Wittgenstein's Ph.D Viva—A Re-Creation

LAURENCE GOLDSTEIN

On a first reading, ignore all footnote references and all decimal numerals in the text, which refer to propositions in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus[1]

[18 June, 1929; a room in Cambridge University. G. E. Moore, smoking a pipe, is pacing the room. Enter Bertrand Russell.]

Russell: Good afternoon, Moore. This viva—I have never known anything so absurd in my life.[2]

Moore: Well, I haven't either, Russell, but I believe I have.[3]

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. K. Ogden and F. P. Ramsey (trans.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), referred to henceforth as '*Tractatus*'. Prior to publication, Wittgenstein went through the translation and suggested several amendments. *See Letters to C. K. Ogden with Comments on the English Translation of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, edited with an Introduction by G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

[2] Although this re-creation is fictional some of the sentences, including this one, occurred in the real viva as recalled by Russell. See Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 271–2.

[3] Moore's name is associated with a paradox about utterances of the form 'p is not the case, but I believe p' (paradoxical because any such utterance could apparently be true, yet there would be some absurdity in an individual's sincerely uttering it) which he discussed at the Moral Sciences Club, Cambridge, in 1944. On the following day, Wittgenstein wrote to Moore: 'Pointing out that "absurdity" which is in fact something *similar* to a contradiction, though it isn't one, is so important that I *hope you'll publish* your paper. By the way, don't be shocked at my saying it's something "similar" to a contradiction. This means roughly: it plays a similar rôle in logic. You have said something about the *logic* of assertion. Viz.: It makes sense to say "Let's suppose: p is the case and I don't believe that p is the case", whereas it makes *no* sense to assert "p is the case and I don't believe that p is the case". This *assertion* has to be ruled out and *is* ruled out by "common sense", just as a contradiction is. And this just shows that logic isn't as simple as logicians think it is. In particular: that contradiction isn't the *unique* thing people think it is. It isn't the *only* logically inadmissible form'. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, G. H. von Wright (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 177. The 'logicians' of

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Russell: Would you like to sit here or over there?
Moore: Yes.[4]
[Russell rolls his eyes and takes a seat. Moore then sits down.]
Russell: I think we're ready. Come in, please, Mr. Wittgenstein.
[Wittgenstein enters]
Russell: Please sit down.
[Wittgenstein sits]
Russell: As you know, we're here to discuss your *Tractatus* which you have submitted as a doctoral thesis.[5] I don't propose going through the whole text. We did that in The Hague soon after the war[6] and you explained it all to me, but your ideas were so subtle that I kept on forgetting them.[7] You felt that my introduction to the book betrayed complete misunderstanding,[8] and you may be right

[4] Moore is reputed to have made a joke of this form which, though rather feeble, lends itself to an interesting analysis in terms of indirect speech-acts and Gricean 'conversational implicature'.

[5] In the seven years between the publication of the book and the viva, the *Tractatus* had become widely regarded as a masterpiece—hence Russell's remark at the beginning about the absurdity of the charade. It was a foregone conclusion that Wittgenstein would be awarded the Doctorate. See Alan Wood, B*ertrand Russell: The Passionate Sceptic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 156.

[6] Mid-December, 1919. See Monk, op. cit., note 2, 181–3 for an account of this meeting. In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell from the Hague on 20 December, just after spending a week with Wittgenstein discussing the text every day, Russell wrote 'I came to think even better of it than I had done; I feel sure it is a really great book, though I do not feel sure it is right'. See *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 82.

[7] This is somewhat anachronistic, for it was a conversation with Wittgenstein in 1913 that was so described by Russell, in a letter to Lucy Donnelly, dated 19 October. Cited in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russel, Vol. 8*, John G. Slater (ed.) (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1986), xviii.

[8] 'superficiality and misunderstanding' was, according to Wittgenstein, all that was left in Russell's Introduction, once the refinement of Russell's

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whom Wittgenstein is speaking include his own early self (his *Tractatus* doctrine of contradiction will feature *infra*). Moore's discussion alerted him to the logical difference between the use of the verb 'believe' in the first person present and its uses in other tenses and persons. See *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), Part II, Section X and *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) §§460–504. The investigation of the concept of *belief* in Wittgenstein's late writings supersedes the obscure and implausible account of *belief* and other propositional attitudes offered at *Tractatus* 5.54–5.5423.

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about that. Yet I find this rather puzzling, since there are some parts of the text, for example the metaphysical sections at the beginning and the theory of judgment, which seem to be taken straight from works of my own.[9] Further, there are several points which seem perfectly clear and about which I think you to be clearly mistaken.

Wittgenstein: Quite impossible. The truth of my views is unassailable and definitive.[10]

Russell: I don't think we'll get very far if you take that attitude. [To Moore] Go on, *you've* got to ask him some questions—*you're* the professor.[11]

Moore: All right. Before I suggested the Spinozistic title for your book,[12] you had planned to call it *Der Satz*.[13] That was because you conceived the work as an investigation of the nature of statements and, in particular, of the conditions under which a string of words (what you call a 'Satzzeichen') fails to constitute a genuine statement and is nonsensical. The importance of this investigation, as you saw it, was that philosophy itself is riddled with such nonsensical pseudo-statements masquerading as *bona fide* statements, and the difficulties dissolve once this fact is exposed.[14]

[9] For documentation on what is lifted from Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1926) and his MS. now called *Theory of Knowledge*, see Anthony Grayling, *Russell* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 99–102.

[10] *Tractatus*, Preface, p. 5.

[11] Quote from the actual viva. See Wood, op. cit., note 5, 156.

[12] Recapitulating Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

[13] See William Warren Bartley III, *Wittgenstein* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1973), 28. There is a problem about the English translation of 'Satz'. In most *Tractatus* contexts, 'statement' is the best rendering. A Satz is a Satzzeichen (a perceptible sign—for example, a written sentence) in application, i.e. as *employed* to say or think something true or false (3.1–3.1432, 3.5).

[14] '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' (4.003). The methodology of the *Tractatus* is laid out at 3.323–3.325, 4.002–4.0031, 4.11–4.116 and is succinctly described in 'Remarks on Logical Form', a paper printed in the *Proceedings of the Annual Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association*, **9** (July, 1929), 162–71, where Wittgenstein writes: 'The

style had vanished in the translation into German. See *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 87–8, letter to Russell dated 6.5.1920. For the history of Russell's introduction and Wittgenstein's dismissal of it, see Brian McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life. Young Ludwig (1889–1921)* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 173–84.

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Wittgenstein: That is correct.

Moore: And there is another kind of failed statement, according to you—these are the tautologies and contradictions; they may, in a certain way, be important because of their relation to valid inference (*Tractatus* 6.12–6.1224) but they have no content, they state nothing (5.142, 5.43, 6.121). You hold them to be senseless? (4.461, 5.143)[15]

Wittgenstein: Yes, yes—I told you all about that fifteen years ago.[16]

Moore: I remember. When you made me come and visit you in Norway at the end of winter, the first thing you said to me was not

[15] Tautologies and contradictions are said by Wittgenstein to be senseless (sinnlos) although they are not like pseudo-philosophical utterances or ungrammatical jumbles of words which are said to be nonsensical (unsinnig) (4.461, 4.4611). Rudolf Carnap, who had a high opinion of the *Tractatus*, says '[t]he most important insight I gained from his work was the conception that the truth of logical statements is based only on their logical structure and on the meaning of the terms. Logical statements are true under all conceivable circumstances; thus their truth is independent of the contingent facts of the world. On the other hand, it follows that these statements do not say anything about the world and thus have no factual content'. See R. Carnap, 'Autobiography', *The Philosophy of Rudolph Carnap* P. A. Schilpp (ed.) (La Salle: Open Court, 1963), 27. The insight Carnap gained is that the traditional conception of tautologies as highly general truths about the world is mistaken. (His own phrasing of the point would have been rejected by Wittgenstein.)

[16] On March 26, 1914, Moore began a two-week visit to Wittgenstein in Norway, when he took notes dictated by Wittgenstein.

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idea is to express in an appropriate symbolism what in ordinary language leads to endless misunderstandings. That is to say, where ordinary language disguises logical structure, where it allows the formation of pseudo-propositions, where it uses one term in an infinity of different meanings, we must replace it by a symbolism which gives a clear picture of the logical structure, excludes pseudo-propositions, and uses its terms unambiguously' (p. 163). The ambition of achieving philosophical clarity by making use of a perspicuous language had been stated by Frege in the introduction to *Begriffsschrift* (in *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931* J. van Heijenoort (ed.) (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1–82) and was embraced by Russell under the influence of Peano. Although Wittgenstein defended the *Tractatus* in his viva in June of 1929, he less than one month later condemned as worthless the 'Remarks...' paper, and refused to read it at the Joint Session of 12–15 July, 1929 for which it had been submitted—he read a piece on infinity instead. One wonders whether objections raised at the viva had afterwards given Wittgenstein serious pause or had exacerbated doubts he had already been entertaining (managing, however, to suppress them in his viva) with regard to his early style of philosophizing.

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'How are you Moore, nice of you to come all this way', but 'Logical so-called propositions *shew* the logical properties of language and therefore of the Universe, but *say* nothing'.[17] That was a strange thing to be told as soon as I stepped off the boat.

Wittgenstein: Why? It's true. The fundamental thought of the *Tractatus* is that some things cannot be said but can only be *shown* (4.1212). We use sentences to make pictures of reality; genuine statements picture possible states of affairs (3.001, 3.1–3.1432, 4.01). Tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality; they present no possible state of affairs (4.462), so they don't *say* anything (6.11) but they *show* the formal properties of language and of the world (6.12). They don't picture reality and so are neither true nor false.[18]

Moore: Well, I can perhaps see why you want to say that contradictions are not false. Your point is that a contradiction says nothing so *a fortiori*, it doesn't say anything false, and can't even properly be called a statement. But a tautology is different. In your own system of truth-tables, a tautology is *true* in all possible situations. And you somewhere even say that the truth of tautology is certain (4.464) and can be recognized from the symbol alone (6.113).

Wittgenstein: Don't be misled. Tautologies and contradictions are quite different from substantial statements; they form a logical island.[19] Let me remind you that, in the text, I assert that every

[17] This is the first sentence of the 'Notes dictated to G. E. Moore in Norway', in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914–16* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), 107, and is elaborated at 6.12.

[18] This claim first appears in the 'Notes dictated to G. E. Moore in Norway', op. cit. note 17, 108, and was accepted by Russell who, in a letter to Wittgenstein dated 13 August 1919, wrote: 'I am convinced you are right in your main contention, that logical prop[osition]s are tautologies, which are not true in the sense that substantial prop[osition]s are true'. See *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Cambridge Letters* B. F. McGuinness and G. H. von Wright (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 121.

[19] The term 'logical island' is due to Peter Geach who *denies* that, for Wittgenstein, tautologies are thus insulated. See his 'Kinds of Statement', *Intention and Intentionality* C. Diamond and J. Teichmann (eds) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 221–35. For criticism of Geach, see Laurence Goldstein, 'The Development of Wittgenstein's Views on Contradiction', *History and Philosophy of Logic* 7, No.1 (January, 1986), 43–56. In later writings, Wittgenstein came to the view that a form of words cannot be ruled senseless *a priori*. There are contexts in which an utterance contradictory in form can be used to make a statement, true or false. When his interlocutor expostulates: 'But you can't allow a contradiction to stand', Wittgenstein replies: 'Why not? We do sometimes use this form in our talk, of course not often. ...' See *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (revised edition) G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (eds), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), VII–11.

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statement has sense (4.064) and assert soon afterwards that tautologies and contradictions lack sense (4.461). You may now proceed to infer that tautologies are not genuine statements. The same conclusion follows from the pair of claims that a statement is a picture of reality (4.01) and that tautologies and contradictions are not pictures of reality (4.462). So you see I am committed to the view that tautologies are not *bona fide* statements—they have no sense and so, of course, cannot be true.

Russell: Let me read something to you. [Russell fishes a letter out of his pocket and reads:] 'Either my piece is a work of the highest rank, or it is not a work of the highest rank. In the latter (and more probable) case I myself am in favour of it not being printed. And in the former case it's a matter of indifference whether it's printed twenty or a hundred years sooner or later. After all, who asks whether [Kant's] *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, was written in 17x or y. …' Does that ring a bell? It's from a letter you wrote to me nine years ago in which you said 'the argument seems to me unanswerable'.[20] But you'll notice that the very first premise of this 'unanswerable' argument is nothing other than a tautology. So are you really telling me that your 'unanswerable' argument is useless because it has a premise that makes no sense?

Wittgenstein: I don't have any answer to that.[21]

Russell: Well, perhaps you have an answer to this: When *was* the *Critique of Pure Reason* written?

Wittgenstein: It was published in 1781—you know that perfectly well.

Russell: 1781 … Was any particular well known philosopher born in that year?

[20] *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 71. This letter was written to Russell on 6.5.1919 at the time when Wittgenstein was having difficulty in finding a publisher for the *Tractatus*. See Monk, op. cit., note 2, 184 and the section from McGuinness op. cit., mentioned in note 8.

[21] One possible answer is that the inference could be recast without making use of a tautology but simply by applying an instance of a rule sometimes called 'vel-elimination'. If from premise A (together with assumptions α) a conclusion C follows, and if from premise ~A (together with assumptions β) C follows, then C follows just from the union of assumptions α and β. The conclusion, in the case under consideration, is that if the *Tractatus* was worthy of being printed, then it didn't much matter when. But, even though one can reach this conclusion without making use of a tautology, the point still remains that Wittgenstein did use a tautology in his letter to Russell, and, on Tractarian principles, what is *sinnlos* cannot be used to say anything (the converse claim is made at 3.328). Without that tautology, his argument does not go through, so *prima facie* at least, the tautology must contribute *something*.

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Wittgenstein: What do you have in mind?

Russell: I think you know to whom I am referring. Bernard Bolzano was born in that year. I myself am a long-time admirer of Bolzano's; as you know, I acknowledged and endorsed his *Paradoxien des Unendlichen* treatment of the notion of an infinite series in my *Principles of Mathematics*.[22] You must admire him too, judging by the extent to which you have plagiarized his writings. I don't know whether you read Bolzano directly or got to know him through Robert Zimmermann's secondary school text *Philosophische Propädeutik*, but you've certainly helped yourself to a lot of his views: that a proposition has a unique analysis (3.25), the thesis that all necessity is logical (6.375). The classification tautology/contradiction/contingent proposition is Bolzano's as is the theory of probability that you espouse (5.152), as is the definition of logical consequence (5.12–5.122). Even in the details, your joint negation operator N (5.502) is in Bolzano and so also is the notion of a variable proposition obtained by turning a constituent (*Bestandteil*) of a proposition into a variable (3.315).[23]

Wittgenstein: Yes, I made use of some of Bolzano's ideas. But I did insist, in the Preface to my book, that what I wrote makes no claim to novelty in points of detail...'

Russell: These are not *details* but central planks of your construction and it is simply not acceptable to make such heavy use of another writer's ideas without indicating their origin. You say you make no claim to novelty, but the Cambridge University Ph.D. regulations clearly state... .

Moore: [urgently whispering to Russell] Don't mention regulations to him; he'll send you straight to hell.[24] [Addresses

[22] Bertrand Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1903), 201, 357. Bolzano's treatise was published in 1854.

[23] See Jan Sebestik, 'The Archeology of the Tractatus: Bolzano and Wittgenstein', *Wittgenstein—Towards a Re-Evaluation* R. Haller and J. Brandl (eds) (Vienna: Verlag Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1989), 112–18. A good idea of the range and depth of Bolzano's philosophical thought may be gained from *Bolzano and Analytical Philosophy* W. Künne, M. Siebel and M. Textor (eds) = G*razer Philosophische Studien* **53** (1997).

[24] On his first long visit to Norway, Wittgenstein composed a 'Logik' and wrote to Moore enquiring whether it could be counted as a dissertation towards a Cambridge B.A. degree. When Moore replied, pointing out that, for this to be possible, certain regulations would have to be complied with, Wittgenstein sent the following charming note in reply:

> Your letter annoyed me. When I wrote Logik I didn't consult the Regulations, and therefore I think it would only be fair if you gave me my degree without consulting them so much either! As to a Preface and

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Wittgenstein] You just told us, and you wrote it to Russell too, that the main point of your dissertation concerns the logical doctrine of what can be shown but not said—you called this 'the cardinal problem of philosophy'[25]—yet you said to Mr. Engelmann that the central point of your book is an ethical one.[26] In the preface you say that the whole meaning of the book can be summed up in the sentence 'What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent', yet in the text itself you say that your fundamental thought is that the logical constants do not represent (4.0312). You seem to be very confused about what the main idea really is. Can you just explain to me this 'fundamental thought' that the logical constants do not represent.

Wittgenstein: Yes. Two proofs are given in the book,[27] but I'll explain the theorem simply and non-technically. Consider the operation of conjunction. If I believe that your wife put a shirt and a sock in the drawer, I might say 'There is a shirt in the drawer and there is a sock in the drawer'. Then, for each of the conjoined sentences, there is a corresponding possible state of affairs, namely a shirt's being in the drawer and a sock's being in the drawer. But

[25] *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 71, letter of 19.8.1919.

[26] See Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein. With a Memoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 143.

[27] 5.2–5.441, 5.46–5.47. For an interesting discussion of the adequacy of these proofs and their dependence on the requirement that in a statement there must be as many distinguishable parts as in the situation that it represents (4.04), see Leo Cheung, 'The Proofs of the *Grundgedanke* in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', forthcoming. Wittgenstein's *Grundgedanke* is a reaction against the views of (among others) Russell, who held that logical constants denote logical objects. See Brian McGuinness, 'The *Grundgedanke* of the *Tractatus*', *Understanding Wittgenstein* G. Vesey (ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1974), 49–61; also Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 208–12. McGuinness attempts to show how the *Grundgedanke* is related to the other fundamental thoughts about what cannot be said and the transcendence of ethics.

Notes: I think my examiners will easily see how much I have cribbed from Bosanquet—If I'm not worth your making an exception for me *even in some* STUPID *details* then I may as well go to Hell directly; and if I *am* worth it and you don't do it then—by God—you might go there.

See *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 150, letter of 7.5.1914. Moore resolved not to reply to this lunatic outburst—he had not written the regulations governing the award of Cambridge degrees, nor was it within his power to waive them—and he avoided further contact with Wittgenstein. In fact, the two of them resumed communication, following a chance meeting on a train, just a few months before Wittgenstein's viva.

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there is nothing in this, or any, possible situation corresponding to 'and'; the word 'and' does not represent anything; the drawer does not contain a shirt, a sock and an 'and'. The same applies, of course, to the conditional and to disjunction. I may say 'Russell's house is in Trumpington Street or his house is in Cavendish Street', and, if either disjunct is true, then that statement will correspond to a complex state of affairs in the world. But that does not mean that the word 'or' stands for some object in the world. However hard Russell looks, he will not find an 'or' on the streets of Cambridge, and nobody ever put an 'and' in Mrs. Moore's drawers.

Russell: Quite so—but that's hardly a very original idea. The mediaeval logicians distinguished between categorematic expressions—those which supposit or stand for something—and the syncategorematic expressions which don't, and the same distinction appears in many other writers. For example, as is spelled out clearly in John Locke....

Wittgenstein: John who?

Russell: Locke—he was a famous 17th century philosopher.

Wittgenstein: Oh.[28]

Russell: Perhaps we'd better turn to another subject. A main theme of your book is that we can avoid philosophical confusion and paradox if we adopt a perspicuous notation. Now, I know that my own set-theoretic paradox[29] has been of interest to you for a long time. I believe you once told me that thinking about it had got you started in philosophy, and when you were only 18 years old you proposed a solution to Philip Jourdain.[30] The paradox can be disposed

[28] Wittgenstein's ignorance of, and antipathy towards, the classic philosophers is legion. He had never read a word of Aristotle, and once remarked that no assistant lecturer in philosophy in the country had read fewer books on philosophy than he had. He said that he did not read Hume because he found doing so a torture. See Karl Britton, 'Portrait of a Philosopher', *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and his Philosophy* K. T. Fann (ed.) (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1967), 60–1.

[29] The paradox concerns the claim that the class of non-self-membered classes is a member of itself—a claim which apparently if true is false, if false, true. The Russell Class R is the class of all those classes which are not members of themselves. Thus, the condition for any class x being a member of the Russell Class is: x is a member of R if and only if x is not a member of x. To see whether R itself is a member of the Russell class, substitute 'R' for 'x' in this condition. This results in the absurd conclusion that it is a member if and only if it is not.

[30] In a notebook, recording a visit of Russell on April 20, 1909, Jourdain writes about his response to the 'solution' that Wittgenstein had shown him. See Ivor Grattan-Guinness, *Dear Russell—Dear Jourdain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 114.

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of very easily, you think, once one is armed with your perspicuous notation, and you give my own solution very short shrift in your book (3.331–3.333). The key to solving the problem, as you see it, is the observation that a function cannot be its own argument, because if the argument has the form $\phi(x)$ a function of that argument has to have the form $\psi(\phi(x))$, which is visibly of a different type.

Wittgenstein: Yes, exactly—the argument, although in this case itself a function, is a different type of function than the one whose argument it is.

Russell: But isn't that saying the same as my own theory of types?[31]

Wittgenstein: No, in your theory you say that the two are of different types, but in my theory this can't be said—that they are of different types *shows* itself in the symbols.

Russell: But how can you say that you can't say it when you just said it?

Wittgenstein: You can't; you can't say it.

Russell: What? You mean that I can't say it, but you can?

Wittgenstein: No, I can't say it either. When I said it before, I was, strictly speaking, talking nonsense.

Moore: Listen, Wittgenstein, we didn't come here just to listen to you talking nonsense.

Wittgenstein: [blustering] Look, I mean it's nonsense but it's helpful nonsense. There are certain things... I utter them, and they seem to make sense ... but they don't really ... I can't *say* them ...[32]

[31] See Russell's 'Mathematical Logic as based on the Theory of Types' *American Journal of Mathematics* **30** (1908), 222–62, reprinted in *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931* J. van Heijenoort (ed.) (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 150–82. The theory is also set out in the introduction to Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge University Press, 1910–1913). In a letter to Wittgenstein of 13.8.1919, Russell raised, *inter alia*, a question about the theory of types. For Wittgenstein's brief reply, see point (3) of his letter to Russell in *Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore*, op. cit., note 3, 72.

[32] Wittgenstein seems to have held the view that nonsense results from 'the urge to run up against the limits of language', an activity he identifies with ethics, an activity he holds to be of value even though he thinks 'it is definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics'. He says '[b]ut the inclination, the running up against something, *indicates something*. St. Augustine knew that already when he said: 'What, you swine, you want not to talk nonsense! Go ahead and talk nonsense, it does not matter'. These remarks were recorded by Waismann in discussion with Wittgenstein on December 30, 1929. See *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 68. For an attempt to make sense of Wittgenstein's views of nonsense, see Cora Diamond, 'On What Nonsense Might be', *Philosophy* **56**, No. 215 (January, 1981), 5–22.

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[Russell starts whistling]

Moore: [to Russell] What do you think you're doing?

Russell: He says he can't say it, and we can't say it, so I thought I'd try whistling it.[33]

[Moore and Russell laugh but]

Wittgenstein [banging his fist on the table]: This is intolerable.

Moore: Well, I have to say that I have tried hard to understand your views on this matter, but I still find them mystifying. The underlying idea seems to be that since, *pace* Hegel, the world itself is not contradictory or paradoxical, then a perspicuous language the structure of which reflects the structure of the world is automatically guaranteed to be free from confusion and paradox. Yet such talk—the 'structure of the world' and of a correct syntax 'reflecting' or 'picturing' this structure—it all seems highly metaphorical and unsatisfactory to me.[34] And the idea that your symbolism lies hidden beneath, or somehow transcends *our* everyday language (4.003)[35]—

[33] It was Frank Ramsey, in his 'Critical Notice of L. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*', *Mind* **33**, No. 128 (October, 1923), 478, who observed that 'what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either'.

[34] Wittgenstein himself later came to realize the perniciousness of the metaphor. Norman Malcolm retails the story: 'Wittgenstein and P. Sraffa, a lecturer in economics at Cambridge, argued together a great deal over the ideas of the *Tractatus*. One day (they were riding, I think, on a train) when Wittgenstein was insisting that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same "logical form", the same "logical multiplicity", Sraffa made a gesture, familiar to Neapolitans as meaning something like disgust or contempt, of brushing the underneath of his chin with an outward sweep of the finger-tips of one hand. And he asked: "What is the logical form of *that*?" Sraffa's example produced in Wittgenstein the feeling that there was an absurdity in the insistence that a proposition and what it describes must have the same form. This broke the hold on him of the conception that a proposition must literally be a "picture" of the reality it describes.' See Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 57–8.

[35] I borrow this formulation from Dale Jacquette, a recent commentator who seems to accept the metaphors without qualm and to accept too that Wittgenstein's logical symbolism 'automatically guarantees' protection against Russell's paradox See his *Wittgenstein in Transition* (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1998), 138–42. In later writings, Wittgenstein rejects the notion of a logical structure hidden below the surface of ordinary language. 'Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. ...' (*PI* §126). The importance of this revelation is acknowledged in the title of Norman Malcolm's *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

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in so far as I can make sense of such a claim, it seems to express just a pious optimism that a symbolism of itself will show that philosophical puzzles such as Russell's paradox are nonsensical. As I say, I find it all quite baffling. But this business of what cannot be said but only shown obviously means a lot to you. Is it your theory that religion, ethics and aesthetics are so frustrating because we are attempting to talk about what is, by its nature, ineffable? Is that what is really behind this theory of yours?[36]

Wittgenstein: No, the ineffability of ethics and so on is a *consequence* of the theory. The theory itself concerns logical syntax. It is a solution to Frege's problem concerning concept expressions which occur as subjects of sentences and which therefore apparently stand for objects despite the fact that, as concept-expressions, they should be standing for concepts.[37]

Moore: But isn't that an inevitable consequence of Frege's theory? Nothing can prevent you using an expression like 'The concept *horse*' as the subject of a sentence so, if you accept (as you do (3.318)) Frege's analysis of sentences into function and argument, standing, respectively, for concept and object, and that a singular term like 'the concept horse' can be the argument of a function, then you are bound, if you interpret the doctrine strictly, to end up saying that concepts are objects—thus undermining the theory. That's why Frege asks his reader to interpret him non-strictly, to grant him a pinch of salt.[38]

Wittgenstein: The concept *concept* is a formal concept, and therefore cannot play the same rôle in a statement as does a proper concept (4.126). So Frege's sentence 'The concept *horse* is a concept' is a pseudo-proposition (4.1272).

Moore: Suppose I just say 'The concept *horse* is not difficult to grasp'. The definite description stands for an object, so we seem embarrassed by the conclusion that the concept *horse* is not a concept, but an object.

Wittgenstein: You can't even use the phrase 'The concept *horse*': that is not permitted by logical syntax.

Moore: But I want to say that the concept *horse* is not difficult to grasp, because I think that it's true.

[36] Moore would have had some sympathy with this view. His own position, in *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903) is that the goodness of an action may be intuited and is not effable.

[37] G. Frege, 'On Concept and Object', *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* P. T. Geach and M. Black (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 42–55. The problem continued to plague Frege—see his *Posthumous Writings* H. Hermes, F. Kambartel and F. Kaulbach (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 119, 177.

[38] Frege, 'On Concept and Object', op. cit., note 34, 54.

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Wittgenstein: But you can't say it.

Moore: Then you can't say most of the things you want to say in your book.

Wittgenstein: I know. Don't worry, I know you'll *never* understand it.[39]

Moore: I think I understand perfectly well that, in order to avoid a problem that your theory shares with Frege's, you are stipulating to be unsayable plenty of the things that I, and ordinary people like me, say. To claim that something is a formal concept is to label a problem, not to solve it.

[Wittgenstein looks awkward, squirms a little, but does not say anything.]

Russell: Can we perhaps turn to another topic, one which has provoked a lot of discussion over the last fifty years: the definition of number. The theory you propose is, to the best of my knowledge, a new one. You say that a number is the exponent of an operation (6.021); the exponent indicates how many times the operation is performed.

Wittgenstein: Correct. Do nothing (0 things) to an x and it remains the same. Do something to an x to which you've already done the same thing n times, and you've now done it n + 1 times.

Russell: So the crucial notion in these definitions is that of doing something (performing an operation) repeatedly (n times)?

Wittgenstein: Yes

Russell: But surely to define '+1' in terms of the repetition of an operation is not exactly helpful, since to repeat an operation is to do it *one more time*, so the definition is circular.

Wittgenstein: I never thought of that.[40]

Russell: Perhaps you should have done so. [to Moore]: Do you have any more questions?

Moore: No thanks. [Moore starts writing on a piece of paper]

Russell [to Wittgenstein]: That's the end of the viva. You may leave.

[39] Quote from the actual viva. See Wood, op. cit., note 5, 156. Wittgenstein is said to have said this while (patronizingly) putting an arm on each of his examiners' shoulders.

[40] From 1929 onwards, Wittgenstein argued that to seek a definition of number betrays a misunderstanding, and he criticizes Russell on this score. See, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* B. F. McGuinness (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 221–223; *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1932–35*; A. Ambrose (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 164. For an account of Wittgenstein's early theory of number and its connection to the *Tractatus Grundgedanke* concerning logical constants, see Marc Joseph, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Arithmetic', *Dialogue* 37, No. 1 (Winter, 1998), 83–106.

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[Wittgenstein leaves]

Russell: Well, we have examined him on the central doctrines of his book and found that he is able to supply no adequate defence of them. [Moore stops writing] I mentioned Bolzano, but I could easily have mentioned others from whom he has derived ideas without any acknowledgment,[41] and I regard that as a serious matter. He certainly would not appreciate others plagiarizing from him.[42] You have to present our report, what on earth are you going to say?

Moore: I've written it already. [Reads from his piece of paper] 'Some people think that Mr. Wittgenstein's thesis is a work of genius: but, be that as it may, it is certainly *not* up to the standard required for the Cambridge degree of Doctor of Philosophy'.[43]

University of Wales, Swansea

[41] Wittgenstein confided to a 1931 notebook: 'I don't believe I have ever invented a line of thinking, I have always taken one over from someone else. I have simply straightaway seized on it with enthusiasm for my work of clarification. That is how Boltzmann, Hertz, Schopenhauer, Frege, Russell, Kraus, Loos, Weininger, Spengler, Sraffa have influenced me'. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, G. H. von Wright (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 19, a passage in which Wittgenstein identifies lack of originality as a Jewish trait—perhaps those Jews in the above list of authors upon whose ideas Wittgenstein seized got *their* ideas from non-Jewish persons! (There is quite a bit of anti-semitic rubbish scattered through Wittgenstein's diary notes up to 1931, but it ceases after that year.) Even Wittgenstein's literary style is derivative, owing a great deal to Lichtenberg and Goethe—see, respectively, G. H. von Wright, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Biographical Sketch' in his *Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), 15–34, and M. W. Rowe, 'Goethe and Wittgenstein', *Philosophy* **66** (1991), 283–303. Von Wright writes, 'An author ... who reminds one, often astonishingly, of Wittgenstein is Lichtenberg. ... It is deserving of mention that some of Lichtenberg's thoughts on philosophical questions show a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein's' (p. 34). Why von Wright should put things this way round (when Lichtenberg was writing two centuries before Wittgenstein) I do not know.

[42] I have learned from Michael Nedo that, in conversation with Moritz Schlick, Wittgenstein complained bitterly about Carnap plagiarizing his views. Wittgenstein told Schlick that one should either be scrupulous in citing sources, as he (Schlick) was, or one should not bother citing them at all, as was his own practice. But what is morally unacceptable (according to Wittgenstein) is citing selectively.

[43] In the actual examiner's report, Moore wrote 'It is my personal opinion that Mr. Wittgenstein's thesis is a work of genius; but, be that as it may, it is certainly well up to the standard required for the Cambridge degree of Doctor of Philosophy'. The common view, well represented by Peter Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy*

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(Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 22–38, is that the *Tractatus* is a flawed masterpiece. Nevertheless, it is my serious contention that, had Wittgenstein's contemporaries not been so overawed by his personality, and had the dissertation been judged by normal standards of originality and quality of philosophical argumentation, it would have failed. Wittgenstein was, in his twenties, philosophically wet behind the ears (although he had produced some interesting ideas in logic). Subsequently, after many years of struggle against his personal vices and against the naïve preconceptions that informed the *Tractatus*, he went on to produce truly great and highly original thought. I concur with Michael Dummett in his judgment that 'No one capable of recognizing profound philosophy can open the *Philosophical Investigations* without perceiving that it is a work of genius' (M. Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 166).

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