Marie McGinn's new book offers an interpretation of some central themes in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and other early works, an interpretation that she sees as representing an alternative to those that have dominated recent discussion, the so-called 'metaphysical' interpretation—associated with Pears, Hacker, Malcolm and others—and the 'resolute' interpretation—associated primarily with Diamond, Conant and others. McGinn claims that one can be 'anti-metaphysical' without 'resolutely' refusing to see in early Wittgenstein 'genuine philosophical insights into the nature of a proposition and the nature and status of logic' (ix–x). A feature that she presents as crucial and crucially distinctive of her reading is that Wittgenstein achieves these insights 'by means of a method that can plausibly be held to be merely clarificatory' (x), his project being one of 'clarifying, rather than explaining, the workings of our language' (9). She does not claim to have invented this 'third way', tracing its roots in the work of Ishiguro, McGuinness, Rhees and Winch; but—as she says (x)—she has explored in much greater detail and depth possibilities that these predecessors raise.

McGinn's book is excellent; it's admirably thorough, works extremely hard at many of the most difficult and demanding of passages in Wittgenstein's early work and, in doing so, puts together a reading of the *Tractatus* that many will find persuasive. It is also a complex book, dense and sometimes difficult. It calls for careful study, which I think it will get over the next few years, and what I can offer here are really not much more than first impressions.

According to McGinn, Wittgenstein's 'central aim' is to make clear the essence of representation, 'what is essentially shared by all representations of possible states of affairs' (99). Her starting point is the claim that the connection between language and world is 'internal' in being one that is not to be 'discovered' but is instead 'grounded in a rule' (80), in 'rules of projection in virtue of which we use propositional signs to say how things are in reality' (81). Wittgenstein's task is to make these rules of projection 'perspicuous'; he is not — McGinn insists—in the business of explaining 'how language's ability to represent the world came about' (82, cf. also 122). It is an aspect of the internal relation mentioned above that language is 'autonomous' (13): rules of projection, in making possible the comparison of pictures with reality, 'cannot themselves be represented in a picture that can be compared with reality' (94) and the possibility of such a comparison does not depend on the existence of any particular state of affairs but solely on 'the existence of the rules of projection' (96).

A crucial step in rendering the rules in question perspicuous is made by adopting the notion of 'logical portrayal'. McGinn argues that, for Wittgenstein, 'the rules of projection that lay down what counts as [a] picture's being true or false … include the correlation of the pictorial elements that make up the picture 'with objects that are the constituents of the states of affairs that are depicted' (96); in doing so, she integrates perhaps the best known idea proposed in the tradition in which she sees herself as standing: an opposition to the idea that the correlation between names and objects arises independently—and might provide the basis of an explanation—of the use of names in propositions that are used to make true and false statements (88).

Factoring in the further requirement that sense be determinate, the 'existence' of the rules of projection comes to be seen as dependent upon 'the existence of primitive expressions, which stand for logically simple objects that are the simple constituents of states of affairs' (110); and here we reach one of the crucial points in McGinn's reading: her claim that the author of the *Tractatus* did not regard such requirements as carrying metaphysical import. McGinn insists that '[i]t is the essential structure of the [representational] sys-
tem itself, and not of what lies outside it, that [Wittgenstein] is investigating’ and that, although the ‘dogmatic’ commitment to simple objects ‘emerges in the course of’ that investigation, that commitment ought not to be seen—and was not seen by the early Wittgenstein—as ‘a speculative claim about the essential structure of the world conceived of independently of its representation in propositions’ (116, 117, cf. also 120 and 133).

Through Wittgenstein’s reflections on variables, showing, formal concepts, generality, the general form of the proposition, and ‘the great achievement of Wittgenstein’s early work’, his ‘mak[ing] clear that logic does not belong to the level of facts’ (173), McGinn argues one can follow her guiding notion, that Wittgenstein’s attempt to clarify what representation as such involves does not aspire to ‘ground’ the possibility of representation in a metaphysics but does yield ‘positive philosophical insights into how language works’ (p. ix). So, for example, once the internal relation between language and world has been made ‘perspicuous’, we will come to recognize that what Wittgenstein is doing in the opening remarks of the Tractatus, which have so often been taken to articulate a metaphysics of some sort, ‘is nothing more than tracing the logical order that is essential to language’s ability to express propositions that can be compared with reality for truth or falsity’ (137).

In a review of this length, I cannot hope to do justice to this rich piece of work or present a proper evaluation of it. I suspect that most critical attention will focus on McGinn’s claims that the early Wittgenstein could have seen the ‘clarificatory’ project that she ascribes to him as lacking metaphysical implications and that ‘[w]hat at first appears to be a metaphysics is … nothing but the shadow of the logic of the language in which we represent the world’ (151). McGinn regards the requirement for simple signs as ultimately ‘dogmatic’ (109–10) and acknowledges that a certain profile does seem to be prescribed for objects: the ‘most plausible candidates’ are ‘spatial or material points, colours, temporal points, and so on’ (115). So one question will be whether this apparently dogmatic prescription regarding the character of what we ultimately think and talk about could at the time of writing the Tractatus either have struck Wittgenstein as metaphysically innocuous or not struck him at all. Since I am broadly sympathetic to the kind of view McGinn is trying to defend here—indeed I made a similar use of the ‘shadow’ metaphor in my own recent book on the Tractatus—I won’t pursue this question; I am sure others will.

Instead I wish to focus on another aspect of the ‘clarificatory’ project. Something that seems to be missing in McGinn’s book is a thorough engagement with a question which she herself posed for resolute readers in the 1999 paper in which she first set out the basic ideas of her reading: ‘if the ladder … turns out to be an illusion, how have we got anywhere by climbing it?’ (‘Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus’, Philosophical Quarterly 49: 491–513, 496) This question concerning the status of the propositions that make up the Tractatus seems a problem for resolute readers in particular because of their commitment to an ‘austere’ conception of nonsense, according to which ‘[a]nything that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has not been made’ (Diamond, quoted in 243 n. 4); nonsense is the absence of sense rather than the presence of, as it were, the wrong kind of sense.

But McGinn herself endorses this conception (243 n. 4 and also 18, 19, 100, 246 and 270) and, in the discussions that come closest to her 1999 question (158–59, 252–54), she also seems to endorse the notion that Wittgenstein’s own propositions are nonsensical: she states that the ‘work’ that these ‘perform does not depend upon their possessing a sense, but upon their enabling the reader to see clearly what the use of language makes clear’; ‘[t]his nonsense has indeed been useful’ in ‘serv[ing] to bring about a clarified vision of the logical order that—Wittgenstein believes—is there in language insofar as it represents states of affairs’ (253). But the 1999 question is: how can climbing a ‘ladder’ made up of strings of signs in which ‘nothing has been expressed’ (18) be ‘useful’, ‘bring about’ any such vision or ‘enable’ one to see anything? (This issue is related to the question of the status of the medium in which one produces ‘a description of what is essential to a system