happens" in philosophy that we are led into "confusions" by "the same word belonging to two different symbols" without realizing it (§§3.331-3.324), and (d) how nothing as all a meant by a word—how one "has given no meaning to cer-
tain signs" (§5.52)—as long as one hovers indeterminately between contexts of use. The underlying thought common to early and later Wittgenstein is that we are prone to see a meaning where there is no meaning because of our inclination to imagine that a sign carries its meaning with it, enabling us to import a particular meaning into a new con-
text merely by importing the sign.

Though the conception of philosophical elucidation remains in many respects the same (one of taking the reader from latent to patent nonsense), there are also important differences here between early and later Wittgenstein. To mention only one: on the later conception, once one has completed the work of perspicuously displaying the possible contexts of significant use, there is no elucidatory role left for a Begriffsschatz to come along and play. What the Tractatus sees as a preliminary task in the process of elucidation (namely, the consideration of contexts of significant use) becomes for later Wittgenstein a comparatively central exercise—one which usurps the role previously played by the rendition of sentences into a perspicuous logical symbolization.

45 EMLAL. p. 65 (my emphasis), UMLAS. p. 331 I have amended Pep’s translation.

would have if it were the kind of thing which could have a sense. In his attempts, in moments like this, to make vivid the logically flawed char-
acter of the examples of type (ii) nonsense which (allegedly) occur in Heidegger's text, Carnap comes close to saying something patently incoherent: namely, that we know what each of the parts of one of Heidegger’s sentences mean (including what the word 'nothing' here means), so we know what the resulting combination would mean, if such a combination were an admissible combination of meanings! (More briefly: we grasp what "it" would mean, if what "it" meant could be meant.) In §5.4735, Wittgenstein says: "if . . . [a proposition] has no sense this can only be because we have given no meaning to some of its constituent parts. (Even if we believe that we have done so.)" This last parenthetical remark of Wittgenstein's gently touches on the elucidatory aim of the work as a whole: to show us that we are prone to believe that we have given meaning to some of the constituent parts of a proposition when we have not done so. This remark high-
lights an important analogy between type (ii) nonsense such as "Caesar is a prime number" (as Carnap describes it) and an innocuously mean-
ful sentence such as "Caesar crossed the Rubicon": in each of these cases, we believe that we have already given a meaning to all of the con-
stituent parts. In the former of these two cases, we undergo the phenomenology of meaning something determinate while failing to mean anything determinate by our words. Part of what causes us to hallucinate a meaning in sequences such as "Caesar is a prime number," according to Wittgenstein, is that there is more than one natural remedy for what ails the nonsensical linguistic string. (The greater the number of natural remedies which lie ready to hand for redeeming the sense of a string, the more powerful the illusion of meaning which that string is able to engender.) We could assign a meaning to 'Caesar' which would allow us to treat 'Caesar' as the kind of logical element which symbol-
izes a number; or, alternatively, we could assign a meaning to 'prime number' which would allow us to treat it as the kind of element which symbolizes a predicate which applies to persons. So there are two nat-
ural ways of making sense of this string: it can be taken as saying some-
ting it makes sense to say of a person—in which case it contains the proper name of a person but not a numerical predicate; or it can be taken as saying of a number something which it makes sense to say of a number—in which case it contains a numerical predicate but not a proper name for a person. But, according to the Tractatus, there isn’t anything which is an instance of a proposition’s containing two logical elements which are incompatible. What there can be is a case in which there are two natural directions in which to seek a sense for a sentence
confused about what it is we want to say and we project our confusion onto the linguistic string. Then we look at the linguistic string and imagine we discover what it is trying to say. We want to say to the string: "We know what you mean, but 'it' cannot be said." The incoherence of our desires with respect to the sentence—wishing to both mean and not mean something with it—is seen by us as an incoherence in what the words want to be saying. We displace our desire onto the words and see them as aspire to say something they never quite succeed in saying (because, we tell ourselves, "it" cannot be said). We account for the confusion these words engender in us by discovering in the words a hopelessly flawed sense.

The heart of the Tractarian conception of logic is to be found in the remark that "we cannot make mistakes in logic" (§5.473). It is one of the burdens of the elucidatory strategy of the Tractatus to try to show us that the idea that we can violate the logical syntax of language rests upon a conception of "the logical structure of thought" according to which the nature of logic itself debar us from being able to frame certain sorts of "thoughts." Wittgenstein says: "Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted" (§5.473). If a sentence is nonsense, this is not because it is trying but failing to make sense (by breaking a rule of logic), but because we have failed to make sense with it: "the sentence is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination of sense, not because the symbol in itself is impermissible" (§5.473). My emphasis). The idea that there can be such a thing as a kind of proposition which has an internal logical form of a sort which is debarred by the logical structure of our thought rests upon what Wittgenstein calls (in the Preface) "a misunderstanding of the logic of our language."

(Michaelmas Term, 1935, recorded by Margaret MacDonald, ed. Cara Diamond, unpublished manuscript. In context is as follows: Different kinds of nonsense. Though it is nonsense to say "I feel his pain," this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word, say "hor-cadabra" (compare Moore last year on "Scott kept a racochle at Abbeystowe") and from saying a string of nonsense words. Every word in this sentence is English, and we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if we discard from our language "I feel Smith's toothache" that is quite different. The second seems nonsense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about the matter of things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain. The task will be to show that there is in fact no difference between these two cases of nonsense, though there is a psychological distinction, in that we are inclined to say the one and be puzzled by it and not the other. We constantly hover between regarding it as sense and regarding it as nonsense, and hence the trouble arises.

The quotation is from Wittgenstein's "Lectures on Personal Experience"
Carnap mistakes this misunderstanding of the logic of our language for Wittgenstein's own misunderstanding of the logic of language. Carnap, however, was well aware that Wittgenstein viewed most of what was said about the *Tractatus* in Carnap's published writings as shot through with misunderstanding, so he was careful merely to express a sense of indebtedness to Wittgenstein's work while directly attributing as little as possible of his own conception of logical syntax to the *Tractatus* itself. Subsequent commentators on Wittgenstein's work have been less careful, thus bringing about the following historical irony: at the present time, when much is written about Wittgenstein's and relatively little about Carnap's philosophy by authors who allege that Carnap's doctrines have been surpassed through Wittgenstein's later criticisms of the views expressed in his *Tractatus*, the philosophical teaching they disseminate under the name of Wittgenstein resembles the very one that Carnap sought to champion in some of his writings and which Wittgenstein sought to criticize already in the *Tractatus*.

**ELUCIDATION IN THE TRACTATUS**

Carnap, in what he takes to be a departure from the teaching of the *Tractatus*, soon after writing "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language" gives up on the idea that the key to exposing metaphysical propositions as nonsense lies in unmasking the underlying violations of logical syntax they harbor. Rather he returns to a strategy of elucidation that he had already defended in a different form earlier in his career: one of specifying principles for the construction of alternative "linguistic frameworks" (i.e. frameworks within which it is possible to make cognitively significant statements) and insisting that all dispute be conducted with reference to such principles. The speaker of metaphysical utterances is invited either to

---

47 That Wittgenstein thought Carnap repeatedly and grossly misunderstood the *Tractatus* is evident from his late correspondence with Schlick about Carnap's efforts to build on his ideas and from his brief correspondence with Carnap himself on the subject in 1932. (See, for example, the letters reprinted in M. Nedo and M. Rancher, eds., Ludwig Wittgenstein: Sven Leben in Bildern und Texten (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 314-15, 316-17.) Passing remarks sprinkled throughout Carnap's letters and papers at the University of Pittsburgh Archives for Scientific Philosophy bear witness to Carnap's continued (and eminently justified) frustration concerning both the obscenity and the hardness of Wittgenstein's complaints about Carnap's misappropriation of his work.

48 Philosophy and Logical Syntax, pp. 80-1.

---

Die Überwindung der Metaphysik

translate his propositions into a properly specified linguistic framework or to furnish principles which would allow a listener to translate between her own framework and that of the speaker. Carnap's picture here is the following: any dispute which can be adjudicated must turn on one of two factors—empirical factors (which can be adjudicated through observation) or linguistic factors (which can be adjudicated through appeal to the fundamental principles of the linguistic framework within which the dispute is conducted). Carnap anticipates that most metaphysical disputes will be unmasked (through a proper formalization of "the language" in which the dispute is conducted) as ones in which the parties to the "dispute" do not share a common language: the seemingly substantive matter over which the disputants appear to differ, though disguised so as to appear to be of a superempirical nature, will be revealed to be of a merely verbal nature. However, considered as a strategy of philosophical elucidation, such a procedure is likely, as Carnap fully realizes, to fall short of its goal of assisting one's interlocutors to win their way through to clarity. Often the philosophical conversation will simply break off:

If one partner in a philosophical discussion cannot or will not give a translation of his thesis into the formal mode, or if he will not state to which language-system his thesis refers, then the other will be well-advised to refuse the debate, because the thesis of his opponent is incomplete, and discussion would lead to nothing but empty wrangling. 49

Faced with a Heidegger, once the conversation reaches the juncture described here, presumably a Carnap will politely take his leave. Carnap's method here runs out of steam, once again, just at the point at which Wittgenstein's seeks to enter the philosophical conversation.

The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, faced with Heidegger's assertions, would neither have us conclude that a sign has been given a wrong use (e.g. that a logical particle that serves for the formulation of a negative existential statement has been illegitimately employed), nor that the conversation should be abandoned if the speaker refuses to specify the ground rules of the linguistic framework within which he is conducting his inquiry. Wittgenstein would instead have us first attempt to identify alternative ways of perceiving the symbol in the sign by reflecting upon its possible contexts of significant use. 50 Each alternative way of

---

49 Ibid.

50 In conversation with Carnap and other members of the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein remarked: "To be sure, I can imagine what Heidegger means by Being [Sein] and Anxiety [Angst]." (Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations
perceiving the symbol in the sign yields a distinct segmentation of the propositional sign into symbolic constituents. In a symbolic notation of the sort which the Tractatus recommends (one "founded on the principles of logical grammar," designed expressly to serve the purposes of philosophical elucidation), there will correspond to each possible segmentation of the string a unique rendering of it in the notation. In Tractarian philosophical elucidation, the role of logical symbolism is to furnish a perspicuous means of representing alternative segmentations, thus perspicuously displaying to the speaker the range of available possibilities for meaning his words. Let us consider four possible outcomes such an elucidatory employment of logical notation might have. Let us begin with the two most straightforward possible outcomes. Faced with a perspicuous representation in logical symbolism of the possibilities for meaning his words, a speaker might:

1. accept a particular rendition of his sentence into the symbolism;
or
2. not accept any proposed rendition of his sentence.

If the outcome is (1), then we have learned what the logical form of the speaker's statement is—"we are furnished with a means for seeing the symbol in the sign. If (2), then it remains open what (if anything) he means—it remains open whether we are faced with a case of nonsense or have simply failed to discern his meaning. In both cases (1) and (2), a Begriffsschrift (i.e. a symbolic notation founded on the principles of logical grammar) serves a hermeneutic role. It helps us to see better what someone means by his words or what we mean by our own words. Let us now consider a third possible outcome. Faced with a perspicuous representation in logical symbolism of the possibilities for meaning his words, a speaker might:

3. discover that he means nothing at all by his words, but rather has been unwittingly hovering between alternative possibilities of meaning his words, without determinately settling on any one.

Prior to a perspicuous overview of the available possibilities for meaning his words, the speaker in case (3) is under the impression of having conferred a method of symbolizing on each of his signs. But, confronted with the perspicuous overview which the symbolism furnishes, the speaker discovers that he has been wavering between alternative possible methods of symbolizing.7 The task of working through the options for how he can mean his words undermines his impression that there was something determinate that he did mean by them. His original conviction that there was such a "something" dissolves on him. (We will return to case (3). We need to consider yet a fourth kind of case before we can see how a Begriffsschrift discharges the whole of its appointed task as an instrument of Tractarian elucidation. In this case, the speaker:

4. refuses to countenance the possibility that the full meaning of his words could correspond to anything expressible in the symbolism.

Such a response signals that an interlocutor has placed his foot on the penultimate rung of the Tractarian ladder. Outcome (4) resembles each of the first two outcomes in a certain respect. It resembles (1) in that the speaker accepts parts of thoughts which can be expressed in the symbolism as corresponding to parts of his own thought—but only parts: alternative rendition(s) of his words into the symbolism are, in each case, at most partially expressive of that which he wants to mean by his words. Case (4) resembles (2) in that the speaker refuses to accept any single rendition as definitively capturing his meaning. "Alternative renditions can express a constituent aspect of the whole which I want to mean," the speaker in case (4) responds, "but no single rendition can express the whole of what I want to mean; because what I want to mean requires the conjunction of logical features that the symbolism does not permit me to conjoint."

The speaker in case (4) feels that that which he wants to mean by his words could never be expressed in a Begriffsschrift, for the very features of a Begriffsschrift which render it capable of perspicuously reflecting the logical structure of language simultaneously render it incapable of expressing that which he wants to mean by his words. It is here that Tractarian elucidation encounters its final hurdle—the case of a speaker who not only, as in case (2), rejects all of the alternative possible ways of meaning his words expressible in a Begriffsschrift, but one who rejects any possible rendition of what he wants to mean by his words into a Begriffsschrift on a priori grounds—on the grounds that he


7 The Tractatus works through in its characteristically compressed detail a wide variety of such cases (of hovering between determinate possibilities of use) as they arise in connection with the philosophical employment of Begriffbegriffe such as "world," "fact," "existence," "logical form," "representation," "language," "thought," "concept," "object," "generality," etc. etc.
wants to mean cannot be accommodated by the logical structure of lan-
guage. (It is against just such a speaker, as we have seen, that Carnap’s
methods are powerless.) Such a speaker is perfectly willing to concede
(as Heidegger is) that that which he wants to mean by his words runs
up against the limits of what logic will permit us to say. Only he will
insist that his nonsense is unlike the nonsense which figures in outcome
(3) for his nonsense is substantial nonsense, and not the “it is his aim to produce
just this sort of nonsense. The task, when faced with such an interlocu-
tor, for the Tractatus, is not one of demonstrating to the speaker that
“the proposition is nonsensical because the symbol itself is impermi-
ssible” (§5.473). (This would hardly come as news: for this is just what the
sort of interlocutor that is here in question will himself maintain about
his own nonsense—“logically impermissible” nonsense is just what he
aims to produce, and nothing other than such a sort of nonsense would
serve his purpose.) The task for the Tractarian elucidator is rather “to
demonstrate to [the interlocutor] that he has given no meaning to cer-
tain signs in his propositions” (§5.53), that the “proposition” is only
apparently substantially nonsensical. The elucidation is only at an end
when the interlocutor arrives at the point at which he is able of his own
accord to acknowledge this. Thus it is only at an end when the inter-
locutor “recognizes” his propositions as Unsiins—in the sense of
Unsiins specified in §5.473— that is, in the only way, according to the
Tractatus, anything can be Unsiins. The activity of elucidation which
the Tractatus seeks to present in its reader is only at an end when the
reader of the work is able to “recognize” the propositions which figure
in the work as Unsiins, not for the reason that the interlocutor in case
(4) imagines (because of incompatible determinations of meaning he has
already made), but rather because the reader now sees that no determi-
nation of meaning has yet been made.23 The aim is to bring the reader
to the point at which he himself is able to acknowledge that, in want-
ing to mean these forms of words in the apparently determinate way in
which he originally imagined he was able to “mean” them, he failed to
mean anything (determinate) at all by those forms of words.

The “problems of philosophy” that the Tractatus sets itself the task

23 Thus Wittgenstein says in §5.53 that the aim is to demonstrate to the metaphysi-
cally inclined speaker that he has given “no meaning to certain signs in his Sätze.” If the
standard reading of the Tractatus were correct, this is not what Wittgenstein should be
saying here. The complaint should be directed not at the (inner) signs in the metaphysi-
cian’s Sätze (on the grounds that no meaning—i.e., no method of symbolizing—has been
confounded upon them), but at the impermissible character of the propositional symbols
which the metaphysician employs. (Hence also the danger of translating “Sätze” as “propos-
tions.”)
could ever bring about the passage from the first of these experiences (the hallucinatory one) to the second (the experience of discovering oneself to be a victim of a hallucination). As long as we retain the relevant phenomenology of meaning (as long as it appears to us that, by golly, we do mean something determinate by our words), our conviction in such an experience of meaning will always lie deeper than our conviction in anything we are told by a theory of meaning concerning what sorts of things we are and are not able to mean by our words. Hence the ineffectuality of Carnap’s earlier methods. Carnap eventually gives up on the project of furnishing “a theory of meaning” of this sort, but in the process he gives up on the idea of an effective method of philosophical elucidation. The Tractatus aims to practice a method of elucidation which does not presuppose a theory of this sort. It does not aim to show us that certain sequences of words possess an intrinsically flawed sense by persuading us of the truth of some theoretical account of where to locate “the limits of sense.” Any theory which seeks to draw such “a limit to thinking” commits itself, as the Preface says, to being “able to think both sides of the limit” and hence to being “able to think what cannot be thought.” The Tractarian attack on substantial nonsense—one idea that we can discern the determinately unthinkable thoughts certain pieces of nonsense are trying to say—is an attack on the coherence of any project which thus seeks to mark the bounds of sense.

The Tractatus seeks to bring its reader to the point where he can recognize sentences within the body of the work as nonsensical, not by means of a theory which legislates certain sentences out of the realm of sense, but rather by bringing more clearly into view for the reader the life with language he already leads—by harnessing the capacities for distinguishing sense from nonsense (for recognizing the symbol in the sign and for recognizing when no method of symbolizing has yet been conferred upon a sign) implicit in the everyday practical mastery of language which the reader already possesses. As the Preface says: “The limit... can only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.” Just as, according to the Tractatus, each propositional symbol—that is, each sinnsuolser Satz—shows its sense (§4.042), so the Tractatus shows what it shows (i.e., what it is to make sense) by letting language show itself—not through “the clarification of sentences” but through allowing “sentences themselves to become clear” (through das Klaren von Sätzen, §4.112). The work seeks to do this, not by instructing us in how to identify determinate cases of nonsense, but by enabling us to see more clearly what it is we do with language when we succeed in achieving determinate forms of sense (when we succeed in projecting a symbol into the sign) and what it is we fail short of doing when we fail to achieve such forms of sense (when we fail to confer a determinate method of symbolizing on a propositional sign). If and when we have failed to achieve sense, the acknowledgment that this is how things stand lies with us.

In the transition to Wittgenstein’s later work the task of eliciting such acknowledgment plays an increasingly important role: The philosopher strives to find the liberating word... The philosopher delivers the word to us which can render the matter harmless... The choice of our words is so important, because the point is to hit upon the physiognomy of the matter exactly... Indeed, we can only convict someone else of a mistake if he... acknowledges the expression [we have chosen] as the correct expression... For only if he acknowledges it as such, is it the correct expression. (Psychoanalysis)”

The fundamental difference between Carnap’s and Wittgenstein’s approaches to philosophical elucidation might be summarized as follows: Carnap seeks a method that will furnish criteria that permit one to establish that someone else is speaking nonsense, whereas Wittgenstein (both early and late) seeks a method that ultimately can only be practiced by someone on himself. Wittgenstein’s method only permits the verdict that sense has not been spoken to be passed by the one who speaks. The role of a philosophical elucidator is not to pass verdicts on the statements of others, but to help them achieve clarity about what it is that they want to say. Thus the conversation does not break off if the other cannot meet the demand to make himself intelligible to the practitioner of philosophical elucidation; rather the burden lies with the one who professes to elucidate—not to specify a priori conditions of intelligibility, but rather to find the liberating word: enabling the other to attain intelligibility, where this may require helping him first to discover that he is unintelligible to himself.”

45 This essay borrows heavily from my “The Method of the Tractatus,” in Rock, ed., From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy.