

# CORA DIAMOND'S THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

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JONATHAN TRAN

The publication of *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics* presents an opportunity to review Cora Diamond's contribution to Christian theology and ethics. While Diamond's regular interlocutors (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe, Simone Weil and Stanley Cavell) carry obvious theological resonance with well-trodden pathways into any number of theological loci, it is Diamond's philosophical analysis that is of greatest benefit for theology. Her particular arguments, including some of analytic philosophy's most astute and innovative formulations, offer profound insights into the scope and implications of theological reflection. Diamond's contributions are well known within contemporary philosophy. Her penetrating insights on the nature and repercussions of moral thought, particularly her work on the normative status of humans and animals, have upended entire ways of thinking. Still, it is Diamond's highly original reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein that stands out as her most important and perhaps most lasting contribution. Because Wittgenstein's presence within contemporary analytic philosophy remains fraught, Diamond's innovations have often fallen by the wayside, highly significant for purveyors of "the new Wittgenstein," but for the most part underappreciated within the broader guild of philosophy. Considering that Wittgenstein plays such an influential role in contemporary Anglophone theology, however, Diamond's interpretation matters crucially, not least for Christian theologians.

*Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going on to Ethics* brings together essays collected over a thirty year period.<sup>1</sup> The book consists of three parts. Part I, incorporating three essays on propositions, addresses the nature of philosophical activity. Part II uses two essays to resolve an objection Anscombe raised about Wittgenstein's account of propositions. Part III's two essays involve Diamond "going on to ethics" following her resolution of Anscombe's objection. The essays are quite demanding but the fruits gleaned by their engagement are well worth the effort. In what follows, I outline the book's major formulations and their implications for Christian theology with a view to elucidating some of the returns of Diamond's theological imagination.

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Jonathan Tran  
Religion Department, Baylor University, One Bear Place #85490, Waco, TX 76798, USA  
Email: jonathan\_tran@baylor.edu

<sup>1</sup> Cora Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe, Going On to Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). Page references will be made parenthetically inline above.

*On What Can Only Be Said: Austerity and Resolution*

A number of contemporary theologians, usually under the influence of postliberal theology, tend to align themselves along three commonly held positions regarding Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy. A first view is that language runs up against limits, on the other side of which are realities that can only be shown even if never straightforwardly said, with God serving as the paradigmatically unsayable. A second view is that linguistic meaning follows use and use is determined by irreducible forms of life. A third view is that Wittgenstein's development from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* itself embodies the limits of language and the determinacy of forms of life.<sup>2</sup>

Diamond does not so much challenge the adequacy of these positions as render them superfluous. Unlike his *Philosophical Investigations*, with its multiple, insistent reminders that not every utterance involves propositional content, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is almost exclusively focused on propositions. This matters because the most vexing philosophical questions he faced had to do with those aspects of language that purport to represent or describe extralinguistic reality. Following the critical philosophical project – which stems from Descartes to Hume to Kant – propositions took up the whole of philosophy's attention, specifically the question, "What do those representations do to represented reality?" Utilizing the *Philosophical Investigations* only for the purpose of reminding us that not all utterances are propositions still leaves standing the question of what, in Wittgenstein's approach, propositions do. Too often those who appropriate Wittgenstein for theological ends pass too quickly over the *Tractatus*, leaving the impression that they either do not understand its central problematic or fear they have no answer for it. In her groundbreaking essay, "Realism and the Realistic Spirit," Diamond signaled its enduring challenge – captured in Wittgenstein's cryptic note: "Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing."<sup>3</sup>

According to Diamond, Wittgenstein offers in the *Tractatus* a picture theory of propositions which, following Elizabeth Anscombe, understands "the elements of the proposition to stand for the objects whose possible configuration we are reproducing in the arrangement of the elements of the proposition."<sup>4</sup> This picture theory advances three claims about propositions. First, a proposition arranges words into a meaningful relationship in order to propose something. It is what a proposition does with words and not the words themselves, taken in isolation, which grants sense to the words and the proposition. In short, words have meaning only in how they are used in a proposition. Correlatively, a proposition only makes sense insofar as the words of which it is comprised are meaningfully related to each other, where one is able to catch the drift of how the proposition uses the words (16). A proposition is nonsensical when one or more of its words proves unclear, and clarification entails clarifying terms (e.g., "By *x*, I mean such and such.")<sup>5</sup> This minimalist account of nonsense – what Diamond describes as Wittgenstein's "austere" view – is distinguishable from a substantive view of nonsense, to which I will return below. Second, in making sense a proposition says something – proposes something – about the world. The intentional content of the proposition – its ability to propose something about something – comes from its elements working together toward that end. Only in making sense can a proposition

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 1961); henceforth *TLP*. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, fourth edition (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), henceforth *PI*.

<sup>3</sup> First published in 1986, the essay now begins her *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1959), 69.

<sup>5</sup> *TLP*, 5.4733.

propose something about the world.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis here is not so much on the world as it is on the proposition through which the world comes into view; *what* the proposition says about the world serves as the proposition's intentional content, what its elements logically picture to be the case.<sup>7</sup> When Wittgenstein talked about a proposition's logical form, its logical character, he meant the manner by which the proposition used its elements toward a certain picture of the world. Third, a proposition's sense reduces to one of two possibilities: what it pictures about the world is either true or it is false. As Wittgenstein remarks, "A proposition shews how things are *if* it is true."<sup>8</sup> Diamond calls this a proposition's truth-functional bipolarity, to which I will return.

Wittgenstein's austere view of nonsense effectively rules out a view of nonsense as consisting of two kinds: the plain nonsense of the Diamondian variety, on the one hand, and some other more substantive nonsense, on the other (151). The latter view has become quite popular in Christian theology, often invoked as a way to mark and guard God's mystery and transcendence. This view holds that behind substantive nonsense – as distinct from plain nonsense – there is *something* sensical that substantive nonsense is trying to say but which becomes nonsensical when said. Those who hold this view believe that this is what Wittgenstein was finally after in the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's letter to Bertrand Russell is frequently invoked as evidence: "Now I'm afraid you haven't really got hold of my main contention to which the whole business of logical propositions is only corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be expressed (*gesagt*) by propositions, i.e., by language (and, which comes to the same thing, what can be thought) and what cannot be expressed by propositions, but only shown (*gezeigt*); which I believe is the cardinal problem of philosophy."<sup>9</sup> On this view, the *gesagt/gezeigt* distinction is meant to make room for the idea of something possessing sense, oddly, prior to our speaking about it (111). Trying to put this sensical-in-itself thing into language will have the effect of rendering it nonsensical; nonsense here is not the fault of speakers who fail to clarify themselves but the failures of speech as such (158). The image is seemingly buttressed by Wittgenstein's famous statement, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical."<sup>10</sup> However, this interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* runs directly against its own picture theory of propositions where words gain meaning as a function of a proposition's logical form – a form that uses words to say such and such, where the onus falls to speakers to be clear about their words on pain that the propositions they assert will otherwise slide into nonsense. This interpretation presents a metaphysical image that neatly divides between things-sensible-in-themselves, on the one side, and the language which tries to convey that sense, on the other. Into that image the *gesagt/gezeigt* distinction introduces a further division between things whose sense can survive linguistic conveyance and things that cannot. On the far side of language sit these substantively sensical things which resist linguistic conveyance. They can only be shown.<sup>11</sup> The logical form imposed by propositional saying only muddles things. Different entities have been assigned the role of these sensical-in-themselves

<sup>6</sup> Anscombe, *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69.

<sup>8</sup> *TLP*, 4.022.

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore*, edited with an introduction by G. H. von Wright, assisted by B. F. McGuinness (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 71.

<sup>10</sup> *TLP*, 6.522.

<sup>11</sup> See Peter Geach and J. Hintikka, "Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein," in *Acta Philosophica Fennica: Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G. H. von Wright*, vol. 28, 1976, 54–70; P. M. S. Hacker, "Was He Trying to Whistle It?," in *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Norman Malcolm, *Nothing Is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of Early Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); David Pears, *False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

substantively-inexpressible things behind and resistant to language. They assume various forms – from Kantian things-in-themselves, to the authentic self, to the God of Christian faith. Some theologians have adopted this approach because they think it preserves divine ineffability. Only God possesses God's own sense and any attempt to speak of that sense will invariably sound like nonsense.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note the implications for the other side of the saying/showing divide. If the elements of a proposition no longer depend on logical form, then language can no longer be viewed as possessing its own integrity. The very idea of natural languages no longer obtains, the result of which is that language cannot be trusted, leaving judgments of every kind – epistemic, moral, aesthetic and theological – essentially solipsistic in structure.

Against the metaphysical image, Diamond asserts that nonsense is nonsense. There are not different kinds of nonsense. Nonsense, as nonsense, cannot be made sense of, certainly not by speculating about it in terms of a substantively self-subsisting ineffable existence. What cannot be made sense of cannot be made sense of.<sup>13</sup> Diamond's austere view of nonsense follows from the picture theory's austere view of sense; namely, that sense concerns propositions, which either make sense or not – and, if they do make sense, are true or not. Wittgenstein's logical form has the effect of deflating the power of the metaphysical image. Diamond writes, "The logical characteristics of propositions, their capacity for truth and falsehood, their relation to reality, can be made clear without appeal to substantial metaphysical facts, which would have to turn out right if our thought is genuinely to be in contact with reality" (121). For Diamond, questions about the externality of the world simply do not arise – what could be more obvious? Instead, Diamond reads Wittgenstein as interested in how that obviousness often tempts us into confusions about linguistic representation (hence Wittgenstein's comment above about realism without empiricism). Empiricism promotes the idea that language generally, and propositions specifically, depend for their stability and meaning on extralinguistic phenomena that do not require, and indeed can be damaged by, the logical form propositions grant. Empiricism turns the aim of philosophy into a preoccupation with epistemological verification, using the empirical world to verify the substance of human speech. A consequence of such a view is to situate God as one among a number of other extralinguistic phenomena to be verified.

With the austere view, which makes of nonsense just nonsense, Diamond precludes introduction of the metaphysical image, putting Wittgenstein's saying/showing distinction under different terms. I will say more about this later. Right now it is necessary to trace how the anti-metaphysicalism of the austere view transposes onto Diamond's innovative interpretation of Wittgenstein's corpus. This comes to be known as Diamond's "resolute reading" (which she develops with James Conant). One might best understand it as a response to the following supposition: "If Wittgenstein is as anti-metaphysical as the picture theory's austerity suggests, then how does one explain the *Tractatus*' metaphysical imagery?"<sup>14</sup> There is a popular answer not unconnected to the metaphysical image that the austere view precludes. On the whole,

<sup>12</sup> For various theological treatments, see Paul L. Holmer, "Wittgenstein's 'Saying' and 'Showing,'" *Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 22 (1980): 222–35; David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1966); D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (New York, NY: Macmillan St. Martins Press, 1970); David A. Conway, "D. Z. Phillips and 'The Adequacy of Language,'" *Analysis* 35, no. 3 (1975): 93–97. See Anscombe's discussion of the self in Anscombe, *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 161–73.

<sup>13</sup> See Cora Diamond, "We Can't Whistle It Either: Legend and Reality," *European Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (2010): 335–56.

<sup>14</sup> See James Conant and Cora Diamond, "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan," in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, edited by Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London: Routledge, 2004), 46–99.

Wittgensteinian theologians have adopted this popular view. It tells a story whereby Wittgenstein at one point used to believe that the world is composed of simple nameable objects, all of which could be related as facts via propositions in a language.<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein worked out this metaphysical view of language in the *Tractatus*, replete with its metaphysical imagery. By the time he got to the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein, according to the story, came to see that his earlier metaphysical project was wrongheaded, which then caused him to advance a more mature anti-metaphysical idea that language has less to do getting at what the world is in itself and more to do with “forms of life” that use “language games” for a variety of purposes, only one of which is to describe and represent the world. The popular answer tells, paradoxically, a metaphysical story that makes Wittgenstein into a metaphysician. It also comes with a reading strategy: one should read the *Tractatus* as a mistake that the *Investigations* later corrects, “the later Wittgenstein” overcoming “the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*,” and so on and so forth.

By arguing that Wittgenstein's anti-metaphysicalism should be read *resolutely* throughout the entirety of Wittgenstein's corpus, Diamond's approach shows how the popular story rings hollow. The *Tractatus* does not represent an immature Wittgenstein wrong-headedly engaging in metaphysics but rather an inventive Wittgenstein intentionally employing metaphysical imagery – what Diamond calls “self-conscious fakes” – through which readers are invited to learn how to distrust the very metaphysical imagery that is being deployed.<sup>16</sup> Appreciating the tremendous influence exerted by the critical project from Descartes to Hume to Kant, Wittgenstein recognized that he could not challenge that project head on. Thus, he devised through the *Tractatus* a way for readers to discover for themselves the project's fatal problems, which they would experience from the inside, so to speak. By placing themselves within the metaphysical imagery, they would learn to separate out what was salvageable (the picture theory of propositions) from what was not (the metaphysical imagery). As evidence, Diamond quotes what she takes to be the interpretive key that Wittgenstein himself supplies: “My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: anyone who understands me finally realizes them as nonsensical, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up it.) He must overcome these propositions; then he sees the world rightly. About what cannot be spoken of one must be silent.”<sup>17</sup> She explains, “The *Tractatus* calls its own propositions nonsense, but its own nonsense is intended to counter the kind of nonsense it takes to be characteristic of Philosophy . . . What Wittgenstein means by calling his propositions nonsense is not that they do not fit into some official category of his of intelligible propositions but that there is at most the illusion of understanding them. . . You are to understand not the propositions but the author.”<sup>18</sup>

Diamond makes much of Wittgenstein's ladder metaphor, the ladder that is the conceptual scaffolding to be thrown away once used. She worries about Wittgensteinians refusing to give the ladder up, “chickening out” because of a worry that their most cherished beliefs will crumble in the absence of trusted metaphysical supports. “What counts as not chickening out is then this, roughly: to throw the ladder away is, among other things, to throw away in the end the attempt to take seriously the language of ‘features of reality’. To read Wittgenstein himself as not chickening out is to say that it is not, not really, his view that there are features of reality that cannot

<sup>15</sup> Alice Crary, “Introduction,” in *Wittgenstein and the Moral Life: Essays in Honor of Cora Diamond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 1–25 (2–3).

<sup>16</sup> Cora Diamond, “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by Lawrence C. Becker and Becker, Charlotte B., second edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 1810–13 (1811).

<sup>17</sup> *TLP*, 6.54.

<sup>18</sup> Cora Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, edited by Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 149–73 (151, 150 and 155).

be put into words but show themselves. What *is* his view is that that way of talking may be useful or even for a time essential, but it is in the end to be let go of and honestly taken to be real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to ineffable truth.”<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein’s picture theory – where logical form secures and stabilizes meaning otherwise thought to depend on empiricist verification – thus serves to alleviate readers of their anxiety after the *Tractatus*’ metaphysical nonsense self-destructs, therapeutically assuaging worries by ensuring that cherished beliefs can, under the integrity of their own logical form, stand on their own. Diamond imagines reading the *Tractatus* crucially as an exercise in moral formation where one arrives at its insights only after submitting oneself to its rigorous tutelage. Diamond is of the conviction that Wittgenstein’s readers would come out all the better having survived his idiosyncratic instruction, and only then finally able to appreciate the operations of language he recounts in the *Investigations*. The readerly strategy is therefore not about how to read the *Tractatus* retrospectively in light of the *Investigations*, but about how one comes to appreciate the *Investigations* once one has climbed the *Tractatus*’ ladder and thrown it away.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes, “If I am inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation out of grey rags and dust, I shall do well to examine those rags very closely to see how a mouse may have hidden in them, how it may have got there and so on. But if I am convinced that a mouse cannot come into being from these things, then this investigation will perhaps be superfluous.”<sup>20</sup> The metaphysician will look for metaphysical reasons to explain language, be “inclined to suppose that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation” and will require the *Tractatus*’ rigorous tutelage after which they might “examine those rags very closely” so that they might come to the simpler explanation as to “how a mouse may have hidden.” I mentioned earlier that for Diamond Wittgenstein’s saying/showing distinction serves a different role than that ascribed to it by the metaphysical image. Those who encounter a piece of nonsense in an austere and resolute way will, like the person who finds a mouse among rags, look for straightforward explanations. They will not take the nonsense as an invitation to look behind the nonsense for something occluded by language – God, an inscrutable self, or the forever-contracting thing-in-itself. Rather, they will assume language’s adequacy and look to clarify – to *show* – what was said, to see if sense can be further provided, most directly by the one who uttered the nonsense. Hence, Wittgenstein’s admonition: “*look and see*.”<sup>21</sup> Diamond’s anti-metaphysicalism denies neither that speakers might not and often do not understand each other nor that some things are better shown than said. She simply refuses to believe that either scenario results from a metaphysical deficiency of language. Diamond holds to a “realistic” view about what language can and cannot do; it *can* convey meaning from one person to another, meaning that internally relates word and world; it *cannot* make up for a person’s lack of clarity about what they want to say. In looking beyond language to that which resists language, theologians – in the gnostic, iconoclastic and nominalist mood that can make of Christianity something obtuse – can be guilty of evading the responsibilities that a human life in words places on speakers. Indeed, the tendency to evasion has little to do with something beyond the ordinary conditions of their speaking and more to do with a (moral) failure to inhabit the very words being used. None of this denies God’s transcendence, of course. What it does suggest, on the contrary, is that the case for divine transcendence rests on the integrity of human modes of knowing.

<sup>19</sup> Diamond, *Realistic Spirit*, 181.

<sup>20</sup> *PI*, §51. See also John McDowell, “Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, edited by Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), 38–52.

<sup>21</sup> *PI*, §66.

*Diamond's Theological Imagination*

Diamond portrays imagination as “an activity of mind through which we come to be able to see, perhaps only with great effort, what is before us, to see possibilities as open to us we had not seen, to see the pursuit of truth as opening up questions and more questions for us.”<sup>22</sup> Imagination, accordingly, has little to do with private mental states that conjure – *imagine* – fanciful possibilities (e.g., the imaginary friend or an imagined conspiracy) but rather denotes what becomes objectively available through the dense materiality of practiced habits of speech. This portrayal of imagination arrives with Diamond's program of resolute reading, a program that comes with significant ethical implications which Diamond develops in relationship to Iris Murdoch. Before I turn to those implications I need to recount another aspect of Diamond's thought, one that will not only frame these ethical implications as theologically relevant but will show how ethical thought and theological thought importantly resemble one another, something Diamond learned from Anscombe's theological ethics.

Recall the third aspect of Wittgenstein's picture theory, a truth-functional account of propositions: insofar as a proposition pictures something, that picture can either be true (T) or false (F); things stand as the proposition pictures (*p*) or they do not (*not~p*) so that a proposition qua proposition stands between two poles. Bipolarity is characteristic of propositions; to be a proposition, on the terms of the picture theory, is to possess two possible senses, *p* and *not~p*, taking the form *TpF* (50). However, at just this point Anscombe raises an objection. She recognizes Wittgenstein's picture theory as the *Tractatus*' great contribution, calling it “powerful and beautiful,” and yet impugns it as “dogmatic,” “plainly false,” and “wrong,” judging it, in Diamond's words, as “incredible in the restrictions it places on language” (235).<sup>23</sup> Anscombe gets to the core of the objection in her *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*:

Here it is worth remarking that the truth of the *Tractatus* theory would be death to natural theology; not because of any jejune positivism or any “verificationism,” but simply because of the picture theory of the “significant proposition.” For it is essential to this that the picturing proposition has two poles, and in each sense it represents what may perfectly be true. Which of them is true is just what *happens* to be the case. But in natural theology this is an impermissible notion; its propositions are not supposed to be the ones that happen to be true out of pairs of possibilities.<sup>24</sup>

Diamond helps the objection along with two other instances where Christian theology – specifically, doctrinal claims – refuses bipolarity: first, Helmut Gollwitzer's claim that without God, “all thinking about the world ultimately goes astray” (224 and 236); and, second, Brian Davies' claim that Christian theology “puts up ‘No Entry’ signs . . . at the beginning of certain roads down which one might be tempted to wander,” signs like, “God is not a moral agent subject to praise or censure” (261).<sup>25</sup>

For Anscombe, the picture theory's commitment to bipolarity poses significant problems not just for natural theology but also for moral philosophy. Moral philosophy similarly refuses bipolarity, where contesting some moral picture (some moral *p*) with an opposite moral picture

<sup>22</sup> Cora Diamond, “Murdoch the Explorer,” *Philosophical Topics* 38, no. 1 (2010): 51–85 (69).

<sup>23</sup> Anscombe, *Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 77.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Diamond quotes from Helmut Gollwitzer, *The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1965), 213; Brian Davies, “Is God a Moral Agent?,” in *Whose God? Which Tradition? The Nature of Belief in God*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 97–122 (111 and 116).

(*not-p*) would result not in alternative thinking but failed thinking as such. Anscombe famously made such an argument in her essay “Mr Truman’s Degree.” The crux of her argument is summed up in the claim, “For men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is always murder” (225).<sup>26</sup> For Anscombe, entertaining the thought that “For men to choose to kill the innocent as a means to their ends is *not* always murder” does not represent a different moral thought – say, an alternative ethical point of view – but rather that thinking as such has “gone off the rails” (287). Moral thinking *qua* thinking can only come to one conclusion here. Supplementing Anscombe’s Truman example with a description of how entertaining *not-p* results in absurdity, Diamond invokes David Wiggins’ approach to slavery as a moral issue. According to Diamond, Wiggins thinks that “if you refuse to subsume the institution of slavery under the concepts it is subsumed under in the argument for its injustice and insupportability, you are at risk of depriving yourself, at the same time, of any workable scheme of moral ideas. You need to consider what would be involved in having a workable system of moral ideas that dispensed, in the face of the slave trade and its historical effects, with ideas like *justice*, *slavery*, and *using human beings as means, not ends*” (279–80).<sup>27</sup> To acquiesce to the picture theory’s bipolar account of propositions is to embrace what turns out to be morally and theologically unthinkable because internally inconsistent and incoherent. Hence, Anscombe’s conclusion that the picture theory is dogmatic, plainly false, and wrong.

In answering Anscombe’s objection, Diamond concedes that many things one would want to propose – including propositions without viable *not-p* senses – would not count as a proposition on the picture theory. But she also thinks that Wittgenstein’s approach makes room for other uses of propositions (134 and 135). Specifically she points to what she calls “preparatories” – following Wittgenstein’s mathematical and logical (or simply, grammatical) notion of “*preparations* for a language” – that work very much like Davies’ “‘No Entry’ signs . . . at the beginning of certain roads down which one might be tempted to wander.” She suggests several occasions for such closures, illiberal as they might be (258–61). Wittgenstein lays out the idea: “Language has the same traps ready for everyone; the immense network of easily trodden false paths. And thus we see one person after another walking down the same paths and we already know where he will make a turn, where he will keep going straight ahead without noticing the turn, etc., etc. Therefore, wherever false paths branch off I ought to put up signs to help in getting past the dangerous spots” (196).<sup>28</sup> Diamond outlines several examples where an “asymmetry” serves as a “path-blocker” (192, 197 and 251–53).<sup>29</sup> “Suppose, for example, we found ourselves frequently multiplying 2 times 24 and getting 46 (perhaps because we tended to slip from multiplying 2 times 4 to adding instead). So in these cases an inequation might come in handy: ‘ $2 \times 24 \neq 46$ ’” (196).<sup>30</sup> The inequation has no *not-p* sense and any attempt to refute it (to establish its *not-p* sense) would “peter out to nothing” because it serves as an occasion – e.g., “we tended to slip from multiplying 2 times 4 to adding instead” – where what it pictures can only be true (*Tp*). On these occasions, the point is not so much to propose how things are but to foreground how they must be. Interestingly, Anscombe here takes as a paradigmatic example “the robustness of the

<sup>26</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 62–71.

<sup>27</sup> David Wiggins, *Ethics: Twelve Lectures on the Philosophy of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 369.

<sup>28</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Transcript: TS 213*, edited by Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian Aue (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 312.

<sup>29</sup> Diamond quotes Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, 192.

<sup>30</sup> Diamond offers several other examples of instances where the attempted refutation of an asymmetry “peters out to nothing.” “Someone is not the name of someone” is her most often used example. Perhaps her most helpful is “I am not dead” for the Cotard sufferer (see, respectively, 71–96 and 217–20). While both of these examples are more illuminating than  $2 \times 24 \neq 46$ , explicating them in greater detail is beyond the scope of this essay.



necessary truths of natural theology" (187 and 224). As a necessary truth, a successful preparatory, which might begin by categorically blocking certain options, will exert an implicit normative force by making only certain options imaginable.

According to Diamond's Wittgenstein, there are many instances of these sorts of "accommodatory propositions" – as many as there are occasions where they prove useful. That Diamond uses as examples straightforwardly theological propositions (along with Davies' example, Gollwitzer's claim that without God "all thinking about the world ultimately goes astray") in her attempt to resolve Anscombe's objection as it pertains to natural theology illuminates how doctrinal claims (*Tp*) act as a species of preparatory and how preparatories are not unique to theological speech. This is a crucial point. There are aspects of speech that are critical not only for theology, but for moral thought in general and indeed for any far-reaching mode of speech.

In conclusion, I want to build on Diamond's discussion about what can and cannot be imagined in order to get to her larger claims about ethical imagination. Consider something Iris Murdoch says in *The Sovereignty of Good*: "We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it, and this exhilarates us because of the distance between our ordinary dulled consciousness and an apprehension of the real."<sup>31</sup> As discussed above, Diamond resolutely makes of Wittgenstein's austere view of sense and nonsense a call for renewed attention to that which is given. She thinks that some will need to undergo the *Tractatus*' rigorous tutelage in order to gain the sensitivities necessary for attention and forgo evading responsibilities that entangle them in metaphysical illusions. Much of what reading the *Tractatus* is supposed to do is to train one into being drawn into what is there, rather than speculating about what is not. In coming across nonsense, as Wittgenstein does when he finds before him the inheritance of the critical project, the philosopher enters in. Diamond imagines the *Tractatus*' metaphysical imagery as Wittgenstein's attempt to lay out that inheritance so that his readers can get inside and look around, imagining themselves in the position of the utterer of nonsense:

... the *Tractatus*, in its understanding of itself as addressed to those who are in the grip of philosophical nonsense, and its understanding of the kind of demands it makes on its readers, supposes a kind of imaginative activity, an exercise of the capacity to enter into the taking of nonsense for sense, of the capacity to share imaginatively the inclination to think that one is thinking something in it. If I could not as it were see your nonsense as sense, imaginatively let myself feel its attractiveness, I could not understand you. And that is a very particular use of imagination.<sup>32</sup>

She imagines the philosophical labor here to involve not making sense of nonsense (which cannot be done) nor imposing sense onto nonsense (which the metaphysical image wants done) but rather as identifying nonsense as nonsense and imagining its attractions. She imagines Wittgenstein putting up a signpost at the end of the *Tractatus* that reads "anyone who understands *me* finally realizes them as nonsensical." Again, Murdoch: "We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it."

One might wonder whether Diamond's far-from-simple resolute reading does not itself fancy "that a mouse has come into being by spontaneous generation out of grey rags and dust." Danièle Moyal-Sharrock sees the reading as entirely too far-fetched and points to what she takes to be a dogmatic moralism motivating it, "because [Diamond] scorns (what she takes to be) its metaphysics, the metaphysics cannot be Wittgenstein's; and so Wittgenstein is said to be *staging* a

<sup>31</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1971), 88.

<sup>32</sup> Diamond, "Ethics, Imagination and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," 156-57.

metaphysical point of view rather than *holding* one.”<sup>33</sup> Importantly, taking seriously the exegetical point here does not commit one to thinking that Diamond’s anti-metaphysicalism on language contravenes all metaphysics, including Christian theology’s inextricable metaphysicalism. Indeed, it is Diamond’s portrayal of imagination as an inclination toward the ordinary as that which transcends itself – an inclination that moreover requires rigorous tutelage – that brings Diamond closest to Christianity. Here one moves from the “very particular use of imagination” explicated by the resolute reading to its implications for moral life.

It is this capacity for imagination that Diamond’s philosophy embodies in examining those modes of thought that enliven and open one to the world. As was the case for Murdoch before her, Christian theology interestingly turns out to be a consistent source of inspiration. In a passage from “Vision and Choice” to which Diamond often returns, Murdoch speaks of “people whose fundamental moral belief is that we live in the same empirical and rationally comprehensible world and that morality is the adoption of universal and openly defensible rules of conduct. There are other people whose fundamental belief is that we live in a world whose mystery transcends us and that morality is the exploration of that mystery in so far as it concerns each individual.”<sup>34</sup> Murdoch brings up “certain aspects of Thomism” characterized by “moral attitudes which emphasize the inexhaustible detail of the world, the endlessness of the task of understanding, the importance of not assuming that one has got individuals and situations ‘taped’, the connection of knowledge with love and of spiritual insight with the apprehension of the unique.”<sup>35</sup> For Murdoch and Diamond, what transcends does not need to be located on the far side of nonsense, as it is in the metaphysical image dividing saying and showing, but issues within forms of life where certain things become thinkable, or unthinkable: “The true naturalist (the Marxist, for instance, and certain kinds of Christians) is one who believes that as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us and that moral progress consists in awareness of this reality and submission to its purposes.”<sup>36</sup> Ethics becomes far less about choosing between ethical options (*p* and *not~p*) and much more about submitting to what becomes imaginatively available, illustrating “how imagination is involved in the shaping of a fundamental moral attitude. The inexhaustibility of the world is not, as it were, there to be established by some argument, but is part of an imaginative vision of the world. Any far-reaching moral or moral-religious concept is grasped imaginatively, and not all at once; such concepts are then capable of ‘stirring’ our practical thinking at deep levels.”<sup>37</sup>

Diamond derives from Murdoch and Simone Weil a picture of imagination as an activity of attention that propels one forward, drawing one closer to the world, and so can be spoken of as freedom, likening attention and imagination to an adventure. In remarking on G. K. Chesterton’s evocatively Christian imagination, she writes, “Life as an adventure in a fairy tale was, for Chesterton, the best way of putting something that was for him a kind of perception; it reflected convictions that underlay any conscious understanding of the world.”<sup>38</sup> We might think of Christianity similarly as an adventure where the same dense materiality of speech that impels

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<sup>33</sup> Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, “Cora Diamond and the Ethical Imagination,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 3 (2012): 223–40 (229). In contrast, see Christopher Corder and Andrew Gleeson, “Cora Diamond and the Moral Imagination,” *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 5, no. 1 (2016): 55–71 (61–62).

<sup>34</sup> R. W. Hepburn and Iris Murdoch, “Symposium: Vision and Choice in Morality,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 30 (1956): 14–58 (47).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Diamond, “Murdoch the Explorer,” 70–71.

<sup>38</sup> Cora Diamond, “‘We Are Perpetually Moralists’: Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value,” in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, edited by Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79–109 (94 and 102).

one on the journey also habituates the very sensitivities (epistemic, moral, aesthetic and theological) necessary for it. The perilous nature of the journey and the habits of speech by which one comes to see God along the way teaches Christians to trust – having thrown away the ladder, having rid themselves of the ladder – what they see.<sup>39</sup>

Like her many Catholic interlocutors, Diamond imagines from a vantage “close to” that which transcends, regarding enchantment as a natural feature of the world and its many creatures (76). Diamond’s great interest in forms of *life* that place rigorous demands on thought evinces her own Wittgensteinian attempt to enter in, look around and see *from close to*, developing capacities for wonder as to the “astonishment and incomprehension that there should be beings so like us, so unlike us, so astonishingly capable of being companions of ours and so unfathomably distant.”<sup>40</sup> Alice Crary, a philosopher who has been deeply influenced by Diamond, writes that once one has been positioned “inside ethics”, “there can be no question of limiting the imaginative exercise that we accordingly face by specifying ahead of time which aspects of human beings’ or animals’ lives are of interest. For we cannot exclude the possibility that, once we have refined our conception of what matters in these lives, our understanding of them will shift, revealing that characteristics that once struck us as unimportant are in fact morally salient.”<sup>41</sup> Unsurprisingly, Diamond excoriates those instances when thought flounders – empiricists making of the world, in Murdoch’s words, something “hard” upon which the “objective” can be bluntly and crudely verified – and those modes of speech that precipitate the mind’s slackening toward what she interestingly calls “impiety.”<sup>42</sup> She bristles at the “obtuseness” of a qualification that Peter Singer enters in reference to “even a retarded human being.” Instead, she invites the reader to something better (morally, philosophically aesthetically, theologically) than what an updated utilitarianism has to offer, reminding us of the responsibilities that our humanity entails and the responsiveness it enjoins.<sup>43</sup>

This responsibility to responsiveness is no easy thing, and in one of Diamond’s most remarkable essays, she addresses “the difficulty of reality,” which she describes as “experiences in which we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability, difficult in that way, or perhaps awesome and astonishing in its inexplicability. We take things so. And the things we take so may simply not, to others, present the kind of difficulty – of being hard or impossible or agonizing to get one’s mind round.”<sup>44</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, whose sensibilities closely resemble Diamond’s, interprets her to be saying “that there is a connection between our assumption that we cannot imagine what it might mean for us to inhabit the body of an animal confronted by death and our inability to identify with the wounded body of [the person standing right in front of us].”<sup>45</sup> Hauerwas and Diamond alike take from Murdoch the centrality of human responsibility to responsiveness. Indeed, Hauerwas goes so far as to claim that he has “made a career out of” Murdoch’s sentence, “I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral

<sup>39</sup> See Diamond, *Realistic Spirit*, 309-17. Thanks to Brandon Morgan for helping me see the connection between Diamond’s “realistic spirit” and trust.

<sup>40</sup> Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1, no. 2 (2003): 1–26 (14).

<sup>41</sup> Alice Crary, *Inside Ethics: On the Demands of Moral Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 91. Along these lines, see Cora Diamond, “Losing Your Concepts,” *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (1988): 255–77.

<sup>42</sup> Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1975), 82. Cora Diamond, “The Importance of Being Human,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*: 29 Supplement to *Philosophy* 1991, 25-62 (52) and Cora Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People,” *Philosophy* vol. 53, no. 206 (October 1978): 465-79 (468).

<sup>44</sup> Diamond, “Difficulty of Reality,” 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “Bearing Reality: A Christian Meditation,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2013): 3–20 (8).

imagination and moral effort.”<sup>46</sup> In a fascinating interaction with Hauerwas, the aforementioned Crary writes,

The notion of moral attention I have in mind can be distilled from the meta-ethical stance on which Hauerwas and I agree. To represent moral values as woven into the fabric of reality, in the fashion in which we both do, is to hold that our affective endowments contribute internally to our ability to get aspects of the world into focus in a manner pertinent to ethics. This affectively-inflected understanding of moral cognition is aptly represented as implying the need in ethics for specific modes of attention. What are required are modes of attention that are demanding insofar as they call on us to further develop our sensitivities and thus to work on ourselves.<sup>47</sup>

Crary observes that there is “an arresting and important analogy between the logic of moral attention, thus understood, and the logic of faith as Hauerwas describes it.” It is only appropriate then that “the logic of moral attention” be recognized as Cora Diamond’s singular contribution to moral philosophy – a contribution, moreover, whose importance for and contribution to Christian theology cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Hauerwas and Crary share interests in interrogating in a Wittgensteinian mode the cultural inheritances that often leave us confused and bereft of attention, that prevent us from seeing that our problem is not that we are insufficiently committed to living morally, or that we fail to recognize that the lives of others matter. What we are missing, rather, is a fuller appreciation of the significance that “that recognition is something that is available to us insofar as we already attend passionately, or lovingly, to them.”<sup>48</sup> These passionate forms of attention, which enable us to imagine ourselves into the frame of the world, constitute particularly Diamondian moments of which we can never have enough.

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<sup>46</sup> Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 35-36; Stanley M. Hauerwas, “Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them If God Does Not Exist?,” in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 170–85 (155). See Stanley Hauerwas, “Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient?,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 8, no. 3–4 (February 24, 2005): 113–19. Hauerwas’ Wittgensteinianism has been consistently underestimated, along with its abiding relationship to his reflections on the disabled.

<sup>47</sup> “Reply to Stanley Hauerwas: Thoughts on Cats and Theology,” *Syndicate Theology*, October 7, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* In another text, Crary shows how moral judgment does not issue as application of antecedently adopted concepts, but rather works the other way. See Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).