Reply to Michael Kremer

Cora Diamond

Michael Kremer's 'Comments' have greatly sharpened my understanding of what is at stake in Wittgenstein's thinking during 1929 — his increasing dissatisfaction with his old ideas, and the emergence of a new approach. And he has very strikingly also brought out the connections with Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics. One central thing for me in Kremer's comments is his treatment of Wittgenstein's idea of what language *must* be like, of what must be present in language even if not obviously so. That's what I will focus on here.

The first such requirement that Kremer mentions comes from *Tractatus* 3.23, where Wittgenstein speaks of the requirement that simple signs be possible, and says it is the requirement that sense be determinate. These, Kremer says, are the *same* requirement, and identical to the demand that there be a logical order that can be revealed by analysis, which must end in elementary propositions that are concatenations of simple signs. Kremer adds that the same requirement shows up in Wittgenstein's description of the general propositional form, which all propositions have in common. Kremer mentions a closely related point — the idea that Wittgenstein criticized later, that we tend to think of the proposition as achieving something: it reaches right to reality, as he puts it in the *Tractatus*. It reaches right to reality by dint of satisfying the logical requirement for doing so, namely, that it shares its essential formal features with the situation it represents. Again, this is not a *further* requirement.

I want now to connect Kremer's idea with the section in the *Investigations* right before §107. This is the section where Wittgenstein speaks of the sense we may have of trying to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers. Kremer's suggestion that what may appear to be different requirements are actually *one requirement* confronting us in somewhat different forms, makes it natural to ask, "Well, what if the requirement, understood in *one* such way, is given up, and we nevertheless keep, or try to keep, *the*

requirement?' If we had, or thought we had, in the *Tractatus*, an account of language which made clear how the requirement, however formulated, was met, and how it all hung together, and we had as it were captured the essence of language, then if we give up on one of these understandings of the requirement, will it be possible to repair the account? How can you take one of these understandings out, and be left with anything coherent, if what you took out is not one separate requirement, but is simply one way of formulating *the* requirement? It may indeed seem as if you are trying to repair a spiderweb with your fingers.

What was given up, either during or before the writing of "Some Remarks on Logical Form", was the requirement understood *this* way: that there is the general propositional form, shared by all propositions. I believe we can see signs of the stress created by this change, if we look at §106 of the *Investigations*.

There is a profoundly useful clue to what is going on in §106, but at a part of it that is less immediately striking than the spiderweb part. Wittgenstein speaks of our imagining that we have to describe extreme subtleties, and being stymied, —we are unable to describe those subtleties with the means at our disposal. In the background there is the idea that we took ourselves to have a certain *means of description of propositions*, but we no longer have it, once we give up the idea of the general form of propositions.

The general form of proposition was a *means of description of all propositions*, or that's what Wittgenstein thought. The general form of proposition was a variable, and the stipulation of its values is a description of the propositions that are its values (TLP 3.317); its values can be set out as a formal series, given by a law governing the construction of propositions (5.501) But it is not only that the general form of proposition is a means of description of all propositions. The further point is that the description of propositions which it provided made totally clear (that was the idea) how the logical requirements were met. The general form of proposition was not just a means of description of propositions, it was *the* means of description of propositions, and the idea of the crystalline character of logic was tied to what was given as, or in, the general form of proposition. So the sense of the spiderweb standing in need of repair is clear if we think of how much of the hanging together of the whole web of the *Tractatus* depended on what supposedly could be seen of how *the requirement* in all its aspects was tied to the idea of what was shared by all propositions, in their shared form.

This should be tied to Wittgenstein's statement in his notebooks in 1915 that his difficulty was only an — enormous — difficulty of expression. The difficulty was to express with complete clarity what belonged to propositions as such; it was to find a form of expression in which the logical character of propositions showed forth clearly, as it doesn't in our ordinary propositions.

I think this account of §106 can make clear one way my paper went wrong. I had been puzzled by Wittgenstein's speaking of the intolerable conflict between the logical order that we think must be present in language and what our actual language is like. How could there be a conflict if the idea was that the logical features of language were not supposed to be obvious from superficial features of actual language? I didn't know how to look for the conflict Wittgenstein meant. One of the places to look is "Some Remarks on Logical Form". The general form of proposition was supposed to give us a means of description of all propositions. But the capacity of our actual language to describe such things as colour patches in the visual field is not going to be provided for by a general *a priori* account of propositionhood, reflecting only a limited number of propositional forms. Wittgenstein's point in §107 about the conflict between our requirement and what we see if we examine actual language is backed up by, for example, his remarks in "Some Remarks about Logical Form" about propositions that assign a degree to a quality like brightness. If one were to continue to hold that the *Tractatus* account of what language must be like is met in some hidden way, the requirement clearly would be in danger of becoming empty.

My argument here has been that Kremer's discussion of Wittgenstein on "the requirement", on the demand we may think that language *must* meet, enables us to read §107 without the puzzlement that I encountered. Kremer leads us to focus on what happens when an aspect of that requirement is pulled away from the full account, and to tie that to the question how we may find ourselves apparently without the means of description we need for propositions, a means of description in which their all meeting the requirement is clear from what they are.

University of Virginia
Corcoran Department of Philosophy
120 Cocke Hall, Charlottesville,
VA 22904 USA
E-mail: coradiamond@gmail.com