

What is Squiggle? Ramsey on Wittgenstein's Theory of Judgement

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I

At the age of 20, and fresh from his undergraduate studies in mathematics, Ramsey set about writing what would be his first substantial publication, his 1923 Critical Notice of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (hereafter *TLP*). It is hard for modern students of that book, who negotiate its obscurities with generations of previous commentary to serve as guides, to appreciate the task Ramsey confronted; and, to the extent that one can appreciate it, it is hard not to feel intimidated by the brilliance of his success. His Critical Notice made Ramsey the first of Wittgenstein's interpreters.¹ In my view it makes him, still, the best.

I want to illustrate that here by considering what light his remarks cast on a single passage of the book, in which Wittgenstein advances what might be called his theory of judgement.

- 5.54 In the general propositional form, propositions occur in a proposition only as bases of the truth-operations.
- 5.541 At first sight it appears as if there were also a different way in which one proposition could occur in another.
Especially in certain propositional forms of psychology, like 'A thinks that *p* is the case', or 'A thinks *p*', etc.
Here it appears superficially as if the proposition *p* stood to the object A in a kind of relation.
(And in modern epistemology (Russell, Moore, etc.) those propositions have been conceived in this way.)
- 5.542 But it is clear that 'A believes that *p*', 'A thinks *p*', 'A says *p*', are of the form "'*p*' says *p*', and here we have no co-ordination of a fact and an object, but a co-ordination of facts by means of a co-ordination of their objects.
- 5.5421 This shows that there is no such thing as the soul—the subject, etc.—as it is conceived in contemporary superficial psychology.
A composite soul would not be a soul any longer.

Part of what is going on here is well understood. This is, roughly, that a fact can be represented only by a fact that manifests in itself the structure of the fact represented, and thus that whatever represents a state of affairs has

¹ Russell was too much a collaborator, I think, to be counted as first among Wittgenstein's interpreters.

to be complex in the same way as a proposition that might represent that state of affairs. That was first spelled out by Ramsey, and is now common ground amongst interpreters. Away from that common ground, though, interpretations soon diverge. In particular, they diverge even over such a seemingly basic question as whether Wittgenstein's analytical proposal is intended to make clear the sense that propositional attitude statements have, or whether instead it is intended to make clear that they have no sense. I'll suggest that this question and others that have seemed pressing to later commentators have done so because the focus and intention of Wittgenstein's proposal have been misidentified, in ways that attention to Ramsey can correct.

For the purpose of this illustration I'll begin by contrasting the accounts of the passage offered by two of the best of later commentators on the *Tractatus*, Elizabeth Anscombe and Anthony Kenny. Although they wrote forty and thirty years ago, their discussions have not been surpassed. For Ramsey's views I will draw on, in addition to the 1923 Critical Notice, his 1927 paper 'Facts and Propositions'. Only the first of these is explicitly exegetical. In the second Ramsey is addressing the issues in his own right. Towards the end of this paper, though, Ramsey makes the following very suggestive acknowledgement: 'In conclusion, I must emphasize my indebtedness to Mr Wittgenstein, from whom my view of logic is derived. Everything that I have said is due to him, except the parts which have a pragmatist tendency, which seem to me to be needed in order to fill up a gap in his system' (1927: 51). This suggests a simple subtractive scheme for arriving at an exegesis from a non-exegetical treatment:

$$X - Y = Z,$$

where

X = the total view of 'Facts and Propositions',

Y = the 'parts which have a pragmatist tendency',

so that

Z = what Ramsey took to be the Wittgensteinian basis to which he was adding.

The pragmatist theory of content that Ramsey proposed to fill the 'gap' is evidence of his genius as an original philosopher in his own right. What I want to emphasize about Ramsey as an interpreter is his recognition of the gap, or, in other words, his understanding of what kinds of issues and questions Wittgenstein's account aimed to settle and which it left open.

The pragmatist elements of 'Facts and Propositions' have more than one role. The most obvious but least important such role is to distinguish different attitudes—judgement, supposition, hope, expectation—towards, as we say, the same propositional content. This role I will ignore throughout the chapter. Wittgenstein's 'theory of judgement', like Russell's, is indifferent

to such contrasts, so might be better called a theory of understanding (cf. Russell 1992: 107). The second and most important role is to make good a shortcoming in Wittgenstein's account that Ramsey had already pointed to in the Critical Notice, extending this theory of understanding from elementary propositions to propositions in general. For much of this chapter (Sections V–VIII) I will be able to adopt the simplifying assumption that this is *the* role of Ramsey's pragmatist innovations, so that removing these additions returns us to the elementary case. In the final section of the chapter, though, I will acknowledge a role that Ramsey rightly found for his pragmatist tendency in the elementary case too.

II

Anscombe's reading of our passage has two main planks. The first is the common ground I've already sketched, but which she sets out more thoroughly and clearly in the following passage.

'it is clear', [Wittgenstein] says; and of course what was clear to him was that for anything to be capable of representing the fact that *p*, it must be as complex as the fact that *p*; but a thought that *p*, or a belief or statement that *p*, must be potentially a representation of the fact that *p* (and of course actually a representation of it, if it *is* a fact that *p*). It is perhaps not quite right to say that 'A judges *p*' is of the form "'*p*' says that *p*'; what he should have said was that the business part of 'A judges that *p*', the part that relates to something's having as its content a potential representation of the fact that *p*, was of the form "'*p*' says that *p*': 'A believes *p*' must mean 'There occurs in A or is produced by A something which is (capable of being) a picture of *p*'. (Anscombe 1959: 88)

Summarizing this, we might say that on Anscombe's analysis the gist of 'A judges *p*' is to be given in the pattern:

(AA) A's mental bits are configured thus and so, and the fact that they are so configured represents that *p*.

As Wittgenstein told Russell (Wittgenstein 1995: 125), and as Ramsey seems to have known without needing to ask, it doesn't matter at all what these mental bits might be.

A thought is a type whose tokens have in common a certain sense, and include the tokens of the corresponding proposition, but include other non-verbal tokens; these, however, are not relevantly different from the verbal ones, so that it is sufficient to consider the latter. (Ramsey 1923: 274)

Anscombe follows this recommendation in formulating the second plank of her reading, that what she takes to be the 'business part' of (AA), the part that follows the comma, is by the lights of the *Tractatus* a significant, bipolar proposition. She models this part of her discussion on the illustration Wittgenstein presents at *TLP* 3.1432,

that 'a' stands in a certain relation to 'b' says that aRb ,

asking: What actually is that certain relation? There seem to be true and false answers to this question. Given the notational conventions she supposes in force, for instance, the following is true (where '^' indicates concatenation):

that 'a' stands to 'b' in the relation one establishes between names n and m by writing $n^{\wedge}R^{\wedge}m$ says that aRb ,

while the following is false:

that 'a' is separated by one character from 'b' says that aRb .

With different conventions different instances of the 'business part' of (AA) would hold. For instance, in the loose style that many of us adopt, one that tolerates either of ' aRb ' or ' Rab ' indifferently, we should have:

that 'a' occurs in a three-character string also containing 'R' and ending with 'b' says that aRb .

According to Anscombe's reading, then, a specific instance of the pattern (AA)—or, as she puts it, some particular 'interpretation' of "' p ' says that p ", in which "' p '" is replaced by a formulation of the representing fact that constitutes that proposition (1959: 90)—will be a contingent, bipolar proposition giving the content of a given report, 'A judges that p '.

III

There are three obvious criticisms to be brought against Anscombe's reading. Two are raised by Kenny, the third not.

1. The first questions whether the examples just given should persuade us that "' p ' says that p ' can be the form of a contingently true statement. To imagine a change from true to false in such a statement amounted, we saw, to imagining a change in linguistic conventions. On the conventions Anscombe supposes in force, the last example,

that 'a' occurs in a three-character string also containing 'R' and ending with 'b' says that aRb ,

would be false; but with the laxer conventions I mentioned it would be true. The subject matter of this sentence must therefore be something that can remain the same while the conventions governing it are altered. It must be, in Wittgenstein's terminology, a sign rather than a symbol (*TLP* 3.321–3.322). But Wittgenstein seems to count it a mistake to ascribe any representational character to a mere sign. And if that is so, then the way Anscombe aims to provide for such a statement to be merely contingently true will, by Wittgenstein's lights, prevent it from being a truth at all. Thus Kenny:

“*p*” says that *p*’ does not have true–false poles. For what appears within the nested quotation marks is either—as Anscombe understands it—a description of accidental features of the propositional sign, in which case the proposition is always false; or it is a description which identifies ‘*p*’ precisely as the proposition that says that *p*; in which case the proposition is necessarily true (and therefore, for Wittgenstein, a pseudo-proposition). (1984: 7)

This complements an earlier and simpler argument to the same conclusion:

But “*p*” says that *p*’ must be a pseudo-proposition, since a proposition shows its sense and cannot say that it has it (*TLP* 4.022). (Kenny 1973: 101)

Neither argument is altogether persuasive. The thought of *TLP* 4.022, that a proposition *shows* its sense, emphasizes Wittgenstein’s conception of the proposition as a standpoint of representation (*TLP* 2.173), a transparent medium *through which* we are presented with reality. Yet that conception seems not to preclude another straightforwardly empirical standpoint, one that focuses on the medium rather than looking through it. *TLP* 4.022 might be better rendered ‘A proposition shows the state of affairs that is its sense’, rather than ‘A proposition shows *that* this state of affairs is its sense’. Kenny would need the second, rather than the first, to argue that, since it is shown what sense ‘*p*’ has, it cannot be said what sense it has.

As for the dilemma argument, it is certainly true that for Wittgenstein a symbol, and not a mere sign, is the proper bearer of meaning; that means, firstly, that only a symbol can have the kind of internal relation to reality that Wittgenstein takes to be involved in the philosophically important notion of meaning (*TLP* 3.31); and, secondly, that all manner of philosophical confusions result if that primary notion of meaning is imagined to attach to a mere sign (*TLP* 3.324). But again, accepting the priority of the meaning of symbols seems not to preclude, but to make possible, a secondary notion attaching to signs, when those signs are, contingently, the ‘visible parts’ of meaningful symbols (*TLP* 3.32).² It was, Wittgenstein said, for the empirical science of psychology to determine what are the actual constituents of thought and the kind of relation they bear to things (1995: 125). Yet Kenny’s argument leaves to psychology no form in which to report its results.

² A philosophical ascription of content aims at something with logical or epistemological consequences, consequences, for instance, for what implies what, or what is evidence for what; and no statement of the accidental properties of signs, or of their external relations to things, has such consequences. On the other hand, if on those grounds it is accepted that philosophy’s concern with content will issue in the statement of an internal relation, that the *symbol* ‘*a*’ signifies *a*, that seems to make room for the statement of an external relation between the *sign* ‘*a*’ and *a*, a relation that is, as it were, a product of the internal relation that interests philosophy and the contingent fact that the sign ‘*a*’ is so used as to become that symbol.

2. If that first criticism is inconclusive, a second seems more clear-cut. If there are genuine propositions of the pattern of (AA), and if Wittgenstein's proposal is that 'A judges p ' amounts to such a proposition, then the proposal does not solve, but simply replicates, the original problem. The problem was that ' p ' misleadingly seems to occur as the argument of a non-extensional function in 'A judges p ' (TLP 5.541). This second problem for Anscombe's reading is that ' p ' equally appears to occur as the argument of a non-extensional function on the 'right-hand side' of "' p ' says that p '. Whatever else it was supposed to achieve, Wittgenstein's analysis was meant to remove that appearance.

3. The third criticism is simpler. Even if Anscombe is right that propositions of the pattern "' p ' says that p ' can be genuine contingent propositions, her proposal seems just to mislocate the contingency in the belief reports these propositions are supposed to analyse. Intuitively, 'A judges p ' is a genuine contingent proposition because it is contingent *how* A's mind is set: his mental bits *are* configured so as to think that p , but they might not have been so configured, and perhaps tomorrow they will not be. The contingency Anscombe argues for (and that Kenny denies) has to do instead with what significance, if any, attaches to A's mental bits being configured in the ways they are. If that is contingent at all, it is so because it is contingent what mental language A 'speaks'; but that is in the nature of a standing truth, one that will still hold tomorrow, when A changes his mind.

IV

Although the previous section casts doubt on some of his arguments, Kenny's overall picture is, I believe, much closer to Wittgenstein's intentions.

Suppose that I think a certain thought: my thinking that thought will consist in certain psychic elements—mental images or internal impressions, perhaps—standing in a relation to each other. That these elements stand in such and such a relation will be a psychological fact; a fact in the world, within the purview of the natural sciences; just as the fact that the penholder is on the table is a physical fact within the purview of the natural sciences. But the fact that these mental elements have the meaning they have will not be a fact of science, any more than the fact (if it is a fact) that the penholder's being on the table says that the cat is on the mat (if the appropriate code is in force). (Kenny 1984: 8)

This section does not aim to challenge that picture, but only to question whether Kenny's discussion can properly lead us to it.

As we've already seen, Kenny denies that anything of the pattern "' p ' says that p ' can be a contingent truth. From that he concludes that 'belief propositions must be pseudo-propositions'—

or more precisely, they will be the conjunction of a genuine proposition and a spurious one. The proposition that Jones believes that grass is green will be a conjunction of (1) the proposition that certain mental elements in Jones's mind are

related in a certain way, and (2) the pseudo-proposition that their correlation in that way says that grass is green (1973: 101).

And this, Kenny contends, removes the original problem that Anscombe's analysis merely relocated:

if ‘“*p*” says that *p*’ is only a pseudo-proposition, and ‘A believes that *p*’ is of that form, it is easy to see how propositions reporting beliefs are no exception to the rule that propositions can occur in other genuine propositions only as the bases of truth-functional operations. (1984: 7)

But, now, is the original problem, the appearance that ‘*p*’ occurs as argument to a non-extensional function in ‘A judges *p*’, really solved? That depends, I think, on what we take the original problem to have been: does it turn on the apparent *non-extensionality* of the argument-place occupied by ‘*p*’, or is the problem that the non-extensional place occupied by ‘*p*’ appears to be an *argument-place*? Kenny's solution presumes the first. He is content to leave us with the appearance that ‘*p*’ does indeed occur in whatever analyses ‘A judges *p*’, while protecting the ‘rule’ of extensionality for ‘genuine’ propositions: on his account, one might say, ‘*p*’ *does* occur non-extensionally in a *non*-proposition. (Since ‘A judges *p*’ is not a genuine proposition, it has no truth value, so no truth value that varies independently of that of the contained proposition ‘*p*’.) If, on the other hand, the second formulation of the problem is the right one, we should expect a solution of it to reveal that ‘*p*’ does *not* occur as an argument at all in whatever *genuine* proposition replaces ‘A judges *p*’. And the history of our passage, which shows Wittgenstein to be concerned in the first instance to dispel the impression that ‘*p*’ has in a belief report an occurrence comparable to that of the name ‘*b*’ in ‘*aRb*’, suggests strongly that the second formulation is the right one.³

³ Some representative passages:

In ‘a judges *p*’ *p* cannot be replaced by a proper name. This appears if we substitute ‘a judges that *p* is true and not *p* is false’. The proposition ‘a judges *p*’ consists of the proper name *a*, the proposition *p* with its 2 poles, and a being related to both of these poles in a certain way. This is obviously not a relation in the ordinary sense. (Wittgenstein 1961b: 95)

When we say ‘A believes *p*’, this sounds, it is true, as if here we could substitute a proper name for ‘*p*’; but we can see that here a *sense*, not a meaning, is concerned, if we say . . . ‘A believes that “*p*” is true and “not-*p*” is false’. (1961b: 106)

At this stage, note, Wittgenstein is content to leave the subject of a judgement as represented by a name. That stage is superseded in the notes dictated to Moore:

The relation of ‘I believe *p*’ to ‘*p*’ can be compared to the relation of ‘“*p*” says *p*’ to *p*: it is just as impossible that *I* should be simple as that ‘*p*’ should be. (Wittgenstein 1961a: 119)

In making that move Wittgenstein has strengthened his earlier contention, that belief is not a relation ‘in the ordinary sense’ to a proposition *p*, to the conclusion that it is in no sense a relation:

Kenny opposes Anscombe's view that what follows the comma in the pattern (AA) could ever be the form of a contingent proposition. But he shares with her the presumption that this is the 'business part' of the analysis. This shows up in his readiness to compress his 'more precise' statement, that a belief report conjoins an empirical psychological report (before the comma) with a non-empirical semantic commentary on it (after the comma), into the conclusion that belief reports are pseudo-propositions. The history just mentioned suggests, though, that we should look to find the 'business part' of the report *before* the comma.

It must of course be some kind of shorthand for Kenny to describe a belief report as a conjunction of an empirical proposition and a pseudo-proposition, a piece of nonsense. For one cannot conjoin a senseful '*q*' with a nonsensical '*r*'. (One can pronounce one after the other, with 'and' between them, but that will not amount to conjoining anything with anything.) It would be natural to take this shorthand description to imply that the report reduces to the empirical proposition that is its first 'conjunct': adding the bit of nonsense doesn't add anything. To suggest instead that the report reduces to its second 'conjunct' leaves us not so much with an account of what a belief report amounts to as with the contention that it amounts to nothing at all.

(Kenny tries to soften the blow, holding that, while "*p*" says that *p* is a pseudo-proposition, it 'is of course a *correct* pseudo-proposition: it is a thesis of the *Tractatus*' (1984: 7). Here I think Anscombe is importantly right in focusing, not on the schema, but on its instances, for it is they that would be involved in analyses of given reports, 'A judges *p*'. Whatever might be claimed for the schema, those instances would not be theses of the *Tractatus*, since they would relate to the peculiarities of A's mental bits and their configuration.⁴)

The question arises how can one proposition (or function) occur in another proposition? The proposition or function can't possibly stand in relation to other symbols. (1961a: 118)

There are internal relations between one proposition and another; but a proposition cannot have to another *the* internal relation which a *name* has to the proposition of which it is a constituent, and which ought to be meant by saying it 'occurs' in it. In this sense one proposition can't 'occur' in another. (1961a: 116)

(I rely here on the premise that any relation to a proposition *p* would be expressed in a proposition in which *p* occurred as relatum.)

⁴ This point happily allows me to avoid the general question, much discussed in recent work on the *Tractatus*, whether there is confusion in relying on the idea that a piece of nonsense might be 'correct'.

V

Ramsey finds the business part of a belief report where several of our considerations have suggested it ought to be found, in the description of *A*'s mental set-up. The first passage of the Critical Notice to make this plain is not focused primarily on our passage, but occurs in Ramsey's account of the picture theory; he is expounding the claim that 'the representing relation', the correlations between picture elements and objects, 'belongs to the picture' (*TLP* 2.1513).

... this, I think, means that whenever we talk of a picture we have in mind some representing relation in virtue of which it is a picture. Under these circumstances we say that the picture represents that the objects are so combined with one another as are the elements of the picture, and this is the sense of the picture. And I think this must be taken to be the definition of 'represents' and of 'sense'; that is to say, that when we say that a picture represents that certain objects are combined in a certain way, we mean merely that the elements of the picture are combined in that way, and are co-ordinated with the objects by the representing relation which belongs to the picture. (That this is a definition follows, I think, from 5.542.) (1923: 271)

Ramsey is here concerned with two forms of statements. The first,

a picture represents that certain objects are combined in a certain way,

shares with "*p*" says that *p*' the shape: subject–verb–complement. Its subject seemingly refers to a representing item (a picture, proposition, or thought); its clausal complement then formulates the represented state of affairs. The second,

the picture elements are combined in that way, and are co-ordinated with the objects,

begins by replacing the apparent reference to a representing item ("*p*") by the schema of a sentence that would state the representing fact; it then dispenses altogether with the clausal complement by which the represented fact would be formulated ('that *p*'), and thus with the representational verb that introduces it ('says'). Ramsey cites our passage as entailing that the first of these statements is defined by, or reduces to, the second. For that to be so, our passage must have the following implications:

1. No representational relation between '*p*' and the possible fact that *p* figures fundamentally in what is asserted by "*p*" says that *p*' (nor therefore in 'A judges *p*').
2. Nor is there in that statement any mention of, or formulation of, the possible fact that *p*; i.e. the apparent occurrence of '*p*' on the 'right-hand side' of "*p*" says that *p*' (and therefore of 'A judges *p*') will, on a right account, simply disappear.

3. The only correlation between thought or language and reality presumed in an account of judgement is the correlation between words (picture-elements, or mental bits) and objects.

These implications give our passage a centrality in Ramsey's reading of the *Tractatus* that few other commentators have recognized. He holds, firstly, that Wittgenstein here

explicitly reduces the question as to the analysis of judgement . . . to the question 'What is it for a proposition token to have a certain sense?' (1923: 274–5);

and secondly,

that if we can answer [that] question we incidentally solve the problem of truth; or rather, it is already evident that there is no such problem. For if a thought or proposition token ' p ' says that p , then it is called true if p and false if $\sim p$. We can say that it is true if its sense agrees with reality, or if the possible state of affairs which it represents is the actual state of affairs, but these formulations only express the above definition in other words. (1923: 275)⁵

For all that he applauds Wittgenstein's advance in clarifying the question, however, Ramsey is convinced that there is no generally satisfactory answer to it to be extracted from the *Tractatus*. Beyond the straightforward case of elementary propositions, he holds, Wittgenstein offers only an account of what senses there are for propositions to have, not an account of which propositions have which senses (1923: 275–7; 1927: 41). It is the main task of 'Facts and Propositions' to make good that shortcoming. In line with the subtractive scheme suggested in Section I, though, I will here be cutting away the pragmatist innovations of that work to expose its understanding of Wittgenstein; and I'll have to be content if that leaves me only with a treatment of the simplest cases.

The rationale for this indirect approach lies in the fact that Ramsey found the simplest cases so simple that he said very little about them—too little to make plain the implications 1–3 above.⁶ In the Critical Notice his whole account of elementary propositions is given in the following passage:

⁵ Because of implications 1–3, that is, any apparent mention of facts in an account of truth is no more than optional verbal decoration:

We can, if we like, say that [a judgement that aRb] is true if there exists a corresponding fact that a has R to b , but this is essentially not an analysis but a periphrasis, for 'The fact that a has R to b exists' is no different from ' a has R to b '. (Ramsey 1927: 143)

It is depressing to remember—when Ramsey had it right from the beginning—how often the *Tractatus* has been taken to offer (or even to represent a paradigm of) a correspondence theory of truth.

⁶ Moore remarked in his Preface to Ramsey's papers, 'But sometimes I feel that he fails to explain things as clearly as he could have done, simply because he does not see that any explanation is needed: he does not see that what to him seems perfectly clear and straightforward may to others, less gifted, offer many puzzles' (Ramsey 1931, p. viii). This is a case in point.

According to Mr Wittgenstein a proposition token is a logical picture; and so its sense should be given by the definition of the sense of a picture; accordingly the sense of a proposition is that the things meant by its elements (the words) are combined with one another in the same way as are the elements themselves, that is, logically . . . Thus if ‘ a ’ means a , ‘ b ’ b , and ‘ R ’, or more accurately the relation we establish between ‘ a ’ and ‘ b ’ by writing ‘ aRb ’, means R , then that ‘ a ’ stands in this relation to ‘ b ’ says that aRb , and this is its sense. (1923: 275)

Here we have the common ground of subsequent interpretations sharply delineated, but what is distinctive in Ramsey’s reading is not yet prominent. Similarly in ‘Facts and Propositions’ atomic sentences are said to offer ‘no very serious problem’:

If a , R , and b are things which are simple in relation to [a thinker’s] language . . . he will believe that aRb by having names for a , R , and b connected in his mind and accompanied by a feeling of belief. (1927: 41)

Pausing only to explain, as above, that a name for R will be itself a relation holding between the names for a and b , Ramsey scuttles along to confront ‘the more interesting problems’ posed by complex propositions. Because the moral for belief reports is not explicitly drawn in this simple context, we need to start with his account of more complex cases and work back.

VI

The major differences between Ramsey’s two discussions occur in parts that I intend to cut away, and that allows me to swap backwards and forwards between them. I’ll give priority to the account in the Critical Notice, drawing on ‘Facts and Propositions’ for comparisons and confirmation. This earlier discussion starts under the simplifying assumption that we have to deal with only one logical symbolism, so that

apart from variation in the names used, there would be a rule giving all propositional signs which, in that symbolism, had a certain sense, and we could complete the definition of ‘sense’ by adding to it these rules. Thus ‘“ p ”’ says that $\sim aRb$ ’ would, supposing us to be dealing with the symbolism of *Principia Mathematica*, be analysed as follows: call anything meaning a , ‘ a ’, and so on, and call ‘ a ’ ‘ R ’ ‘ b ’, ‘ q ’; then ‘ p ’ is ‘ $\sim q$ ’ or ‘ $\sim\sim\sim q$ ’ or ‘ $\sim q \vee \sim q$ ’ or any of the other symbols constructed according to a definite rule. (1923: 278)

Let’s first strip away from this all the complexities introduced by Ramsey’s attempt to deal with truth-functional complexity. That will allow us to drop the material about rule-generated equivalents of ‘ $\sim q$ ’, at the same

⁷ The expression, ‘“ a ” “ R ” “ b ”’ might look to be simply a string of quotations, but what is intended is a proposition. Ramsey uses ‘“ R ”’ here, and I will use it in what follows, as a relational expression: it expresses the relation between names defined in the previous quotation from Ramsey (1923: 275).

time swapping the example from ‘ $\sim aRb$ ’ back to the elementary ‘ aRb ’. The result is:

“‘ p ’ says that aRb ’ is to be analysed: call anything meaning a , ‘ a ’, and so on; then ‘ p ’ is ‘ a ’ ‘ R ’ ‘ b ’.

Now convert this—in a fashion Ramsey clearly anticipates later in the same paragraph—to an analysis of ‘A judges p ’. We then have:

Call that by which A means a , ‘ a ’, and so on; then ‘A judges aRb ’ is to be analysed: ‘ a ’ ‘ R ’ ‘ b ’.

The central feature I’ve aimed to preserve through this succession of cuts and simplifications is marked in Ramsey’s original statement of his proposal by the striking formulation, ‘then “ p ” is “ $\sim q$ ” or “ $\sim\sim q$ ” [and so forth]’. This formulation embodies the idea, which grounds the implications 1–3 of the previous section, that to say what a propositional sign *says*, given an allocation of names, is just to say *which* propositional sign it is. Adapted to an account of belief in accordance with *TLP* 5.542, this central idea becomes: to report a belief is simply to report, in that identifying way, the occurrence of a belief token; or in other words, to say *what* A believes is simply to say *how* his mind is set.

The same conclusion can be reached from the account in ‘Facts and Propositions’.

If then I say about someone whose language I do not know ‘He is believing that not- aRb ’, I mean that there is occurring in his mind such a combination of a feeling and words as expresses the attitude of believing not- aRb , i.e. has certain causal properties, which can *in this simple case*, be specified as those belonging to the combination of a feeling of disbelief and names for a , R , and b , or, in the case of one who uses the English language, to the combination of a feeling of belief, names for a , R , and b , and an odd number of ‘not’s. (1927: 44–5)

Again, strip away from this everything introduced only to deal with truth-functional complexity (and thus the parts with a pragmatist tendency), and what remains is:

To say of someone ‘He is believing aRb ’ is to say that there is occurring in his mind a combination of names for a , R , and b .⁸

So again, we reach the conclusion that to report his belief is simply to say *how* his mental bits are configured.

⁸ Along with—if you must—a feeling of belief. Ramsey allows his reader the freedom to substitute for his talk of feelings ‘any other word . . . which the reader prefers, e.g. “specific quality” or “act of assertion” and “act of denial”’ (1927: 144n.). Suppressing the pragmatist tendency—and thus reassuming Wittgenstein’s indifference between believing, assuming, suspecting, denying, or whatever—I have preferred in the main text to substitute nothing for it.

VII

The account of judgement Ramsey finds in Wittgenstein is thus strictly parallel to the theory advanced by Geach in *Mental Acts* (1957, sect. 14).⁹ Geach speaks of *Ideas* of objects, where by an Idea is meant ‘the exercise of a concept in judgement’ (1957: 53). An Idea of *a* would thus be, in Ramsey’s way of speaking, a mental tokening of a name of *a*.¹⁰ Geach also introduces an undefined operator on relations ‘§()’, pronounced ‘squiggle’, such that ‘if a relational expression is written between the brackets, we shall get a new relational expression of the same logical type as the original one. If “R” is dyadic, so is “§(R)”, . . . and so on’ (1957: 52). In Geach’s stark presentation ‘§()’ is formally undefined, but the intention is clear: for A’s Ideas of *a* and *b* to stand in the relation §(R) will be for A to judge that *aRb*. Geach’s relation §(R) is thus Ramsey’s relation ‘R’: it is a mental tokening of a name of R.¹¹ So, expressing Ramsey’s theory in Geach’s terms, we have:

A judges that $aRb =_{\text{def}} I(a) \text{ §}(R) I(b)$.

Readers of Geach have naturally enough asked: What is squiggle? Its behaviour is in some respects unusual. It is, as Geach points out (1957: 53), clearly non-extensional: that §(cordate) *I(a)* will not amount to anyone’s judging that *a* is a renate. And its syntax is, to put it mildly, non-Fregean: what type of function is it that takes arguments of different types and delivers values of correspondingly different types?¹²

⁹ Though Geach later acknowledges the influence of the *Tractatus* on his theory (1957: 101), he does not mention Ramsey at all in *Mental Acts*; I take that merely to illustrate the minimal referencing conventions in vogue in 1957.

¹⁰ I am here bending, perhaps distorting, what Geach says. Geach’s Ideas are intrinsically general: they are Ideas of *any knife*, or of *some spoon*, rather than of spoon *a* or knife *b* (1957: 53–4); or they are Ideas simply of *flash* and *bang*, rather than of *this flash* or *that bang* (1957: 63). There are two reasons for this. The less relevant is the grinding of Geach’s customary axe, that *name*, and not *proper name*, is the fundamental syntactic category. The more relevant is his view that ‘there is more hope that an account designedly adequate for general judgements will turn out to be adaptable to singular judgements, than there is of the reverse adaptation’ (1957: 63). That reverse adaptation is of course Ramsey’s aim in the parts of ‘Facts and Propositions’ that I have cut out. I am similarly cutting out Geach’s scepticism about its prospects in translating his theory into an account of singular judgements.

¹¹ Remember again that a name of a relation is itself a relation. As Geach makes plain elsewhere (1961), this is in harmony with Frege’s view that the name of a function is itself a function. Geach points out there that a name of a function can occur in a written expression when there is no ink-mark of it to impress itself on the eye, as the name of the exponentiation function occurs in ‘3²’. Similarly a mental name of a relation can occur when there is no phenomenological ‘ink-mark’ of it to impress itself on the inner eye.

¹² Geach in the previous section complains that Russell’s multiple relation theory ‘require[s] different relations of judging (differing as to the number and logical types of the terms between which they hold) for every different logical form of sentences expressing judgements’ (1957: 49), e.g. a triadic relation for ‘*s* judges that *Fb*’, $J(s, F, b)$, and a tetradic

If these are legitimate concerns, then they should spread to embrace $I()$. No function delivers, for a as argument, the concept of a , or the mental name of a ; for there is no such thing as *the* concept or mental name of a . And unless it is presumed, as in a Tractarian context it should not be, that all objects are of a single type, $I()$ must float across types as freely as $\S()$. Geach seems untroubled by such thoughts. But do we really know what $\S()$, or $I()$, is meant to be?

VIII

Surprisingly, in the face of very similar questions Ramsey shares Geach's equanimity. Recall that the analytical proposal of the Critical Notice, quoted in Section VI, assumed that 'we had only to deal with one logical symbolism' (1923: 278). At some point that false assumption has to be lifted: so long as it is in force we have an analysis only of 'A asserts p using such and such a logical notation', not of the neutral 'A asserts p '; and, as Ramsey says, to pass off the first for the second would have such effects as that 'the evidently significant fact that Germans use "nicht" for not becomes part of the meaning of such words as "believe", "think" when used of Germans' (1923: 278). In the corresponding passage from 'Facts and Propositions', also quoted in Section VI, Ramsey illustrates how, in a simple case,¹³ the assumption can be lifted: the account there exploits the causal equivalence of the attitudes of believing $\sim q$ and disbelieving q to avoid having to make explicit reference to any negative particle. The two passages show that Ramsey's concern to eliminate unwanted language-relativity from his analysis is focused solely on the language's logical vocabulary. Surely, though, the point that motivates the concern is broader than that. 'But we may very well know that a Chinaman has a certain opinion without having an idea of the logical notation he uses' (1923: 278), Ramsey says. Equally, one would have thought, one might know that without knowing what names he has for things; and certainly, if I ever know a Chinaman's unexpressed opinion, I know it without having any notion at all of what mental bits are involved.

If "' a " " R " " b "', or the Geachian ' $I(a) \S(R) I(b)$ ', is to give the content of my report of A's judgement, then in it "' a "', or ' $I(a)$ ', must function as my name of A's name for a . But how am I to name that when I am not acquainted with A's name, when in truth I have no notion what it might be? The Geachian formulation, in which, as we saw, ' $I()$ ' and ' $\S()$ ' function exactly as Ramsey's quotation marks, might prompt the thought that my names for A's names are what Russell called 'descriptive names'. But that

relation for ' s judges that aRb ', $J(s, a, R, b)$. If we were to construe ' $\S()$ ' as any kind of functional expression, it would seem in hardly better shape.

¹³ For the importance of the qualification, see Ramsey (1927: 149n).

thought would work only if $I()$ and $\S()$ were functional, and we've seen that they are not. The suggestion would in any case not suit the Tractarian context. Most importantly, though somewhat vaguely, it would undermine the appeal of Ramsey's analysis, which lies in the idea that my portrayal of A's judgement pictures it precisely as it in turn pictures reality: if the apparent complexity in ' $I(a) \S(R) I(b)$ ' were really operative, so that my judgement and A's differed essentially in their multiplicity, then my report would no longer *display how* A's mental bits are configured. Less importantly, though more concretely, complex terms such as ' $I(a)$ ' would on this account be, have no place in the language envisaged in the *Tractatus*.

A natural response to the points just made would be to retreat to a generalization, so that my report would have the form

$$\exists x, y, S: x \text{ names } a . y \text{ names } b . S \text{ names } R . xSy,$$

and this is indeed one of the ways in which Ramsey presented Wittgenstein's analysis in his lectures.¹⁴ In the face of those points, though, this formulation can be only a temporary retreat, as can most easily be shown by reviewing the sign–symbol dilemma that structured the dispute between Anscombe and Kenny. The quantified variables the generalization employs cannot be supposed to range over symbols. That would raise again Kenny's worries over whether its first three conjuncts are attempts to say what can only be shown. More definitively, in my view, this worry would now clearly

¹⁴ Ramsey expounded Wittgenstein's analysis in his Lent Term 1925 lectures entitled 'Foundations of Mathematics'. Notes of these lectures, taken by L. H. Thomas, read:

The meaning of such a proposition as 'A asserts aRb ' is now analysed as

$(\exists 'a', 'b', R_0): 'a', 'b'$ are in A's mind . ' a 'M a . ' b 'M b . R_0 M'R . ' a ' R_0 ' b '.

In this analysis no facts occur and it does not presuppose aRb . (1925b: 40)

(It is explained that M represents 'means'; that M' is of different type from M; and that R_0 represents the relation that signs ' a ' and ' b ' have in ' aRb '.)

Ramsey's focus at this point in his exposition is most clearly brought out by his first comment on the displayed formulation (effectively embodying implications 1–3 of Section V above), that 'in this analysis no facts occur'. Later in the notes Ramsey turns to the shortcoming in Wittgenstein's account that he had identified in the Critical Notice and was to address with the pragmatist innovations of 'Facts and Propositions'. The notes then read, very much in the vein of Anscombe's analysis (see again (AA) in Section II above), and in apparent tension with the key point that 'no facts occur':

We can reduce 'A asserts p ' to ' p ' says p just as before—in A's mind there is a symbol ' p ' and ' p ' says p . (p. 45)

The apparent tension with the earlier point is, surely, no more than that—i.e. it is simply a consequence of Ramsey's shifting his attention to a new point. In just the same way, I think, the fact that Ramsey was content to make that earlier point by means of a formulation of Wittgenstein's proposal similar to that discussed in the text does not show that he would have accepted this formulation as adequate in *every* respect. Each of these two formulations is adequate to the point in hand at the relevant stage of Ramsey's exposition. (I am grateful to Michael Potter for reminding me of the need to square the points made in the text with Ramsey's presentation of the issues in these lectures.)

also afflict the *fourth* conjunct: while an arrangement of signs can be described in a proposition, the logical combination of symbols cannot (*TLP* 4.21 ff.). Ramsey, in any case, is clear throughout that his analysis concerns configurations of signs. But that alternative now also seems to be unworkable. The retreat to a generalization was forced by the thought that I, as reporter, need have no notion of what verbal or mental signs A happens to employ. Equally, though, I have no notion of how those signs, whatever they might be, are connected with things. If the variables in this formulation range over signs, then the naming it speaks of is an external relation. What relation this is, just as much as what those signs are, is something for psychology to find out (Wittgenstein 1995: 125). How can I report that things stand in this relation if I have no notion what the relation might be? The question ‘What is the naming relation?’ is the form now taken by the question ‘What is squiggle?’. Our analysis seems both to need and to preclude an answer to it.

IX

Ramsey, as I noted, is no more fazed by the question than Geach is. He glides past the difficulties just outlined with the phrase ‘apart from variation in the names used’ (1923: 278), spoken in the tone of ‘apart from negligible details’. Those difficulties don’t worry him, I think, because they are irrelevant to the ‘formal standpoint’ (1927: 41) his discussion adopts.

To make this clearer it helps to note an oddity of the way Ramsey introduces his quotational names for a judger’s names, his equivalent of Geach’s I-terms and §-terms. He says, ‘call anything meaning *a*, “*a*”, and so on’ (1923: 278, quoted in context in Section VI). You might compare that to an injunction ‘Call any elephant “Nellie”’, to which a natural response is that it asks you to do something you cannot do: you cannot name an elephant ‘Nellie’ unless you know which elephant you are naming, and you don’t know that just by being told that ‘Nellie’ is to name any elephant. At any rate, that would be a reasonable response if it were supposed that ‘Nellie’ is to be really a name. It would, on the other hand, be an inept response if ‘Nellie’ were intended merely as the kind of dummy-name introduced in the course of a proof. (Compare ‘Let *n* be a real number between 0 and 1’. ‘Which real number?’) Dummy-names like that are schematic in two ways: they achieve generality, and they cover ignorance. They are introduced on the back of premises enough to ensure that there is something of a relevant kind to be named, but not enough to make its naming really possible. Ramsey’s formulation seems suited only to introducing a dummy-name like that. If that is what it actually does, it will

follow that subsequent analyses, which include these ‘names’, will inherit their schematic character.¹⁵

A modern reader expects to extract from Ramsey’s discussion an account of *reports* of belief, an explicit semantic explanation of how expressions function in indirect speech. To someone with that expectation Ramsey’s easy resort in the *analysans* to a device of quotation that is unexplained, and that threatens to be inexplicable, is bound to appear as a serious flaw in his account. But Ramsey’s concerns are different from this modern reader’s. He announces his target as ‘the logical analysis of . . . *judgement*’, not of *reports* of judgement (1927: 34, my emphasis). From the very traditional opening pages of ‘Facts and Propositions’, and the character of his engagement with Russell in them, it seems plain that Ramsey understood his problem very much as Russell did when he wrote: ‘The problem at issue is the problem of the logical form of belief, *i.e.* what is the schema representing what occurs when a man believes’ (Russell 1922: 19). The question for both of them is: What kind of thing is going on, or what kind of fact is it, when a man believes something? And Ramsey’s answer to that runs, for the atomic case: it is for him to have names of the things his belief concerns combined in his mind in the way he believes those things to be combined. It is not a fault in this answer that it presents the fact in question only by description, or that the names that would be involved in the fact are not actually named, but are mentioned only descriptively as names of such and such things. That complexity attaches only to the analyst’s characterization of the fact, and not at all to the fact characterized.

The same holds, I think, when the analysis of ‘A judges that aRb ’ is presented notationally by “‘ a ” “‘ R ” “‘ b ””, or by ‘ $I(a) \S(R) I(b)$ ’. Modern conceptions of what such an analysis is intended to achieve, of what questions it is supposed to answer and how, lead us to question how the terms in the *analysans* are supposed to work. So we ask, ‘What is the semantics for quotation here exploited?’, or ‘What relation is reckoned to hold between $I(x)$ and x ?’, or again, ‘What is squiggle?’. Those questions miss Ramsey’s drift, since for him “‘ a ”” is not genuinely a complex term at all. It is just a stopgap, a stand-in for a name one is not in a position to know.

I’m sure that’s how Ramsey thought of his Wittgensteinian analysis; and I’m sure he had Wittgenstein right in thinking of it that way. There is, though, a natural thought that suggests this cannot be the end of the matter. This natural thought, which I’m inclined to accept as correct, is that an expedient is only properly counted an expedient if it is temporary. It implies that one can brush aside questions about the complexity of such apparent

¹⁵ The point is not just that Ramsey’s analyses will be presented schematically, so as to cover in one go a range of propositions. That much would be true of ‘ x is a bachelor =_{def} x is male and x is unmarried’, a schema whose instances are full-fledged meaningful propositions. The consequence drawn above is that the *instances* of Ramsey’s analysis will have a schematic character.

names as “*a*” only if, in theory at least, those stopgap names could eventually be replaced by real ones. And to the question of what theory could meet that ‘in theory’ obligation, the only feasible answer is psychology.

There are passages in ‘Facts and Propositions’ where Ramsey clearly envisages this kind of supplement from psychology.¹⁶ In those passages he is certainly going beyond anything said in the *Tractatus*, but I see no reason to hold that he is going *against* anything in Wittgenstein. What those passages envisage might now go under the title of a ‘naturalistic theory of content’, an empirical identification of a human being’s mental bits, and a description of their external relations to things. Wittgenstein would of course have thought it no business of a philosopher to supply such a thing. But the ‘gap’ for it is there, as Ramsey says; and perhaps noting that is more important than arguing over what to call people who try to fill it.¹⁷

¹⁶ With this point we abandon the simplifying assumption introduced in Section I, that the pragmatist elements of ‘Facts and Propositions’ can be cut away by limiting oneself to the elementary case: p. 45 of that article clearly envisages that a causal theory would extend to the names occurring in an elementary proposition.

¹⁷ Thanks to Alan Millar and Michael Potter for comments on a draft, and to participants at the Cambridge conference on Ramsey for challenging questions.