



## *Dissolve* in Alice Ambrose (1906–2001)

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Dissolve is a key concept in the philosophy of mathematics of Alice Ambrose. Ambrose applies the concept throughout her later writings on mathematical logic and the philosophy of language.

Ambrose's teacher Ludwig Wittgenstein notes in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953): "We don't want to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" (Wittgenstein 2009, 56e). To disappear or 'dissolve' a philosophical problem, as Ambrose herself puts it, the philosopher must get a clear view of her utterances, exchanges, notations (Ambrose 1979, 106; Ambrose 1975-76, 9).

The propositions of mathematics are something other than decisions concerning logical notations, Ambrose finds. Notations are truth-laden expressions; the propositions of mathematics are not (Wittgenstein 2009, 119e).

Getting clear about the rules for the use of our words then enables the philosopher to see mathematical proofs as semantic assertions, absent of truth/falsity as the logician would have it (Ambrose 1979, 125). At the same time, they are not cognition-reliant entities as was argued by L.E.J. Brouwer. Mathematical expressions are instead, Ambrose believes, nominal claims we invent in order to make room in our discourse for new conventions, what Wittgenstein refers to as "language-games" (Ambrose 1979, 114-115; Wittgenstein 2009, 43e-44e).

With this, the outstanding metaphysical questions of the logic of mathematics, e.g. whether completing the enumeration of infinite sets of characters lies within the realm of experience or not, is overturned; they are revealed as "idle" questions (Ambrose 1979, 115). Dissolving the problems of philosophy arrives when we see such propositions not as issues of deciding what is true and what is false but as puzzles to be put aside (Ambrose 1979, 106).

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### **Keywords:**

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