Nonsense and the New Wittgenstein

Edmund Dain

Cardiff University
31.03.2006

UMI Number: U584052

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

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Summary

This thesis focuses on 'New' or 'Resolute' readings of Wittgenstein's work, early and later, as presented in the work of, for instance, Cora Diamond and James Conant. One of the principal claims of such readings is that, throughout his life, Wittgenstein held an 'austere' view of nonsense. That view has both a trivial and a non-trivial aspect. The trivial aspect is that any string of signs could, by appropriate assignment, be given a meaning, and hence that, if such a string is nonsense, that will be because we have failed to make just such an assignment. The non-trivial aspect is this: that there is no further, non-trivial story to be told, and so nonsense is only ever a matter of our failure to give signs a meaning. Hence, too, logically speaking, all nonsense is on a par.

That view, both of nonsense and of Wittgenstein, has attracted a great deal of controversy. It is particularly controversial in relation to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein famously declares, in the penultimate remark, that the reader is to recognise Wittgenstein's own elucidatory propositions there as nonsensical, and must eventually throw them away in coming to understand Wittgenstein himself. I defend the austere view and its attribution to Wittgenstein, early and later (but focussing primarily on the earlier), against a number of exegetical and substantial criticisms put forward by, for instance, Peter Hacker, Hans-Johann Glock and Adrian Moore.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

I have on occasion used the following abbreviations to refer to works by, or sets of notes taken on lectures by, Ludwig Wittgenstein:

AWL   *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932-1935: From the Notes of Alice Ambrose and Margaret Macdonald*, ed. Alice Ambrose (New York: Prometheus Books, 2001).

BB   *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the* 'Philosophical Investigations' (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

LWL   *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930-1932: From the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee*, ed. Desmond Lee (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

M   'Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-1933', by G. E. Moore, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp.46-114.

NB   *Notebooks 1914-1916*, ed. G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961).

OC   *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, San Francisco and London: Harper and Row, 1972).

PG *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

PI *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

PR *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

RLF 'Some Remarks on Logical Form', in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp.29-35.

TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974).

WWK *Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Weiner Kreis*, shorthand notes recorded by F. Waismann, ed. B.F. McGuinness, trans. Joachim Schulte and B.F. McGuinness (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979).

Introduction

Nonsense and the New Wittgenstein

I

This thesis is about nonsense and it is about the New Wittgenstein. Let me start with

nonsense. It might be thought that there are many different kinds of (linguistic[1])

nonsense. There is, say, the case of absurdity – when someone says something obviously

false, or crazy. Here, one might exclaim 'Nonsense!' to express disbelief, or surprise, at

a statement, or simply lack of patience with a particular point of view. Or there is the

kind of nonsense one finds in a nonsense-poem, in the works of Edward Lear, for

instance, or Lewis Carroll. Then again, a sentence might be nonsense because a word in

it has not yet been given a meaning – perhaps it is a made-up word, like Lear's 'runcible',

or it might be a familiar word used in an unfamiliar way; and of course, there is plain old-

fashioned gibberish – a string of signs with no apparent grammatical structure to it at all –

a word-salad. We might think that there is a philosophically more interesting case, too:

nonsense not resulting from absurdity or from a simple failure to give words a meaning,

but that arises when you try to assert of something what it makes no sense to say of that

kind of thing – an example might be 'Caesar is a prime number' (more on this case anon)

– and so which involves some kind of category clash; the meanings of the words just are

incompatible with one another.

So, we might think that, as well as absurdity, there are various kinds of nonsense

resulting from various kinds of failures, and also another sort of nonsense that results

from putting meanings together in an – as yet unspecified – illegitimate fashion. Some

nonsense-sentences are just plain meaningless, but others combine only meaningful

words, but in such a way that what they say, so combined, is nonsense. Not ordinary,

common-or-garden nonsense, but nonsense that is, as it were, internally logically flawed.

So, if you, for instance, think that people are one kind of thing and numbers quite

another, you might be inclined to think that, in the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number',

we have a sentence that claims of one kind of thing something it only makes sense to say

of something of wholly another kind. Hence, the result – what the sentence says – is

nonsense.

In this thesis, I will want to defend an alternative account of nonsense, one

originally highlighted by Cora Diamond and that has come to be known as the 'austere'

view of nonsense, or 'austerity', for short.[2] I will introduce that view in detail in Chapter

One. For now, it might be summed up in the following words: all nonsense, from the

point of view of austerity, is plain nonsense, not nonsense that results from its own

internally logically flawed nature. Thus, this view is characterised by its rejection of the

idea that there are (at least) two logically distinct types of nonsense, a rejection of the

idea that some nonsense is of a special kind, resulting from the violation of certain requirements upon what it is for a sentence to make sense – whatever those requirements might be.[3] That does not mean that there are no different kinds of nonsense at all, but we must be careful what we mean by that. For austerity, and leaving aside the case of absurdity, nonsense can differ in all kinds of ways: aesthetically, say, and psychologically, as Edward Lear's poems differ from King Lear's mad ramblings and from Wittgenstein's nonsense-sentence 'Ab sur ah'.[4] But it does mean that there will be no differences of a certain sort between nonsense-sentences: logically speaking, all nonsense is equivalent. In that sense, then, there are neither kinds nor degrees of nonsense: it is all logically on a par.[5]

That view of nonsense – the austere view – I will want to argue was Wittgenstein's view throughout his philosophical life, from the *Tractatus* onwards. It is not that Wittgenstein's use of the word 'nonsense' does not alter, for it clearly does: in the *Tractatus*, 'nonsense' (*'unsinn'*) is, for instance, set against the term 'senseless' (*'sinnlos'*) as applied to tautologies and contradictions[6] – sentences which can be formed within the language but which, for Wittgenstein, lack any thinkable content; in the later work, on the other hand, Wittgenstein's use of the term 'nonsense' is far more flexible – sometimes, for instance, it is used of cases of absurdity, and though Wittgenstein still uses the term *'sinnlos'* alongside it, the two terms are used with a degree of interchangeability.[7] So one might want to say that the later Wittgenstein does not have a view of nonsense *per se* at all, and I would not want to disagree with that.[8] What is consistent, however, throughout his work, is the rejection of one kind of view of what

nonsense might be – a view that, for Wittgenstein, is far more widespread than might be imagined[9] – and it might be put like this: for Wittgenstein, there is no nonsense that is nonsense because of what it would have to mean, were it to mean anything, or because of what the terms of which it is comprised do mean. Thus, Diamond, for instance, writes:

> [F]or Wittgenstein there is *no* kind of nonsense which is nonsense on account of what the terms composing it mean – there is as it were no 'positive' nonsense. *Anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has *not* been made; it is not nonsense as a logical result of determinations that *have* been made.
>
> ...
>
> I should claim that [that] view of nonsense ... is one that was consistently held to by Wittgenstein throughout his writings, from the period before the *Tractatus* was written and onwards. There is no 'positive' nonsense, no such thing as nonsense that is nonsense on account of what it would have to mean, given the meanings already fixed for the terms it contains.[10]

That rejection characterises Wittgenstein's thought about nonsense from the *Tractatus* onwards despite the apparent changes in his use of that term.

That view – both of nonsense and of Wittgenstein – is central to a new approach to reading Wittgenstein's work, early and later. That approach, variously labelled (at least in relation to the *Tractatus*) 'New', 'Resolute', 'Austere', even 'Deconstructive' and 'Post-modernist', is best understood as a set of more or less closely related readings; there is, I think, no such thing as *the* New reading.[11] Nevertheless, such readings do share some things in common (even if much more besides is left open to disagreement), and one of those things is the attribution to Wittgenstein, early and later, of an austere view of nonsense.[12]

That view has itself come in for a great deal of criticism, and in particular with respect to its ascription to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. In this thesis, I will want to defend the austere view both substantially – as the correct account of what nonsense is (or rather is not) – and exegetically too – as the correct account of Wittgenstein's own view of what nonsense might be. In Chapter One, I outline the austere view in greater detail, and explore some of its consequences, in particular for our reading of the *Tractatus*. My focus throughout this thesis, as well as in this introduction, will be on that work, though I shall have some things to say with regard to the *Philosophical Investigations* too, and that approach is justified, I think, by the simple fact that this thesis is written in defence of austerity and that it is in relation to the early work that that view has received by far the most criticism. (That itself may be a result of the fact that it is with respect to the early Wittgenstein that New readings have been explicitly presented, rhetorically, as constituting an alternative kind of reading, in opposition to 'Standard' or 'Traditional' readings.)

Each of the subsequent chapters defends the austere view against some of the more serious challenges made against it by P.M.S. Hacker, Hans-Johann Glock and A.W. Moore.[13] Thus, Chapter Two discusses two accounts of nonsense and logical syntax in the *Tractatus*: those of Hacker and of James Conant. Hacker wants to reject the austere view of nonsense, but he also wants to reject an alternative, 'substantial' view of nonsense that, for instance, Conant attributes to Hacker. Instead, Hacker tries to carve out a third kind of stance, and for that he requires a notion of logical syntax and its rules such that violating those rules produces nonsense. In outlining that possibility, Hacker

develops a number of – forcefully presented – criticisms of Conant's accounts of both

nonsense and of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*.[14] In response to Hacker, I rehearse and

build upon criticisms of Hacker's view put forward by Cora Diamond,[15] and I also try to

extend those arguments to cover some counter-arguments to Diamond's responses put

forward by Genia Schönbaumsfeld.[16]

Chapter Three deals with Glock's criticisms of an austere view of nonsense, both

substantial and exegetical, in relation to the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*,

and focussing on Wittgenstein's adaptations of Frege's context-principle.[17]   Glock

argues, among other things, that the austere view is substantially mistaken, since it relies,

according to Glock, on a version of the context-principle that is clearly false, and since it

lacks any independent plausibility (without the support offered by the context-principle).

Further, he argues that in the *Tractatus*, while that – false – version of the context-

principle may indeed be present, it is of no avail to New readers, since it relies on a

notion of meaning that is itself unavailable to New readers, perhaps because they are

committed to the view that Wittgenstein did not there wish unironically to put forward

any theory of meaning at all. And Glock argues that Wittgenstein's later use of the

context-principle, as Glock interprets it, positively 'militates' against the austere view of

nonsense. I break Glock's argument down into a number of different points, and try to

show that none of them present a sound case against the austere view or its attribution to

Wittgenstein, early or later.

The inclusion of Moore in this grouping might seem anomalous, since Moore does in fact accept the austere view of nonsense as being both true and true of Wittgenstein, at least in relation to the *Tractatus*. Moore, however, draws from that view of nonsense certain consequences that would be anathema to most New readers. In Chapter Four, I outline an argument which I find in Moore's paper and attempt to throw some roadblocks in the way of Moore's apparent route to those conclusions. That argument is, I think, worth considering in its own right, but Moore himself seems not to commit to it. In the Postscript to Chapter Four, then, I present a version of the argument to which I think Moore does commit, and try to develop an alternative response to Moore here.[18] Finally, in the concluding chapter, I summarise my arguments and draw out some of the consequences of my defence of the austere view for the debate between New and Standard readings of Wittgenstein's work.

There is a sense in which New readings as it were stand or fall by the austere view of nonsense,[19] but despite wanting to defend that view I shall not be especially concerned to defend New readings in general here; nor shall I be concerned to argue for a particular interpretation within the space mapped out by New readings. Rather, my aim is to conduct a defence of the idea which, I think, lies at the basis of all such readings and so in that way defend that general approach. My attitude towards New readings, however, in particular of the *Tractatus*, is certainly not one of unconditional acceptance; some of the evidence compiled against that kind of reading, or against certain variants of it – particularly from sources external, but pertaining, to the *Tractatus* – can seem quite compelling.[20] But I do think that the view of nonsense that goes hand-in-hand with those

readings both is Wittgenstein's view and is the correct view philosophically speaking; and that, in the first instance, is what I shall want to defend here. That view of nonsense will, clearly, have consequences for how one might read the *Tractatus* unless, that is, one is prepared to attribute to Wittgenstein contradictory views. That might be done of course; and, for instance, P.M.S. Hacker is quite content to do so. For Hacker, Wittgenstein does, wrongly, and in conflict with some central lines of thought in the *Tractatus*, hold there that there are ineffable truths that can be shown and not said. 'One cannot but sympathise with Diamond', Hacker writes, for 'nonsense is nonsense' after all.[21] But if, as Hacker later claims, it is not clear 'what *would* count as sufficient or telling evidence' against New readings, one might say exactly the same of any reading that attributes to Wittgenstein something obviously, centrally and quite devastatingly contradictory.[22]

I want to turn now, in the remainder of this introduction, to give some account of the background to my defence of austerity in New readings of Wittgenstein's work, early and later. One problem one faces in introducing that debate – between New or Resolute and Traditional or Standard readings of Wittgenstein's work – is that one is forced almost inevitably to approach it by way of a great deal of rhetoric that can prove unhelpful if not plain misleading. So, for instance, it may turn out, as some have suggested, that there is as little difference between those two kinds of readings, in places, as there is width to a knife-edge;[23] or it may turn out that there just is no unified set of readings that could count in the end as being either Traditional or Resolute. Still, avoiding that rhetoric entirely would be as misleading as accepting it wholesale, and I want to at least begin

with the way that that debate has been set up, with the proviso that the understanding of

the terrain thus gained must give way to a much more complex and contoured landscape

than first pictured.

II

With that qualification in place, then, I turn to giving an overview of New approaches to

Wittgenstein's work. Those readings purport to offer, as a whole, a rethinking not only

of each of the two commonly distinguished periods of Wittgenstein's thought, but also,

and through that, a reappraisal of the continuity between the early and the later

Wittgenstein, emphasising Wittgenstein's commitment throughout his life to the view

that one cannot put forward doctrines or theses in philosophy, and so to a method of

philosophising far more akin to therapy. In the *Tractatus*, that kind of therapeutic reading

involves rejecting the traditional view of that work as forwarding metaphysical theories

about language, thought and world by way of its self-confessedly nonsensical

propositions.[24] Rather than taking Wittgenstein to genuinely hold there – as, taken at

face-value, he might seem to – that some truths about or features of reality can only be

'shown' and cannot be straightforwardly said – asserted – in ordinary, senseful sentences,

this idea is itself taken to be as it were the final rung in the ladder-like structure of the

Tractatus;[25] it, too, is meant ultimately to be cast aside and what we are left with then is

the realisation that such theories offer no more than the illusion of making sense.[26] Thus,

the aim of the *Tractatus* is to offer us remarks that have the appearance of constituting

solid metaphysical theories on a range of topics, and so engage our desire for theorising

here, and gradually bring us to see that very possibility of theorising as illusory; we come

to view them – the sentences in which they appear to be expressed – as simply nonsense,[27] and give up on the idea that there was anything behind them at all. Central to that view is a view about the form of Wittgenstein's writing: rather than taking Wittgenstein to be forwarding doctrines in propositions which imply their own nonsensicality – a reading which takes the style of the *Tractatus* to be idiosyncratic, certainly, but ultimately perhaps inessential – for New readings the style of his work is fundamental. For, as Conant, drawing on Kierkegaard, stresses, if one is treating an illusion, it is essential that one does not begin by treating it as such.[28] And no amount of telling someone that what they believe themselves to understand is an illusion will rid them of it. 'The analyst', as Derrida puts it, 'must first speak the language of the patient'.[29] Thus, Wittgenstein's style – the presentation of apparent doctrines, and leaving the reader to think through the consequences of those remarks for him or herself – is central to his aim.

On this reading, then, the *Tractatus* is the first expression of a conception of philosophy that remains constant, whatever else changes, throughout Wittgenstein's work. One effect of that way of reading the *Tractatus* is to re-draw the space available to readings of Wittgenstein's later work in this way: if we read Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* as putting forward one set of metaphysical theories about language, thought and the world, it will be open to us to then read Wittgenstein's criticisms of the *Tractatus* in the *Investigations* as constituting a rejection of certain theories. That, in turn, leaves it open to us to read Wittgenstein then as forwarding other theories in their place and that, to a greater or lesser extent, is what it is suggested has typically been done. So, for instance,

on one influential view, the *Tractatus* is taken as maintaining a fairly rigidly realist stance

and then Wittgenstein is taken, in the *Investigations*, to reject that view in favour of

something with many of the characteristic hallmarks of anti-realism; Wittgenstein is read

as moving from a truth-conditional account of language to an account in terms of

assertability-conditions. Wittgenstein's opposition to putting forward doctrines or theses

in philosophy then becomes a facet of his anti-realism, a facet of the stance he does take.

But if we read the *Tractatus* not as self-consciously putting forward theories of any kind,

that sort of avenue is already closed to us; for, to put it crudely, whatever Wittgenstein *is*

rejecting at the start of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he is clearly not rejecting a

therapeutic approach in favour of straightforward theory-generating. Rather, New

readings see Wittgenstein as developing and refining his method of achieving an aim that

remains fairly constant across both works.

Those New readings are undoubtedly at their most controversial in relation to the

Tractatus. That is where they have attracted the greatest criticism and hence that, too, is

where the main focus, both of this thesis as a whole and of this introduction, will be. In

part, that is because it is in relation to the *Tractatus* that those readings have been

developed in the greatest detail and have explicitly been presented as offering a new and

quite radical alternative to standard ways of reading that text. But another reason for that

bias is that one general feature of those readings lies in the stress they place upon the

therapeutic, anti-theoretical character of Wittgenstein's thought, early and later, and the

continuity of Wittgenstein's aims in those terms. And while that might seem to be both

new and controversial to anyone familiar with much of the basic commentary that exists

on the *Tractatus*, it hardly seems original to suggest that Wittgenstein's later thought

purports to offer not more theories, but a kind of therapy for the urge to theorise in

philosophy, for the idea that theories are what is needed there at all. That view, on the

contrary, might be thought to be a characteristic of all writing on the *Philosophical*

Investigations that heeds even the most minimal of Wittgenstein's meta-philosophical

remarks. So where the sense of newness or originality here?

David Stern, in his introduction to the *Philosophical Investigations*, draws the

contrast in this way, as being between Pyrrhonian and non-Pyrrhonian readings of the

Wittgenstein.[30] So, for instance, Pyrrhonian Wittgensteinians, according to Stern, read

the *Investigations* as a work of therapy, informed by a scepticism about all philosophy –

including Wittgenstein's own – and aiming at bringing philosophy to an end. Philosophy

is nonsense – not because it fails to meet certain criteria for having sense – but because it

simply 'falls apart' as it were when we try to make sense of it. Properly conducted, on

this view, philosophy results in no kind of theory at all.

Non-Pyrrhonian readings, on the other hand, see the *Investigations* as offering a

critique of traditional philosophy but one which leads not to the end of all philosophy –

for it is to be replaced with a better and radically different kind of philosophy. On this

kind of reading, Wittgenstein criticises mistaken views only to replace them with quite

specific philosophical positions of his own. And whereas, for Pyrrhonians,

Wittgenstein's critique of philosophy as nonsense is motivated by no kind of theory of

sense, here what philosophers say is measured up against a theory of sense that shows

traditional philosophy to be misguided. Here, then, Wittgenstein's critique of traditional

philosophy is in the service of a new and supposedly better kind of theorising in

philosophy. On the former, Pyrrhonian side of the debate, Stern locates Diamond,

Conant and the later work of Gordon Baker; and on the latter, non-Pyrrhonian side, Stern

cites as instances (and among others) Hacker, early Baker and David Pears.

But although Stern's distinction captures something of the difference between

those two groups of thinkers, the contrast, as Stern goes on to acknowledge, is much less

clear than that:

> What makes the contrast less clear than it seems at first is that most
> Wittgensteinians oscillate, or vacillate, between these views. ... [T]hey want both
> to be uncompromisingly opposed to philosophical doctrine, and still to make
> some sense of the non-Pyrrhonian view that giving up traditional philosophical
> theories can lead us to something better.[31]

For Stern, that vacillation is as much a failure to follow through on one's own rhetoric as

anything else – a matter of saying one thing and doing another; both sides are guilty to

some extent of wanting both to have their cake and eat it too.

That debate is presented in quite different terms, however, by Alice Crary. If

Stern might be thought as it were to cast his net too wide in trying adequately to

distinguish New and Standard approaches to the *Investigations*, Crary might be thought to

make an opposite error. For Crary, what distinguishes New readings as such in relation

to the *Investigations* is the suggestion that, despite professing to take into account

Wittgenstein's remarks on the therapeutic character of his thought, many readings that go

to make up the canonical corpus of commentary on the later Wittgenstein in fact do no

such thing. So, for instance, Crary writes, in her introduction to the collection of essays *The New Wittgenstein*, that 'standard interpretations of [Wittgenstein's] later philosophy *utterly fail to capture its therapeutic character*', and that failure, according to Crary, is to be traced to their continuing to hold onto the idea of an external standpoint upon language:

> Within standard interpretations, Wittgenstein is portrayed as holding that it follows from the abandonment of such a standpoint that what counts as agreement between the use of a sign and its meaning is fixed (not by objective reality, but) by grammar – and that there can therefore be no such thing as fully *objective* agreement.[32]

Insofar as that view takes there to be important consequences for, e.g., our notions of objectivity and agreement as a result of abandoning the possibility of attaining an external viewpoint on language, it continues to cling to the idea of just such a standpoint; Wittgenstein, Crary continues, 'is understood as holding that it is possible to occupy such a standpoint and to detect from there that nothing external underwrites our ways of thinking and talking – and that something else (say, our language-games themselves) must provide a standard of correctness'.[33] So one key feature of New readings of the later work, for Crary, is that they see standard readings as surreptitiously clinging on, in just such ways, to the very confusions Wittgenstein was seeking to exorcise, and in particular to the idea of our being able to view language from a point of view external to language. However much we might seem to need or want such a point of view, it is to be seen to offer nothing more than an illusion of a perspective.

What makes one hesitate about Crary's chosen mode of drawing this distinction is the sense that what Crary calls 'standard' readings, Stern 'non-Pyrrhonian', are being said

to be guilty of one main interpretive error. What unites those readings as 'standard' is

their jointly but in different ways failing to follow through on the idea that there is no

such thing as an external viewpoint on language. Insofar as that is being presented by

Crary as a diagnosis of the main interpretive error of such readings, it seems to bring

Crary, and New readings of the *Investigations*, into conflict with *Investigations* §133.

There, Wittgenstein seems to present the idea that there is no one, single solution to the

problems of philosophy as a major source of contrast with his earlier view.[34] The danger

is that presenting this as the one error that all standard readings fall into, leaves

Wittgenstein himself looking as if he presents one catch-all solution to the problems of

philosophy in the *Investigations*, just as he seems to in the *Tractatus*, and in contrast with

Investigations §133. So if Crary is right, a certain amount of exegetical contortion may

be required in shedding some light on how that feature of New readings is compatible

with Wittgenstein's own description of his method in the *Investigations*.

In the end perhaps none of these difficulties are insurmountable. The difference

that Stern locates in what philosophy might do for us is I think clearly reflected in the

distinction between the two views of what nonsense might be, even if the anti-theoretical

sentiment of the Pyrrhonians is reneged upon elsewhere. So there is I think more to be

said for the distinction than just, say, its being a matter of which other commentators one

might find congenial, or whether one sees oneself as it were under the influence of

Stanley Cavell or not, for instance. But it is to say that the distinction is in practice far

more messy than it might at first look, and which side of it one lies might not always be

clear. In relation to the *Tractatus*, things are perhaps more messy still. I want to turn

now to say a little more about New readings there, beginning with Wittgenstein's

infamous claim that the propositions of that work are nonsensical, and one standard way

of interpreting that claim.

III

Wittgenstein, in the penultimate remark of the *Tractatus*, tells us how we, as readers, are

meant to take the remarks found therein. Here is what he writes:

> 6.54   My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way:
> anyone who understands me eventually recognises them as nonsensical,
> when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must,
> so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
>   He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the
> world aright.

Wittgenstein's propositions, then, or at least those among them that serve as elucidations,

are nonsense. We are to understand Wittgenstein and not his (elucidatory) propositions;

at least part of which understanding will be the recognition that his propositions are

nonsense and so are, at the end, to be unceremoniously cast aside as such. If we do all

this, Wittgenstein promises us, if we 'transcend' his propositions in this way, then we will

'see the world aright'.

Such remarks seem to go hand-in-hand with a distinction central to the *Tractatus*

between what, on the one hand, can be said (but not shown) and what, on the other,

cannot be said but can only be shown. Thus, on a traditional reading of the *Tractatus*,

Wittgenstein holds that there are various things, various features of reality, that show

themselves in our language – they come out, manifest themselves, in ordinary thought

and talk – but that we cannot use that language to directly express or describe these

things.   Instead, such features show themselves in the senseful propositions of our language. Wittgenstein's propositions, on this reading, seek to convey to us somehow what it is that cannot be said and hence, inevitably, they result in nonsense.

One such thing that can be shown but not said, on such a reading, is 'logical form': as Wittgenstein calls it, 'the form of reality' (*TLP* 2.18). Standard commentators, for instance, typically attribute to Wittgenstein a theory of representation known as the 'picture theory'. Central to this is the idea that a picture shares a structure (the way in which the elements of the picture stand towards one another) with the fact it represents (*TLP* 2.15). Since a picture can always misrepresent, as well as represent, a fact, something more fundamental must underwrite the comparison of picture and reality. That something, for Wittgenstein, is 'pictorial form': 'the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture' (*TLP* 2.151). Pictorial form, then, is simply the possibility that the represented structure might obtain in reality; the possibility that the things depicted might in fact stand in relation to one another as do the elements of the picture. As such, it is that which a picture must have in common with reality in order to be able to depict it at all, either correctly or incorrectly (*TLP* 2.17). Representational form, by contrast (if, indeed, Wittgenstein did intend a contrast between his uses of the terms *Form der Abbildung* and *Form der Darstellung*), is that which differs between picture and pictured (*TLP* 2.173); it is that which makes the one a picture of the other rather than simply, as Anthony Kenny puts it, a 'reduplicated reality'.[35]

A picture, Wittgenstein continues, can represent, or depict, any reality whose form it has, as a coloured picture can represent anything coloured, or a spatial picture anything spatial (*TLP* 2.171). Nevertheless, there is one thing a picture cannot represent: namely, its own pictorial form; that in virtue of which it is a picture at all. In order to represent that, a picture would – impossibly – have to be able to picture itself in relation to what it pictured and together with the lines of projection between the two. To do that, of course, it would have to be a completely different picture.

This seems to leave open the possibility that one picture's pictorial form might be depicted by another picture of different form.[36] Logical form, however, cannot be depicted at all since, for Wittgenstein, all pictures must have logical form in common with what they depict, whatever other form they may also have. 'Every picture', Wittgenstein writes, 'is *at the same time* a logical one' (*TLP* 2.182). Two pictures may have different logical forms, but they must have a logical form. Since every picture must have logical form in common with what it depicts, one picture could not be used to depict the logical form of another picture of different form; it would have to share that form in order first to be capable of depicting it at all. But neither can a picture depict its own logical form, and for the same reason that it could not depict its own pictorial form; to do that a picture would have to occupy a perspective outside itself, and view itself together with what it pictured and the lines of projection between the elements of the two. To represent logical form, then, we would have to adopt a viewpoint outside logic – and so, for Wittgenstein, outside the world – looking back on it as it were, with something other than logical form underwriting the picturing relation. Logical form, then, cannot be

depicted by any picture, and a proposition, for Wittgenstein, is a type of picture. Thus,

Wittgenstein writes:

> 4.12   Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form.
>   In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.

That perspective, Wittgenstein is clear, is itself a nonsense, only an illusion of a

perspective. Logical form, then, cannot be represented, cannot be directly put into words;

it cannot, that is, be said.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein continues, it can be shown:

> 4.121   Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.
>   What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent.
>   What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by means of language.
>   Propositions *show* the logical form of reality.
>   They display it.
> ...
> 4.1212   What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.

Logical form, on this account, will show itself in all our senseful thought and talk, as that

which allows such everyday expression to be possible at all. This, then, on a standard

reading, is what the *Tractatus* aims to teach us. Wittgenstein's propositions aim, perhaps,

to express what can only be shown, and in grasping what can only be shown as well as

why it is that it can only be shown, we recognise Wittgenstein's propositions themselves

to be nonsense. Having climbed up them, having used them as steps, and having seen

what it is possible to see from the perspective they afford us, we will be in a position also

to see their limitations and so, finally, to throw them away. That, on a standard view, is

what it is like to 'see the world aright'.

Such a reading has, in recent years, come under increasing pressure from the kind

of Resolute readings put forward by, among others, Cora Diamond and James Conant.

For Diamond and Conant, standard sorts of reading that leave Wittgenstein forwarding a

doctrine of ineffable insights in the *Tractatus* end up mistaking one rung of the ladder –

something that is to be thrown away – for the final lesson of the book. Far from throwing

the ladder away, they see standard readings as clinging desperately to the idea that the

book does, despite what Wittgenstein says, make a good deal of sense after all – that

there are substantial, if unsayable, philosophical lessons to be learnt from it. But for

Diamond, there is in Wittgenstein almost nothing of value to be grasped once the idea

that there is no such thing as putting forward doctrines or theses in philosophy is removed

from his work. Instead, then, Diamond wants to take as seriously as one can the idea that

Wittgenstein's propositions are nonsensical, and doing that means applying it also to

those remarks where Wittgenstein talks of what can be said, and what can only be

shown.[37]

Throughout the *Tractatus*, Diamond writes, when Wittgenstein speaks of those

things which 'show' but cannot be said, he talks of them as 'features of reality' and in

doing so, Diamond notes, he uses 'a very odd kind of figurative language'.[38] That kind of

talk – the use of forms of words such as 'what cannot be put into words' – raises, or

ought to raise, a question for us, about how seriously we can take that kind of remark,

which as Diamond puts it 'refer[s], or must seem to, to features of reality that cannot be put in words or captured in thought'.[39]

Diamond contrasts two ways of taking that kind of remark, two ways of applying to that distinction Wittgenstein's injunction to the reader of *Tractatus* 6.54, and she does so by way of one such feature of reality that is said to show itself but which cannot be expressed: what Wittgenstein calls the 'logical form of reality':

> One thing which according to the *Tractatus* shows itself but cannot be said in language is what Wittgenstein speaks of as *the logical form of reality*. So it looks as if there is this whatever-it-is, the logical form of reality, some essential feature of reality, which reality has all right, but which we cannot say or think that it has. What exactly is supposed to be left of that, after we have thrown away the ladder? Are we going to keep the idea that there is something or other in reality that we gesture at, however badly, when we speak of 'the logical form of reality', so that *it, what* we were gesturing at, is there but cannot be expressed in words?[40]

That approach − answering 'yes' to that final question − Diamond uncompromisingly labels 'chickening out'. Doing that, chickening out, is, Diamond writes, 'to pretend to throw away the ladder while standing firmly, or as firmly as one can, on it'.[41] If we read Wittgenstein as chickening out, then, we will read him as genuinely holding that there are such features of reality − features that can neither be thought nor expressed, but which can nevertheless be gestured at, features that show themselves in ordinary, senseful language-use − and that those features, and their inexpressibility, are what we grasp if we understand Wittgenstein and not his propositions.

What about not chickening out, or *really* throwing the ladder away? What counts as doing that, what reading Wittgenstein in that way looks like, Diamond continues, is this:

[R]oughly: 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 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 an ineffable truth.[42]

Diamond, then, wants us to take as seriously as we can Wittgenstein's claim that we must recognise his elucidatory propositions – including those apparently drawing a distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown – as nonsensical. That is not necessarily to say, however, that Wittgenstein's apparent distinction is merely the product of a malicious or mischievously ironical spirit: rather, Diamond says, that way of talking 'may be useful or even for a time essential'. It is, as it were, a final stepping-stone – the last rung of the ladder – on the way to seeing that there really is nothing there to be expressed at all – nothing either sayable or unsayable.

Diamond, then, wants to contrast two approaches to Wittgenstein's elucidatory propositions, and with that, two ways of taking the idea – which appears throughout Wittgenstein's philosophical writings – that he is not putting forward in his work philosophical doctrines or theses and so, for instance, that his book, the *Tractatus*, is 'not a textbook' (*TLP*, preface). We can, Diamond says, take that to mean that whatever there is in his work that looks like a doctrine or thesis and that we are to recognise to be unsayable, does not really count as a doctrine because it cannot be said:

> You can read the *Tractatus* as containing numerous doctrines which Wittgenstein holds cannot be put into words, so they do not really count as doctrines: they do not have what counts as sense according to the doctrines in the *Tractatus* about what has sense. If you read the *Tractatus* this way, you think that, after the ladder

is thrown away, you are left holding on to some truths about reality, while at the same time denying that you are actually *saying* anything about reality.[43]

On the other hand, you can take it that there really is nothing that is a doctrine in the *Tractatus* that is not used with a degree of self-awareness and that is not to be thrown away at the end of the book, leaving one not in possession of something true but ineffable.

'Chickening out', then, for Diamond, involves a double failure that is captured in the idea of 'irresoluteness'. There is what Diamond terms an element of 'failure of courage' in that one cannot quite bring oneself to give up on the idea that Wittgenstein's propositions make some kind of sense after all. And there is 'a kind of dithering, which reflects not being clear about what one really wants, a desire to make inconsistent demands'.[44] One wants both to be able to think those things that cannot be said and yet to recognise that if we cannot say them, we cannot think them either; so there just is no 'them' to be had.

In practice, that kind of Resolute reading has often involved a distinction between two kinds of remark within the *Tractatus*, between those on the one hand that belong to the 'frame' of the work and those that, on the other hand, belong to its 'body'. Thus, Diamond, for instance, writes as follows:

> In what we might call the frame of the book – its Preface and closing sentences –
> Wittgenstein combines remarks about the aim of the book and the kind of reading
> it requires.
>
> ...
>
> The frame of the book contains instructions, as it were, for us as readers of it.
> Read it in the light of what it says at the beginning about its aim and what it says
> at the end about how you are meant to take what it contains.[45]

That description of the frame might suggest a very literal way of taking that metaphor, as referring to the remarks at either end of the book (and only those remarks) which serve to enclose the main text – that literally frame it. But there are also other remarks, remarks not from the Preface or closing paragraphs but from within what might seem then to be the 'body' of the *Tractatus*, and which are also treated by many New readers of that work as if they should be taken seriously – as remarks with a genuine content – and not as plain (austerely conceived) nonsense. This, for P.M.S. Hacker, reveals a 'methodological inconsistency' on behalf of New or, as Hacker calls them, 'post-modernist' or 'deconstructive' interpretations. Hacker writes:

> Apart from the 'frame', Diamond and Conant implicitly exempt *Tractatus* 4.126-4.1272, 5.473 and 5.4733 from condemnation as nonsense, since these are the passages on which their argument depends.... When it is convenient for their purposes, proponents of the post-modernist interpretation have no qualms in quoting and referring to further points Wittgenstein makes in the *Tractatus*, which they take to be correct rather than plain nonsense.[46]

Although Hacker goes on to develop this criticism in greater detail,[47] he may at first appear to miss the mark here, for such remarks are not, as Hacker puts it, 'apart from the "frame",' but are instead a part *of* the frame, as Conant explains:

> Question: what determines whether a remark belongs to the *frame* of the work (preparing the way for those remarks which do serve as elucidations) or to the (elucidatory) *body* of the work? Answer: its role within the work. The distinction between what is part of the frame and what is part of the body is not, as some commentators have thought, simply a function of *where* in the work a remark occurs.... Rather, it is a function of *how* it occurs.[48]

That remark of Conant's, however, might be paraphrased as follows: what determines the role of a remark in the text is its role in the text. So while it may be useful in preventing an overly-literal interpretation of the 'framing' metaphor, its circularity at the same time prevents it from getting us much further than that.

One of the problems with the metaphor of the frame and the body of the text is that it does suggest at least that the remarks which open the text and those which bring it to a close ought to be, if not all of the frame, at least part of it, and it is those remarks which have – rightly, I think – been most often appealed to as forming part of the frame. What causes the trouble here is just that, as various critics have pointed out, not all of the remarks, in particular in the Preface of the *Tractatus*, are conducive to a Resolute reading of that work, and taking them seriously, taking them to make sense and genuinely (unironically) to be asserted by Wittgenstein would not fit at all well with the Resolute approach. So, for instance, the Preface explicitly states of the *Tractatus* that 'thoughts are expressed in it' and, furthermore, that the truth of those thoughts is both 'unassailable and definitive'. For Diamond, of course, as for other New readers, no thoughts and no truths can be expressed in the *Tractatus* – at least, not by its elucidatory propositions – since its elucidatory propositions are plain nonsense and cannot express any thoughts at all.

Some commentators – Juliet Floyd, for instance – have tried to get around these problems by claiming that even the preface, along with everything else in the *Tractatus*, is meant 'ironically'.[49] Most plausibly, perhaps, somewhere in between, is Peter Sullivan's suggestion that, if these remarks, the remarks of the Preface, are instructions for the reader, then that should come with the proviso that these instructions are at the very least difficult to follow straight-off.[50] Whatever the merits of these different approaches, however, it is clear that both on the issue of what remarks come under the frame and on why they do so, greater clarity is going to be required of any New reading.

Along with the distinction between the frame and the body of the *Tractatus*, there is another distinction which is frequently appealed to by New readings of that work. That distinction might be said to be one between two different kinds of metaphysical remarks in the *Tractatus*, or perhaps two different attitudes towards the metaphysical remarks of the *Tractatus* on Wittgenstein's part. So, on the one hand, there is the kind of metaphysical statement that Wittgenstein intends us to come to see as lacking any content, as plain nonsense. That kind of remark might be characterised as 'ironical': it is there in the *Tractatus*, but only in order that it might be won out over, or overcome. The intention with which it is written is that the reader comes to see it as nonsense. On the other hand, at least for some Resolute readers – Diamond and Conant among them – there is also another kind of metaphysical remark in the *Tractatus*, which differ from the first kind in terms of how they are asserted.[51] As Conant characterises these, they are 'unwitting substantive commitments' – metaphysical remarks which are uttered not ironically, but also not in full awareness of their metaphysical nature, perhaps.[52] The kind of metaphysical remark which is not to be found in the *Tractatus*, according to Resolute readers, are metaphysical remarks put forward not ironically, and also knowingly, as it were, with self-awareness, in full knowledge of their metaphysical nature or status.

For Diamond, that contrast between what I have suggested might be thought of as two kinds of attitudes with which Wittgenstein puts forward metaphysical remarks in the *Tractatus* reflects a distinction in the kind of metaphysics those remarks try to express.

There is, for Diamond, a sense in which the *Tractatus* is as it were unironically metaphysical, but when it is – in that kind of remark – it is not concerned with 'features of reality underlying sense, with things that are the case although they cannot intelligibly be said or thought to be the case'.[53] Instead, the metaphysics comes in a quite different form. Diamond writes:

> What is metaphysical there [in the *Tractatus*] is not the content of some belief but *the laying down of a requirement*, the requirement of logical analysis. We do make sense, our propositions do stand in logical relations to each other. And such-and-such *is required* for that to be so. The metaphysics there is not in something other than language and requiring that it be like this or like that; *that* sort of metaphysics the *Tractatus* uses only ironically: it uses apparently metaphysical sentences, but in a way which is disposed of by the sentences which frame the book, in the Preface and final remarks. The metaphysics of the *Tractatus* – metaphysics not ironical and not cancelled – is in the requirements which are internal to the character of language as language, in their [*sic*] being a general form of sentence, in all sentences having this form.[54]

What there is not, then, for Diamond, is, as she puts it, 'metaphysics in a straight-forward sense': that idea, Diamond writes, 'yields plain nonsense or plain self-contradictions'. But there is a metaphysical requirement lurking, as it were, in Wittgenstein's remarks, and which Wittgenstein had not himself uncovered as such. That requirement differs from one Standard picture of Wittgenstein's metaphysics in the *Tractatus* which sees that metaphysics in terms of beliefs about what there is – an ontology of simple objects, facts, and logical forms – independently of language. Instead, the metaphysics comes in a requirement about language, about sentences sharing a common form, for instance. The kind of metaphysics Diamond does find in the *Tractatus* is essential to her understanding of the development of Wittgenstein's thought. For Diamond, the criticisms Wittgenstein directs at his earlier self in his later work are not criticisms of some philosophical position or other; rather, they are criticisms of the laying down of metaphysical requirements.

Resolute readers, then, are by no means committed to the view that there is no

metaphysics that is not ironical in the *Tractatus*. What they are committed to is the view

that there is no metaphysics of a certain sort – unironical and not cancelled out and

crucially also self-aware or 'witting'.[55] That distinction brings with it certain difficulties

– crucially, perhaps, the difficulty of providing exegetical evidence for dividing up the

metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, or the remarks of that work, in this way. At the same time,

however, it may also seem more plausible as an account of the *Tractatus* than an extreme

stance that would see Wittgenstein as having entirely rid himself of any metaphysical

commitment at all at this early stage.

IV

Having given a brief overview of a couple of the ways that Resolute readings of the

Tractatus might or do proceed in practice, I want to turn to Conant and Diamond's

account of the two basic features of such readings that jointly suffice in a reading for it to

qualify as 'Resolute', in their sense of that word. Those two features each consist of the

rejection of one idea central to much of the standard commentary on the *Tractatus*. The

first feature is the rejection of the idea that the elucidatory propositions of the *Tractatus*,

which Wittgenstein tells us we, as readers, are to come to recognise as nonsensical, are to

be taken to convey ineffable insights of any kind – truths or otherwise.[56] The second

feature involves the rejection of the idea that recognising the elucidatory propositions of

the *Tractatus* as nonsense requires the application of a theory of meaning or sense,

specifying when a sentence does and when it does not make sense.[57]

As Conant and Diamond note, both of these features are rejections of ideas associated with Standard readings; they do not themselves lay down any kind of prescription about how the *Tractatus* ought then to be read, having rejected those ideas. Hence, the potential left open for different interpretations which nevertheless qualify equally as 'New' or 'Resolute' is vast. What these features lay out is at best a programme for reading the *Tractatus*, but no more than that.

That raises the question: where does the austere view of nonsense stand in relation to those two features? Conant and Diamond continue:

> It is a corollary of the second of these features that a resolute reading is committed to rejecting the idea that the *Tractatus* holds that there are two logically distinct kinds of nonsense: the garden-variety kind (cases of which we are able to identify prior to our initiation into the teachings of the *Tractatus*) and a logically more sophisticated kind (the nonsensicality of which is due to their logically internally flawed character).[58]

As a corollary of that second feature, then, the austere view – the view that there is no kind of nonsense over and above the kind involved in our ordinary notion of words failing to say anything – is central to New readings of the *Tractatus*. It is also central to New readings of Wittgenstein's later work, since that rejection of the idea of Wittgenstein's putting forward a theory of sense, or indeed any kind of philosophical doctrine or thesis, is equally fundamental to New readings there.

The idea that the austere view is itself a corollary of the rejection of the idea that Wittgenstein puts forward a theory of sense in the *Tractatus* is key to understanding the kind of view that it is. The austere view, that is, does not itself spring from some theory

of sense that would then stand in need of justification, both exegetically and substantially. Someone who takes an opposite view is Meredith Williams. Williams writes: 'Can the austere [Resolute] reader justify the charge of nonsense without some (implicit) theory of meaning or language? I do not see how.'[59] For Williams, the austere view itself must be the upshot of some theory of meaning or other; without some philosophical standard of sense-making, there is nothing against which to measure sentences. For Williams, the austere view must be founded in some such theory in order to provide a perspective from or framework within which the sentences of the *Tractatus* can be deemed to be nonsense.

Williams might then seem simply to deny the possibility of a non-theoretical notion of nonsense, but that is not quite true. Williams does leave some room for our ordinary notion of strings of signs failing to say anything, but she also thinks that that notion will not do what Resolute readers want it to do. Thus, Williams thinks, Resolute readings face a dilemma in their treatment of nonsense. One might maintain that the nonsense of the *Tractatus* really is just plain – austerely conceived – nonsense; that option, however, according to Williams, leaves us with no way of evaluating a reading, nothing we could rightly call 'a reading'. What is more, that option, Williams suggests, that notion of nonsense, is not sufficient to account for the nonsense of the *Tractatus*, since such sentences are in apparently 'good standing'; so even this option must smuggle in a covert theory of meaning, Williams suggests, but that theory will have to be ineffably contained in Wittgenstein's remarks. On the other hand, one might instead accept that the nonsense of the *Tractatus* can only be recognised as such from the vantage of some philosophical position, thereby radically redrawing the character of the debate:

> This relocates the debate between the austere [Resolute] reading and traditional readings. It becomes a debate concerning the grounds for subscribing to some aspects of the Frege-Russell picture while rejecting other aspects. Are the grounds the picture-theory and the ontology of simple objects, as the standard interpretation has it? Or are the grounds to be found outside the *Tractatus* in Frege's characterisation of the context principle and its implications, as Diamond has it?[60]

Thus, for Williams, the debate is no longer one about whether or not Wittgenstein falls back on a technical account of language and meaning in his use of the word 'nonsense', but rather it becomes an argument about which theory Wittgenstein is relying upon, and where it is to be found.

The point I want to take from Williams' attack on the austere view of nonsense, and on Resolute readings, is just about the kind of view austerity is. Williams, I think, fails to take sufficiently seriously the possibility of a non-technical account of nonsense. To be fair to Williams, she has her reasons for doing so: for instance, that it is not clear to her how one could get anything from reading the *Tractatus* were it plain nonsense, or that there would then be no internal evaluative standard for a reading of that work and by which to judge its merits as a reading, or that where sentences – such as those of the *Tractatus* – appear to make good sense, some theory just is required in order to show that they are no more than 'word salads'. These reasons, however, are not good reasons. The last amounts to a simple assertion that there must be more to it than the austere view suggests; the second ignores the possibility of any kind of distinction between the frame and the body of the *Tractatus*, and the first ignores the possibility that the lesson of the *Tractatus* might just consist in our coming to realise that the kinds of remarks it includes, and that we are tempted to come out with in doing philosophy, are nonsense.

V

I have spent some time in introducing New or Resolute readings of the *Tractatus* and of Wittgenstein's later work, as well as introducing the place of the austere view of nonsense within such readings. I have also wanted to suggest, before going on to introduce that view in more detail in Chapter One, the kind of view that the austere view is – one that arises not from some theory or meaning or sense, but from the rejection of the very idea of such a theory, and of the idea that Wittgenstein was concerned to put forward some such theory. The rest of this thesis will be concerned to outline and defend the austere view against a range of criticisms, and within the framework provided by New readings. I shall want to argue primarily that the austere view is the correct view of Wittgenstein's own use of the word nonsense, not only in the *Tractatus* but also later, and I shall also want to argue that the austere view is substantially (and not just exegetically) correct.

Notes to Introduction

[1] There are other kinds too of course – (misguided) actions, (bizarre) situations, (extravagant) conduct, and (worthless) things might all be called 'nonsense' in one way or another.

[2] See, for instance, Cora Diamond, 'Frege and Nonsense' and 'What Nonsense Might Be', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.73-93 & pp.95-114. Diamond herself attributes the view to G.E.M. Anscombe's 'illuminating discussion of Wittgenstein's later view of nonsense' in Anscombe's 'The Reality of the Past', reprinted in Anscombe's *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981). (See Diamond, 'Frege and Nonsense', p.73.)

[3] Thus, the distinction between sense and nonsense is not something we arrive at by way of the application of some theory or other of meaning. That, I take it, is part (but only part) of what Wittgenstein means when he acknowledges an inclination of his in the following words: 'I would like to say: "I must *begin* with the distinction between sense and nonsense. Nothing is possible prior to that. I can't give it a foundation".' *PG*, pp.126-7.

[4] And these differences might be put into effect to make very different kinds of point, too. For instance, the following poem might be used to make a point about a perceived need for reform of the English language by exploiting its notoriously irregular rules:

> I said, 'This horse, sir, will you shoe?'
> And soon the horse was shod.
> I said, 'This deed, sir, will you do?'
> And soon the deed was dod!

Quoted in Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.48. Nothing about the austere view would stop one from recognising the various purposes – such as this – with which a piece of nonsense might be uttered.

[5] This raises the question: what exactly would constitute a logical difference between nonsense-sentences? I discuss this briefly in Chapter 4 in relation to Hans-Johann Glock and P.M.S. Hacker, who seemingly want to give very different answers to it. In short, for Glock all that is required for the difference to be a logical one is a difference in what causes the remarks to be nonsense; for Hacker, the difference must instead be a difference in the end product as it were – for him nonsense-sentences can arise from different causes without this constituting a logical difference. This difference between Glock and Hacker allows the former to assert that there are logically distinct kinds of nonsense and the latter to deny that there either are or can be, whilst the two nevertheless hold largely similar views on many related substantial points. See below, pp.104-106. Since for Diamond and Conant all nonsense is plain nonsense and plain nonsense results only from a failure to give the words in a nonsense-sentence a meaning, it would seem that there are no logically distinct kinds of nonsense on either way of counting.

[6] See, for instance, *Tractatus* 4.461 & 4.4611. Both *sinnlos* and *unsinn* sentences fail to say anything, but tautologies and contradictions (which are *sinnlos*) are nevertheless part of the symbolism (4.4611): they are perfectly legitimate constructions or moves in the language.

[7] *PI* §500, for instance, might be an example of this.

[8] That, for instance, is Duncan Richter's view. Thus, on the question 'what is nonsense?', Richter writes: 'Wittgenstein, I think, has no view on this in his later work'. See Duncan Richter, *Wittgenstein At His Word* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p.68 and p.81. Nevertheless, I think Richter would agree that Wittgenstein, early and later, has a view on what nonsense is not, as expressed for instance in *PI* §500 (quoted below, p.60).

[9] So, for instance, Wittgenstein is claimed to have said:

> Most of us think that there is nonsense which makes sense and nonsense which does not – that it is nonsense in a different way to say 'This is green and yellow at the same time' from saying 'Ab

sur ah'. But these are nonsense in the same sense, the only difference being in the jingle of the words.

'Most of us' think this, though few, surely, would say it. Wittgenstein's claim here seems to be that one seemingly very natural thing to say about the difference between these two nonsense-sentences is equivalent to saying that there is nonsense which does make sense and nonsense which doesn't. (The implication here, too, given Wittgenstein's choice of example, is that this, absurd, view of nonsense, is a consequence of a particular, widespread view of contradiction.) *AWL*, p.64. Interestingly, on this note, the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes under 'nonsense' the definition 'a meaning that makes no sense'. And one recent introduction to the *Tractatus* has Wittgenstein exploring the possibility of a category of expressions that 'are literally nonsensical and yet make sense', whatever that might mean. See Alfred Nordmann, *Wittgenstein's* Tractatus: *An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.9.
[10] Cora Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.106 and p.107. Cf. James Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.13-61 (p.38, note 42).
[11] These last two terms are due to P.M.S. Hacker. See P.M.S. Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.353-388 (p.359 & p.360 and note 22). All of these terms are to some degree loaded; I will by and large stick to 'New' and 'Resolute' in the following and refer to those readings to which they are opposed as 'Standard' or 'Traditional'. Again, there are other, more loaded terms, such as 'Irresolute', and, as with New readings, only perhaps even more so, there is no such thing as *the* Standard reading. Rather, there is a cluster of readings which are standard perhaps only insofar as they do not meet one or other of the two criteria which suffice to make a reading Resolute (see below, pp.28-29). It is worth noting here that some elements of New readings were pre-empted or prefigured in the works of, for instance, Peter Winch and Hidé Ishiguro.
[12] So, for instance, in the following quotation, Conant describes the difference between his and Hacker's views of Wittgenstein's views of nonsense as of central importance – more important even than their differences over the existence of ineffable truths:

> It would be a mistake to think that the crucial difference between my interpretation of Wittgenstein and that of Baker and Hacker is that whereas they, on the one hand, think that when Wittgenstein wrote his early work he thought that there were ineffable truths that cannot be stated in language and later came to see that this is misconceived, I, on the other hand, think that already in his early work he thought this misconceived. The more important difference between their reading and mine is that I think that Wittgenstein (early and late) thinks that the view that they attribute to later Wittgenstein is a disguised version of the view that they attribute to early Wittgenstein. I take the continuity in Wittgenstein's thought to lie in his espousal of the austere conception of nonsense; they take it to lie in his espousal of the substantial conception.

James Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.13-61 (p.38; note 42).
[13] In fact, the latter accepts the austere view of nonsense (see especially Moore's *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially Chapter Nine, and his 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII (2003), 169-193, (p.186)), but draws very different consequences from it, which New readers would find hard to accept.
[14] The papers of Hacker's on which I focus are his 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?' (*op. cit*) and his 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 53:210 (January, 2001), 1-23. Conant's account can be found in his 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*' (*op. cit*).
[15] In her paper, 'Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.55; No.218 (January, 2005), 78-89.
[16] In her 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', unpublished manuscript, presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 11.09.2005.

[17] Glock's criticisms can be found in his 'All Kinds of Nonsense', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.221-245.

[18] Both in Chapter Four and the Postscript to it, the paper of Moore's I focus on is his 'Ineffability and Nonsense' (*op. cit*).

[19] In fact, one of the lessons of Moore's argument (in his paper 'Ineffability and Nonsense') might be that, though New readings may still fall if austerity does, they do not necessarily stand if austerity stands. For one conclusion of Moore's paper is that austerity is not incompatible with the existence of some kind of ineffable insight.

[20] For instance, Wittgenstein's post-*Tractatus* paper, 'Some Remarks on Logical Form' (in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Hackett: Indainapolis, 1993), pp.29-35), contains views, or seems to, which would, from a Resolute perspective, represent a severely retrograde step from the *Tractatus*, and is written in a spirit that seems not to be 'ironical' as the *Tractatus* might well be taken to be.

[21] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', p.364. 'It is a mistake of Diamond', Hacker goes on to write, 'to suppose that the *Tractatus* is a self-consistent work'. (*Ibid*, p.370.) Does Diamond suppose this? Arguably not, but the contradiction she does find is located much deeper down, between the anti-metaphysical bent of the book, and its nevertheless laying down some kind of a metaphysical requirement. See below, pp.26-28.

[22] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', p.381.

[23] Moore suggests this, at least given his descriptions of the two different kinds of readings ('Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII (2003), 169-193 (pp.179-181)). I do agree with Moore's sentiment that the two kinds of readings are not always quite as absurd as they are often rhetorically characterised as being (by adherents of the opposing view), but I do not agree with his characterisation of the two kinds of readings. I also think that there is a significant difference between the two kinds of readings – marked at least in part by the austere view of nonsense.

[24] That does not mean, however, that the *Tractatus* is necessarily to be read as being entirely free from having any metaphysical commitments of its own. Diamond, for one, clearly sees Wittgenstein as having some metaphysical commitments in that work that are not thrown away. See, for instance, Cora Diamond, 'Introduction II: Wittgenstein and Metaphysics', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.13-38 (p.18). And Conant, too, in what might be thought to be a quite radical departure from the position he takes in some of his earlier work, has talked recently of there being some 'unwitting substantive commitments' in the *Tractatus* which Wittgenstein at the time would not have taken to be metaphysical, or theoretical, or even in some sense peculiarly 'his'. James Conant, 'Moses and Mono-Wittgensteinians', unpublished manuscript, presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 9.09.2005. I return to this below, pp.26-28.

[25] In fact, there is a prevarication in the 'Resolute' literature, between taking this idea to be the 'final rung' – and so an adequate interpretation of the say/show distinction as it appears in the *Tractatus* – and taking it simply to be a mispresentation of Wittgenstein's distinction.

[26] Conant uses the metaphor of peeling off the layers of an onion – what we are left with is not some substantial core; the most we are left with is perhaps the realisation that nothing lay at its core. James Conant, 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege, and the *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Topics*, Vol.20:No.1 (Fall, 1991), 115-180 (pp.157-160).

[27] Not, to be sure, however, as unconditionally nonsense – for one facet of the austere view is that any string of words could be given a sense by appropriate assignments of meaning. See below, e.g., pp.42-44.

[28] See James Conant, 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors', in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, eds. T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin's Press; London: Macmillan, 1995), pp.248-331.

[29] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), pp.32-3.

[30] See David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations: *An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Ch. 2, especially pp.34-36. Stern is here building on a distinction of Fogelin's. See Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), Ch. XV.

[31] Stern, *Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations, p.36.

[32] Alice Crary, 'Introduction', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.1-18 (p.3).

[33] Crary, 'Introduction', p.3.

[34] Although see Diamond's, 'Criss-Cross Philosophy' (in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.201-220) for a qualification to that picture of the difference.

[35] Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Penguin, 1973), p.56.

[36] This, if correct, might seem to be problematic for Wittgenstein since he elsewhere notes both that a picture 'displays' its pictorial form (*TLP* 2.172) – it 'shows it forth' (*weist sie auf*) – and yet, of course, that 'what *can* be shown, *cannot* be said' (*TLP* 4.1212). Instead, this implies that some things that can be shown can also be said. On the other hand, however, it is not wholly implausible to read Wittgenstein at 4.1212 as suggesting not that there are two categories of things; one of things that can only be said, and another of things that can only be shown, and never the twain shall meet, but rather that what something shows, that thing cannot also say. On this view logical form could still not be put into words, for the reasons mentioned in the text (below, p.18).

[37] That is the suggestion of Diamond's 'Throwing Away the Ladder', but it might be thought (and I think Diamond later thinks) that it is not the saying/showing distinction that must be discarded, but rather a certain interpretation of that distinction – one that seems to go hand-in-hand with the idea that the *Tractatus* aims to communicate ineffable truths. See Diamond's 'Saying and Showing: An Example from Anscombe', in *Post-Analytic* Tractatus, ed. Barry Stocker (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.151-166.

[38] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.182.

[39] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.181. It is not, I think, that such formations as – to use two other of Diamond's examples – '*das Unsagbare*' and '*das Undenkbare*' must succeed in putting such features into words if they are to make sense: clearly there is a difference to be exploited here between saying what cannot be said and saying something *about* what cannot be said (for instance, *that* it cannot be said, whatever 'it' is). But such forms of words do at least play on the appearance of having an impossible, unfullfillable reference in order to raise a question more generally about how seriously that kind of talk can be taken.

[40] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.181.

[41] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.194.

[42] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.181.

[43] Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder', p.182.

[44] Cora Diamond, 'Realism and Resolution: Reply to Warren Goldfarb and Sabina Lovibond', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol.XXII (1997), 75-86 (p.78).

[45] Cora Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.149-173 (p.149 & p.151).

[46] Hacker, 'Was he Trying to Whistle it?', p.360.

[47] One point that Hacker goes on to make is this: that these other remarks make appeals to formal concepts which, Hacker thinks, Resolute readers ought to eschew, such as 'proposition' and 'variable'. Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', p.362.

[48] James Conant, 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.174-217 (p.216, note 102).

[49] Rupert Read and Rob Deans distinguish between 'strong' and 'weak' versions of Resolute readings, with one of the features of strong readings being that they discard even this attempt to hold on to certain remarks of the *Tractatus* through the notion of a frame. See Read and Deans, ' "Nothing is Shown": A "Resolute" Response to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe, and Vilhauer', *Philosophical Investigations* 26:3 (July, 2003), 239-270.

[50] Sullivan writes that, as instructions, they might be said to 'share the perversity of instructions for assembling flat-pack furniture: that you can only work out how they're to be read by comparing them with the finished article'. Peter Sullivan, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII, (2203) 195-223, (p.211, note 31).

[51] As Diamond draws the distinction, the difference is between in the first instance the content of a belief, and in the second instance the laying down of a requirement (see below). The (unironical, not cancelled out) metaphysics of the *Tractatus* does not consist in some belief of Wittgenstein's, but in metaphysical

requirements he lays down; and that requirement is not about how the world must be, external to language, but about the character of language itself. Given this contrast, Diamond might not wish to accept my way of expressing the difference here, as between two kinds of metaphysical remark; the suggestion seems to be that the requirement is in the background, but is not the content of some belief or some remark exactly.

[52] Conant used in this phrase in his paper 'Moses and Mono-Wittgensteinians', presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 9.09.2005.

[53] Diamond, 'Introduction II', p.18.

[54] Diamond, 'Introduction II', p.19.

[55] This suggests another way of characterising 'Standard' readings in opposition to New readings, as any reading which is prepared to ascribe to Wittgenstein a witting commitment to metaphysical doctrines or theses of any kind.

[56] It is a feature of much of the (at least earlier) literature on New and Standard readings of the *Tractatus*, that the Standard position is taken to involve a commitment to the existence of ineffable truths as the lesson of the *Tractatus*. That idea is explicitly held by some – most notably, P.M.S. Hacker – and I think also implicitly by others – I would include here Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe (but others, Peter Sullivan, for instance, would not, certainly in the case of Anscombe). However, it is a matter of contention whether, or how many, or which of these Standard readers really do commit to the idea of ineffable truths, especially since the idea (notwithstanding Hacker's vehement defence of it) seems to be something of a straw man.

[57] Conant and Diamond write: 'The second feature is a rejection of the idea that what such recognition requires on the part of a reader of the *Tractatus* is the application of a theory of meaning that has been advanced in the body of the work – a theory that specifies the conditions under which a sentence makes sense and the conditions under which it does not' ('On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.46-99 (p.47)). I want to quibble with their inclusion of the words: 'that has been advanced in the body of the work'. I think the rejection is stronger than that, and that it would apply to a theory of meaning advanced in the body, the frame, or elsewhere and imposed from outside the *Tractatus*.

[58] Conant and Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely', p.48.

[59] Meredith Williams, 'Nonsense and Cosmic Exile: The Austere Reading of the *Tractatus*', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.6-31 (p.18).

[60] Williams, 'Nonsense and Cosmic Exile', p.18.

Chapter One

The Austere View of Nonsense

I

The idea of nonsense plays a central role in Wittgenstein's thought throughout his life,

from the *Tractatus* through to some of his last writings gathered in *On Certainty*. It is a

guiding theme of his work that much of what we say and write when we practice

philosophy is, in spite both of appearances and of our best intentions, nothing more than

nonsense. In the *Tractatus*, we are told, apparently without irony, that '[m]ost of the

propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but

nonsensical' and that, as a consequence, 'we cannot give any answer to questions of this

kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical' (*TLP* 4.003). Accordingly, the

'correct method in philosophy', as the *Tractatus* characterises it, would then be this:

> [T]o say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e.
> something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone
> else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had
> failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. (*TLP* 6.53)

That work, furthermore, ends by drawing attention to the nonsensicality of its own

propositions – they serve as elucidations only insofar as we come to recognise them as

nonsensical; we are to understand Wittgenstein, and not his propositions. In Wittgenstein's later work, the idea of philosophy as consisting mostly of nonsense remains; his aim, as characterised in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is to help the reader pass from a piece of disguised, or latent, nonsense to something that is patent nonsense (*PI* §464). And the use of the exclamation 'Nonsense!' (*Unsinn!*) as a term of criticism in response to philosophical impulses can be found, for instance, in the following striking instance from *On Certainty*:

> I know that a sick man is lying here? Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively into his face. – So I don't know, then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the answer makes sense. Any more than the assertion 'I am here', which I might yet use at any moment, if suitable occasion presented itself. (*OC* §10)

What kind of thing nonsense can be, then, is a question that raises itself insistently in Wittgenstein's work. And the answer we end up giving to this question will have serious and widespread consequences for how we read his work. Thus, when the *Tractatus* tells us we are to recognise its own propositions as nonsense, to use them as a ladder and then throw them away, it will make a great deal of difference to the kind of thing we imagine we can grasp by way of its nonsensical propositions just what nonsense is, and so what it might be thought to be capable of doing, too. What the lesson of the *Tractatus* might be, the kind of thing we can climb up to, may well depend on what the ladder is made up of.[1] So too, when Wittgenstein again and again writes that much of what we want to come out with in philosophy is nonsense, what we think nonsense is for Wittgenstein will not only characterise the kind of criticism he is making of traditional philosophy, but also at a much more fundamental level will colour our conception of the kind of solution or

dissolution of philosophical problems we see him as trying to effect – the very conception

of philosophy as Wittgenstein practises it that we are left with.

We might, for instance, read Wittgenstein's use of the term 'nonsense' as

reflecting a quite general theory of sense of his own – nonsense for Wittgenstein we

might think arises when we violate certain rules, the rules of logical syntax, say, or of

grammar. In that case, we are already taking Wittgenstein to be forwarding quite

explicitly certain philosophical doctrines; his means of dissolving traditional philosophy

is to replace it with other kinds of doctrine which may end up looking for all the world

like a continuation of that very tradition, of that mode of practicing philosophy. Or we

might privilege instead Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical remarks where he again and again

returns to the idea, in Diamond's words, that 'he is not putting forward philosophical

doctrines or theses; or … that it cannot be done, that it is only through some confusion

one is in about what one is doing that one could take oneself to be putting forward

philosophical doctrines or theses at all'.[2] In that case, Wittgenstein's conception of

nonsense would have to be based not on his own philosophical account of sense, not on

its failure to meet certain criteria, but on a much more basic failure to make any sense at

all, on its as it were simply 'falling apart' when we do try to make sense of it.[3]

The question of what nonsense might be for Wittgenstein is, then, one with wide-

ranging consequences for reading his work. What answer we give will it seems

determine the whole shape of his work for us, the very nature of the solution or

dissolution of traditional philosophical problems that he is trying to achieve and, perhaps,

one might add – with a nod to the preface of the *Tractatus* – *how much* is achieved in so doing. In this chapter, I shall want to outline the austere view of nonsense in detail, and offer some of the evidence that exists for its being Wittgenstein's view, early and later, as well as drawing some of the consequences of that view for how we might read Wittgenstein's work.

II

That austere view of nonsense was first outlined by Cora Diamond in a number of essays primarily on Frege.[4] Diamond begins with an account of a view of nonsense that is opposed to the austere view, and that she calls the 'natural' view.

The natural view of nonsense makes a distinction between at least two different logical types of nonsense. There is, on the one hand, the type of nonsense you get if you take a perfectly respectable, senseful sentence, and replace one or more words with nonsense-words. So, for instance, the example Diamond gives is this: 'Scott kept a runcible at Abbottsford'. What makes this kind of sentence nonsense is our failure, to date at least, to give a meaning to some or other of the words involved. Call this type (1), or 'mere', nonsense.

On the other hand, the natural view would have it, there is another type of nonsense: type (2), or 'substantial', nonsense. This type of nonsense is nonsense that results from a category-error of some kind – a putting of a word of one logical category in a place for a word of entirely another category. Thus, this kind of nonsense-sentence

combines only meaningful words, but does so in such a way that their individual meanings, the meanings that the words do have, clash. An example of this sort might be the following: 'Caesar is a prime number'.[5] 'Caesar', we might say, following the natural view, is the proper name or title of a person – and yet the predicate 'x is a prime number' is only assertable of numbers. Asserted of a person, however, it is neither true nor false – what would it be like, we might ask, for Caesar to be or not be divisible only by the number one and by himself? – it is, rather, nonsense.[6]

On the natural view, then, as Diamond presents it, there is a straightforward contrast between two logically distinct types of nonsense: nonsense that is nonsense because of a lack, an absence, of meaning, because a specification has not hitherto been made – type (1), or mere, nonsense; and nonsense that is not the result of an absence of meaning, but of the meanings of the words so combined – type (2), or substantial, nonsense.

On the austere view, by contrast, the entire class of supposed examples of type (2) nonsense is reduced into that of type (1). There is on the austere view simply no such thing as positive or substantial nonsense. Instead, what we have in a nonsense-sentence like 'Caesar is a prime number' (if indeed that is nonsense on some occasion of utterance[7]) is not a combination of incompatible meanings, but no meaning at all; words whose meanings have not yet been specified in that context. This does not mean that we could not give them a meaning – for the austere view, a sentence's being nonsense means only that so far, to date, we have failed to give the signs a meaning – and, of course, if we

do decide to do so, some meanings may occur to us as possible substitutions more readily

than others will. It seems natural, for instance, in the case of 'Caesar is a prime number',

to give 'Caesar' the meaning, say, that 'fifty-three' has in the sentence 'Fifty-three is a

prime number'; just as it seems natural to give 'runcible', in 'Scott kept a runcible at

Abbottsford', the meaning that, say, 'cow' has in the sentence 'Scott kept a cow at

Abbottsford'.[8] In doing so, however, on the austere view, we are not according with

some meaning already present in the signs. If the sentence is nonsense, on the austere

view, it is simply mere nonsense, and no part of it can be said to mean what the same

combination of letters might mean elsewhere, in some other, senseful sentence. So we do

not have, in 'Caesar is a prime number', two logical elements, 'Caesar' and 'is a prime

number', one of which we then alter the meaning of in order that it fit the other. Nor in

'Scott kept a runcible at Abbottsford' do we have the same logical element that we have

in 'Scott kept a cow at Abbottsford'. Nevertheless, certain ways of giving a sense to such

sentences as these do occur naturally to us. So, for instance, Diamond writes:

> It is *natural* to do it with ['Caesar is a prime number'], if we do it at all, either in
> such a way that the meaning of 'Caesar' is what it is in 'Caesar crossed the
> Rubicon' or in such a way that the rest of the sentence means what it does in
> sentences about numbers; it is *natural* to do it with ['Scott kept a runcible at
> Abbottsford'], if we do it at all, so that the whole sentence will say of whatever
> runcibles are what 'Scott kept a cow at Abbottsford' says of cows.[9]

What makes these alternatives seem natural is, for Diamond, simply 'some superficial

resemblance to sentences of two distinct logical patterns'. For Conant, it is a matter of 'a

feature of the "external form" ... of certain sentences – a grammatical surface pattern – of

ordinary language (a certain sort of configuration of signs). [It is] a feature of the surface

grammar (the sign-structure) of ordinary language – not a proper *logical* category'.[10] We

need not take any of these natural options, however, if we do decide to give the sentence

a meaning; 'we might perfectly well', Diamond notes, 'have "Caesar is a prime number"

express the sense, by appropriate assignments of meaning, that clematis is a fast

grower'.[11]

What we cannot do, on the austere as opposed to the natural view, is give a word

the wrong kind of meaning, a meaning that clashes somehow with the meaning that the

rest of the sentence does have. The difference between what the natural view sees as two

logically distinct types of nonsense is, for the austere view then, largely a matter of

psychology: we are prone to take the one for sense, to be taken in by the illusion of

having understood it, by the appearance of sense where there is none. But whatever

psychological images the nonsense-sentence may call to mind, logically it is pure

gibberish.

III

Both of those views of what nonsense might be can be contrasted with a third kind of

view, which might be called 'falsidical' and which has been forwarded by Arthur Prior

among others. I noted above that the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' was a bad

example of category-clash nonsense, or of nonsense full-stop, since Frege for one would

have viewed it not as nonsense at all, but as plain false. One way of characterising a

'falsidical' account would be to say that where the substantial view sees such examples as

involving a kind of logical error resulting in a special category of nonsense, and where

the austere view sees them as lacking any meaning at all, as being mere gibberish, on a

falsidical view (and as the name suggests) they involve instead a trivial kind of falsehood,

and hence are not nonsense at all. The sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' is a good example here, not simply because of Frege's view of it, but because one's own intuitions may leave one undecided about what to say of this case – whether to think it false or nonsense. On a falsidical view, all examples of so-called category-clash nonsense come out intelligible but false.

A version of that kind of view can be found in the following passage from Quine's *Word and Object*. Quine writes:

> [T]here has been a concern among philosophers to declare meaningless, rather than trivially false, such predications as 'This stone is thinking about Vienna' (Carnap) and 'Quadruplicity drinks procrastination' (Russell). Here we witness sometimes just a spontaneous revulsion against silly sentences and sometimes a remote project of cutting down meaningful language to something like empirical size. But since the philosophers who would build such categorial fences are not generally resolved to banish from language all falsehoods of mathematics and like absurdities, I fail to see much benefit in the partial exclusions that they do undertake; for the forms concerned would remain still quite under control if admitted rather, like self-contradictions, as false (and false by meaning, if one likes).[12]

The view that Quine is opposing here is clearly something like the substantial view – the building of 'categorial fences' which exclude, or are meant to exclude, certain combinations of words as involving nonsensical category-clash. But what view it is exactly that Quine is putting forward in its place is not so clear: that is, it is not clear whether Quine would endorse what I am going to call a 'strong' falsidical view, or a 'weak' falsidical view. The former holds that these sentences *and their negations* are all trivially false; the latter that while such sentences as 'This stone is thinking about Vienna' are false, their negations, e.g. 'This stone is not thinking about Vienna', are true.[13] Nothing Quine writes in the above passage commits him to either view over the other.

What as it were speaks in favour of that broad falsidical view – whether strong or weak – and as set against the substantial conception, is the feeling that, if we can understand what it is that these nonsense-sentences do say, then, well, we just can understand what they say, and hence it makes very little sense indeed to go on to call them nonsensical. If we can understand them at all, then they must make some kind of sense, even if whatever sense they do make will be, as Quine puts it, 'trivially false'. What clearly it makes no sense to say (and as *PI* §500 suggests[14]), is that the kind of sense they do make makes no sense. Since both on Quine's view and on the substantial view we can recognise, in Quine's words, 'the forms concerned', it is surely more honest to own up to that and label them not nonsense but false, albeit trivially so.

What Quine's broad position has going for it, then, is simply its unwillingness to follow the substantial view into incoherence. So while neither version of the falsidical view has ever been – at least, so far as I know – attributed to Wittgenstein, one might be tempted to prefer some kind of falsidical view to a substantial one.[15] Why, though, should one prefer an austere view (not simply exegetically) to a version of the falsidical? Either version of the falsidical view, I think, and in particular its strong version, faces a number of difficulties, but rather than trying to outline those problems here, I want to deflect the question and suggest instead why I do not need to answer it. The reason stems from the nature of the dispute between the austere and the falsidical. The question I am concerned with here is that of what nonsense might be; that, for instance, is clearly what is at stake between the austere and the substantial views. But the austere and the

falsidical views can and I think probably largely do agree on the answer to that question: both recognise only a category of 'mere' nonsense, of gibberish, of words lacking any meaning at all, and both deny the existence of as it were 'substantial' nonsense. Thus, Quine can elsewhere, and without it signifying any change of heart on his part, make the following, rather austere-sounding, comment: 'Nonsense is indeed mere absence of sense, and can always be remedied by arbitrarily assigning some sense'.[16] That is quite compatible with his earlier falsidical remark, since he may here be referring only to those nonsense-sentences recognised as such on the falsidical view. Instead, then, what the austere and the falsidical views differ over is not what nonsense might be, but rather (one might put it) over what might be nonsense: they disagree over which sentences properly count as nonsensical, with the falsidical view drawing the bounds of sense far wider than someone holding an austere view might. That question, at any rate, of which sentences are nonsense, is not my question here, and I shall say no more about it.

IV

Having outlined the austere and the substantial views of nonsense, I want to turn now to look at some of the evidence for attributing to Wittgenstein an austere view of nonsense, early and later, and beginning with his view in the *Tractatus*. There, in the *Tractatus*, that view of what Wittgenstein himself thought nonsense might be gains credence from a number of remarks. Most notably, the *Tractatus* 5.473s appear to contain a straightforward statement of such a view. Before turning to that passage, however, I want to begin with another piece of evidence, from earlier in the *Tractatus*: Wittgenstein's reformulation, at *Tractatus* 3.3, of Frege's context-principle.

Frege, in the introduction to his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, lays down the

following three 'fundamental' methodological principles guiding his enquiry:

> [1]   always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the
> subjective from the objective;
> [2]   never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context
> of a proposition;
> [3]   never to lose sight of the distinction between concept and object.[17]

Diamond explains the link between the first two of these principles as follows:

> [I]f we disobey the second principle and ask for the meaning of a word in
> isolation, we shall almost certainly look for an answer in the realm of the
> psychological – we shall explain what it is for a term to have a meaning in terms
> of mental images or mental acts, and that will be a violation of the first
> principle.[18]

What is available to us, when we take a word in isolation from any particular proposition,

primarily, are the images we associate with the word – for Frege, the stuff of psychology,

not of logic. So violating the second of Frege's principles – the context-principle – may

well lead us to violate the first, to confuse the logical and the psychological by looking

for the meaning of a word in terms of mental images. Likewise, failing to separate

sharply the psychological and the logical may lead us to think that we can ask for the

meaning of a word in isolation, not as it appears in some proposition or other – it may

lead us to think that looking for an answer there can give us what we want. Those two

principles are linked to the third in this way: asking for the meaning of a word in isolation

may lead us to look for its meaning in terms of mental associations and images and that

may in turn lead us to lose sight of Frege's distinction between concept and object. Thus,

take for instance the following two sentences:

1.   Vienna is the capital of Austria.

2.   Trieste is no Vienna.

Though in both sentences we have the same sign – 'Vienna' – in the first it stands for an

object, namely, the capital of Austria, and in the second it functions rather as a concept-

word. If we ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, we may think that 'Vienna' has

one meaning wherever, and however, it occurs, and so we will lose sight of the difference

between, for instance, the two occurrences of the word above. Again, something similar

might be said in reverse, too: that losing sight of Frege's distinction between concept and

object may encourage us to think that there is something shared – over and above the

mere sign – between those two instances of the word 'Vienna', and so lead us into

transgressing against Frege's first and second principles too.

In the *Tractatus*, Frege's second principle – the context-principle – is

reformulated to read as follows:

> 3.3   Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition
> does a name have meaning.

And that point gets reiterated a few remarks later, at *Tractatus* 3.314, which begins: 'An

expression has meaning only in a proposition'. That idea, then, that words only have a

meaning in the context of a proposition, bears on the question of what nonsense might be

in this way. If an expression only has meaning in a proposition, then there will be no

such thing as an expression having a meaning in a nonsense-sentence, and no such thing

as our being able to identify its meaning there, for a nonsense-sentence is not a

proposition at all. In a nonsense-sentence, we lack the kind of context in which a word

can mean anything at all. Thus, nonsense-sentences cannot be constituted – as they can

on the substantial view – of meaningful words which, so combined, yield nonsense.

Wittgenstein's contextualism appears to rule out the idea that words in nonsense-sentences can so much as have a meaning.[19]

Wittgenstein's reformulation of Frege's context-principle at *Tractatus* 3.3 is immediately followed in the text by his drawing of a distinction between signs and symbols, and that distinction is instrumental in how Wittgenstein's contextualism gets applied to the question of what nonsense might be. So, beginning at *Tractatus* 3.31, Wittgenstein writes:

> 3.31   I call any part of a proposition that characterises its sense an expression (or a symbol).
> (A proposition is itself an expression.)
> Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression.
> An expression is a mark of a form and a content.
> 3.311   An expression presupposes the forms of all the propositions in which it can occur. It is the common characteristic mark of a class of propositions.

A symbol, or an 'expression', then, is a proposition, or a contributing part of one. It is as it were a logical unit, something that goes towards determining the sense of a proposition, and so something that propositions can have in common, or otherwise the proposition itself. The symbol, in Conant's words, is 'something which only has life in language'.[20] As such, the notion of a symbol stands in contrast to that of a (mere) sign:

> 3.32   A sign is what can be perceived of a symbol.
> 3.321   So one and the same sign (written or spoken, etc.) can be common to two different symbols – in which case they will signify in different ways.
> 3.322   Our use of the same sign to signify two different objects can never indicate a common characteristic of the two, if we use it with two different *modes of signification*. For the sign, of course, is arbitrary. So we could choose two different signs instead, and then what would be left in common on the signifying side?

3.323   In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different symbols – or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way.

Thus the word 'is' figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; 'exist' figures as an intransitive verb like 'go', and 'identical' as an adjective; we speak of *something*, but also of *something's* happening.

(In the proposition, 'Green is green' – where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective – these words do not merely have different meanings: they are *different symbols*.)

The sign, by contrast to the idea of a symbol, then, is not a logical unit at all, but is 'what can be perceived of a symbol' – the mere mark on paper, or noise. So, for instance, in the example presented by the two sentences above, we have one sign in common between the two sentences – that of 'Vienna' – but that sign nevertheless symbolises in two quite distinct ways on each of the two occasions of use: in the first instance, the symbol has the logical role of a proper name, standing for the capital city of Austria; but in the second the sign symbolises a concept, one that the city of Vienna is typically taken to represent a paradigm instantiation of. And, again, in Wittgenstein's example 'Green is green' we have one sign but two symbols – one a proper name and one an adjective. That the two symbols share the same sign is, for Wittgenstein, entirely arbitrary.

That basic distinction between sign and symbol is assumed in much of the above, and it allows us to re-caste part of the import of the Tractarian context-principle for the question of what nonsense might be in the following way: in a nonsense-sentence – i.e. not in the context of a proposition – we have only signs and not symbols, things which have no logical significance despite their perhaps bearing a superficial resemblance to other signs which do symbolise.

The contextualism of the *Tractatus*, then, together with its application by way of the sign/symbol distinction, provides some evidence for Wittgenstein having held in the *Tractatus* to an austere view of nonsense. Wittgenstein's drawing of that distinction, in *Tractatus* 3.31 through to 3.323, is followed immediately by the following comment – 'In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them)' (3.324); to avoid such confusions, Wittgenstein writes, we must make use of 'a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammar – by logical syntax' (3.325). What kind of confusions those confusions are, as well as just what logical syntax is, and how the appeal to a sign-language that is governed by it – or that obeys its rules – can help, is a scene of crucial difference between those who find in the *Tractatus* an austere view of nonsense and those – like P.M.S. Hacker – who find there instead a conception of nonsense based on the violation of rules of logical syntax.[21] I want to postpone discussion of this central issue until Chapter Two and turn instead to a second key piece of evidence for Wittgenstein's having held to an austere view of nonsense in the *Tractatus*.

That passage consists of *Tractatus* 5.473 through to 5.4733 where, as I said above, Wittgenstein appears straightforwardly to state an austere view of nonsense. I shall want to draw out briefly how those remarks might be taken to support the attribution to Wittgenstein of an austere view, before dealing with some objections to that way of reading the passage, made by Genia Schönbaumsfeld. Wittgenstein writes:

5.473   Logic must look after itself.

> If a sign is *possible*, then it is also capable of signifying. Whatever is possible in logic is also permitted. (The reason why 'Socrates is identical' means nothing is that there is no property called 'identical'. The proposition is nonsensical because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination, and not because the symbol, in itself, would be illegitimate.)
>
> In a certain sense, we cannot make mistakes in logic.
>
> 5.4731   Self-evidence, which Russell talked about so much, can become dispensable in logic, only because language itself prevents every logical mistake. – What makes logic a priori is the *impossibility* of illogical thought.
>
> 5.4732   We cannot give a sign the wrong sense.
>
> ...
>
> 5.4733   Frege says that any legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense. And I say that any possible proposition is legitimately constructed, and, if it has no sense, that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of its constituents.
>
> (Even if we think that we have done so.)
>
> Thus the reason why 'Socrates is identical' says nothing is that we have not given *any adjectival* meaning to the word 'identical'. For when it appears as a sign for identity, it symbolises in an entirely different way – the signifying relation is a different one – therefore the symbols also are entirely different in the two cases: the two symbols have only the sign in common, and that is an accident.

One idea that gets reiterated throughout this passage is stated particularly forcefully at 5.4732: 'We cannot give a sign the wrong sense'. That remark directly contradicts the substantial conception of nonsense that requires we can do just that. Only if we can give a sign the wrong sense does it make sense to talk of nonsense consisting of signs whose meanings clash. That we cannot do that comes across, too, in the idea that 'if a sign is *possible*, then it is also capable of signifying', that 'whatever is possible in logic in also permitted'. Thus, there is nothing both possible and yet impermissible; there are no combinations of signs that are logically prohibited. Hence, if some combination of signs says nothing, that will not be down to any illegitimacy on its part, but to our failure to date to give the signs a meaning. And that idea is reinforced later in the passage by way of a contrast between Wittgenstein's view and that of Frege. Where Frege says that 'any

legitimately constructed proposition must have a sense', Wittgenstein says instead that

any possible proposition is already legitimately constructed; if it then has no sense that

will not be because of any illegitimacy on its part, but simply because we have not yet

given some of its signs a meaning. And Wittgenstein adds that that is the case 'even if

we think that we have done so', even if the signs do get used with a meaning elsewhere.

So there is a repeated attack in this passage on the idea of illegitimate propositions, of

propositions whose senses are somehow logically excluded. Against such an idea,

Wittgenstein holds that there are no illegitimate combinations of signs – that any possible

combination of signs could be given a meaning. Hence, too, if any such construct lacks a

sense that will not be because, as Wittgenstein puts it, 'the symbol, in itself, would be

illegitimate', but merely that we have failed to give a meaning to the signs.

That rejection of a substantial conception of nonsense in favour of an austere view

gets illustrated twice by Wittgenstein by means of an analysis of the example 'Socrates is

identical'. So, Wittgenstein writes, the reason why that string of signs says or means

nothing is that 'there is no property called "identical",' or, again, that we have as yet 'not

given *any adjectival* meaning to the word "identical".' It is not that two meanings clash

here, that the meaning of the word 'identical' does not "fit" with the rest of the sentence.

Lest we think that, Wittgenstein adds, in the first instance of the example, that its

nonsensicality is due to the fact that 'we have failed to make an arbitrary determination':

we could have given the sign a meaning, but we have not. Instead, Wittgenstein proceeds

to point out, on both occasions, one way in which we could have given the sign a

meaning – a way which might seem natural to us, given the similarity of what might be

called the surface grammar of the string to a familiar pattern of ordinary language. So, in order to illustrate his point that if a sign is possible, it is also capable of signifying, Wittgenstein draws our attention to one way in which the signs might yet be seen to symbolise, one way of seeing a symbol in the sign. But the problem in each case is just that we have not given the sign a meaning – for instance along the lines of Wittgenstein's suggestion – and not that what we have is a somehow illegitimate symbol, or an impermissible combination of signs.

In the first case, then, Wittgenstein is, as Conant puts it, 'talking about a method of *symbolising*':[22] one way in which we might come to see a symbol in the sign is to take the word 'identical' here to refer to a property. But we have not given the sign such a meaning – there is as yet no property called 'identical' – and so assimilating the sentence to that kind of grammatical pattern, in which the word 'identical' would then function to pick out a property, will not give us anything that the sentence says, will not give the sentence a sense. Taking that route in trying to find some sense in the sentence will get us only so far then, but no further, at least for the time being. There are no obstacles in the way of giving the sign such a meaning, but we have not as yet availed ourselves of this option. And neither have we made any other such arbitrary determination which might give a sense to the whole. The point, then, is this: that the symbol in itself is not somehow illegitimate or impermissible, for we do not have symbols here yet at all; rather, we have failed to make 'an arbitrary determination', and one such determination which would give a sense to the whole is suggested by Wittgenstein – to make 'identical' the name of some property.

In the second case, we get much the same – a suggestion of one way of giving the signs a meaning based on the resemblance the string bears to what Conant calls 'a feature of the "external form" ... of certain sentences – a grammatical surface pattern – of ordinary language (a certain sort of configuration of signs)'.[23] But again, the reason the string is nonsense is just that so far we have failed to give the signs just such a meaning as that suggested, and not that that combination of symbols or signs is logically prohibited or flawed.

The sense in which we cannot make mistakes in logic, then, the sense in which language itself prevents every logical mistake, is this: that we cannot even frame in language an illogical thought – if we try to, we end up only with signs that have no meaning at all, through our failure to give them a meaning, or else which mean something else entirely, but not at any rate something that will satisfy our original desire to say something illogical. So logic, we might say, not only must look after itself, but does so.

That reading just presented is pretty much of a piece with that of James Conant. For Genia Schönbaumsfeld, however, such a reading is deeply unappetising, for it involves a degree of 'interpretative contortion' that she finds wholly implausible – not least because, for Schönbaumsfeld, there is a perfectly acceptable 'straight' reading of the remarks available, a reading that Conant misses, according to Schönbaumsfeld, because he misidentifies the target of the passage as a whole. Where for Conant the target of the passage is a conception of nonsense that he finds Frege at times committed to (and at

other times committed to rejecting), Schönbaumsfeld sees that view – 'a Carnap-type

conception of "substantial nonsense"' – as being 'the view that Wittgenstein is actually

endorsing'.[24] For Schönbaumsfeld, the target of the remarks is instead what she calls 'the

Frege-Russell conception of logic as a kind of "super-science".' Thus, Schönbaumsfeld

writes:

> Frege and Russell conceived of logic as a set of a priori general truths about
> logical entities – as laws, in other words, of a kind of super-physics. *This* is the
> notion that Wittgenstein is criticising. On Wittgenstein's new conception,
> language prevents every logical mistake, not because, as Russell thought, when
> we think in accordance with the laws of logic, we think correctly, but rather
> because the logical syntax of language *determines* what is correct, once the
> relevant meanings have been assigned to words. Hence, *pace* Russell, logic can't
> be justified by appeal to self-evidence, for the 'laws of logic' are a *precondition*
> for making sense in the first place. Logic therefore neither stands in need nor
> admits of further justification and the idea that we could so much as have a false
> or incorrect logic falls by the wayside. The logic of our language (logical syntax)
> is not a *theory* but a set of rules constitutive of what it is to *say* something. This
> disposes of Frege-Russell's mythological 'third realm' populated by logical
> entities whose antics make our logical propositions true or false: if a sign is
> possible, it is also capable of signifying. Consequently, we cannot make mistakes
> in logic. Naturally, this doesn't imply that we can't talk nonsense by producing
> meaningless strings like 'Socrates is identical'. But the reason why this is
> nonsensical is because an arbitrary determination has not been made – *we* have
> not given an adjectival meaning to the word 'identical' (although we could have
> done so). Once this determination has been made, however, the consequences
> that follow from it are *not* arbitrary, and hence there is such a thing as employing
> a sign *incorrectly*, i.e. contrary to the rules for its use (and of course the sign does
> not then symbolise, for a symbol just *is* a sign used according to the rules for its
> correct use).[25]

For Schönbaumsfeld, then, logical syntax is a set of rules which determine the correct use

of a sign. If we do not follow those rules, if we misuse the signs, then we end up with

signs which do not symbolise at all. Hence, when Wittgenstein says that the reason that

'Socrates is identical' says nothing is that we have not given an adjectival meaning to the

word 'identical', he means that, since we have not given it an adjectival meaning, using it

as if it were an adjective involves a violation of the rules for its correct use, which is as a

sign for identity between two things. The sense in which, on Schönbaumsfeld's reading, logic must – and does – look after itself, then, is that those rules for the correct use of signs themselves constitute what is correct, thus they cannot be mistaken, and that breaking those rules leaves us saying nothing at all.

Schönbaumsfeld's view of Tractarian nonsense is essentially the same as P.M.S. Hacker's view. Since I discuss Hacker's stance in Chapter Two, I do not wish to say very much about it here. But I do want to indicate where I think Schönbaumsfeld goes wrong in reading this passage. The first thing to note perhaps is that, while Schönbaumsfeld accuses Conant's reading of involving 'interpretative contortion', her reading requires some gymnastics of its own. In particular, a deal of contortion is necessary to square what Wittgenstein says about our having failed to make an arbitrary determination and that being the reason for the nonsensicality of 'Socrates is identical', with the idea that what is involved in that string is in fact a violation of logical syntax, when no mention of rules and their violation is made at all in the passage, and when the very idea of their being illegitimate combinations of signs – which Schönbaumsfeld's view entails – is given such short shrift throughout. And it becomes more than a little unclear just what the idea – central to the *Tractatus* 5.473s – that we cannot give a sign the wrong sense, is meant to be ruling out on Schönbaumsfeld's view – just what force it has exactly to say that. Moreover, Schönbaumsfeld attributes what she thinks of as Conant's misreading of the passage as a whole to his misidentifying the target of the passage – not 'a Carnap-type conception of "substantial nonsense"' at all, for this, Schönbaumsfeld writes, is in fact the view that 'Wittgenstein is *endorsing*',[26] but rather the 'Frege-Russell view of logic as a

kind of super-science'. But Schönbaumsfeld's claim about Conant's having misidentified

the target of the *Tractatus* 5.473s relies on that Frege-Russell view not equally being a (or

the) target of the passage on an austere reading of the 5.473s – and yet the austere reading

does give one good reason to abandon the Russellian position. In fact, on that kind of

reading of the *Tractatus* 5.473s, the passage presents as it were a two-pronged attack on

the Russell view: first, on the substantial view of nonsense that it gives rise to; second, by

rendering redundant the appeal Russell makes to self-evidence. If the austere view is

right, there just is no work for self-evidence to do. So I am not convinced that

Schönbaumsfeld's reading of the target of the remarks in question adds anything that

could not already be adequately explained on Conant's view. But it does, however, bring

with it an extra difficulty; namely, in reconciling the *Tractatus* 5.473s with what

Wittgenstein later on has to say about what he calls the 'correct method' in philosophy

(*Tractatus* 6.53), which, Wittgenstein writes, would be this:

> [T]o say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science – i.e.
> something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone
> else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had
> failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would
> not be satisfying to the other person – he would not have the feeling that we were
> teaching him philosophy – this method would be the only strictly correct one.

If, as for Schönbaumsfeld, the lesson of the *Tractatus* 5.473s is that metaphysical

nonsense arises for Wittgenstein out of the violation of the rules of logical syntax, out of

the misuse of signs, then further gymnastics will be required to reconcile that set of

remarks with this one. For it would seem that Wittgenstein ought then rather to have

written that we should point out to the would-be engager in metaphysics that he or she

had used certain signs in violation of the rules for their correct use and hence that they

fail to have the meaning that he or she intended them to have, and not that he or she had

simply failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his or her propositions.[27]

V

There is, then, a good deal of evidence for the austere view of nonsense having been

Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus* – from his reformulation of Frege's context-

principle and its application through the sign/symbol distinction, to his apparent

statement of such a view in the 5.473s and the reinforcing of that view made in the

'correct method in philosophy' that Wittgenstein puts forward in *Tractatus* 6.53. I want

to turn now to some of the evidence in favour of ascribing such a view of nonsense to

Wittgenstein in his later work also. There, that view undergoes certain changes, tied to

changes in Wittgenstein's conception of language – most obviously, and as Lars

Hertzberg points out,[28] Wittgenstein's contextualism is broadened out so that the stricture

placed upon our asking for the meaning of a word in isolation is extended also to our

asking for the meaning of a sentence in isolation from some context of use. Nevertheless,

despite such changes, the core rejection of a 'positive' or substantial account of nonsense

remains constant: for the later Wittgenstein as for the earlier, as Diamond puts it,

'*Anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has not

been made; it is not nonsense as a logical result of determinations that *have* been made'.[29]

That view comes across most obviously in three examples quoted by Diamond.[30]

So, for instance, in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes that 'When a

sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless' (§500). That

remark is itself a reformulation of a longer passage from *Philosophical Grammar* (also

quoted by Diamond), which runs as follows:

> How strange that one should be able to say that such and such a state of affairs is
> inconceivable! If we regard thought as essentially an accompaniment going with
> an expression, the words in the statement that specify the inconceivable state of
> affairs must be unaccompanied. So what sort of sense is it to have? Unless it
> says these words are senseless. But it isn't as it were their sense that is senseless;
> they are excluded from our language like some arbitrary noise, and the reason for
> their *explicit* exclusion can only be that *we are tempted* to confuse them with a
> sentence of our language. (*PG* p.130)

Here, Wittgenstein makes essentially the same point as in the remark (just quoted) from

the *Investigations* and illustrates it by way of the idea of an inconceivable state of affairs.

When we call a state of affairs inconceivable, we do not at first conceive of that state of

affairs and then call it inconceivable (except, for instance, for rhetorical purposes when

making, say, a moral point, as with the sentence: 'it is inconceivable that people do

nothing about global warming') since the one thing that state of affairs would then *not* be

would be inconceivable. So it cannot be that the sentence has a sense which is

inconceivable. And the same goes more generally, when we call a sentence nonsense or

senseless, we do not first think of its sense and then call that senseless. And when we call

the sentence senseless – and so as it were exclude it from the language – we are not then

excluding a certain combination of (to fall back on a piece of Tractarian jargon) symbols.

Rather that which is excluded is no different from an arbitrary noise except in that, say

because it employs only words which do have a meaning in the English language, we are

tempted to take it for sense and so are liable to be confused by it. So it is not, then,

because the words do not fit together to give a sense to the sentence that it is nonsense,

but because like an arbitrary noise, we have failed to give the words a meaning, and yet

unlike an arbitrary noise, that fact is not always so clear to us.

Diamond's third quotation is this:

> Though it is nonsense to say 'I feel his pain', this is different from inserting into
> an English sentence a meaningless word, say 'abracadabra' ... and from saying a
> string of nonsense words. Every word in this sentence is English, and we shall be
> inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense
> word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if
> we discard from our language 'I feel Smith's toothache' that is quite different.
> The second seems nonsense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about
> the nature of things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way
> that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain.
> The task then will be to show that there is in fact no difference between these two
> cases of nonsense, though there is a psychological distinction in that we are
> inclined to say the one and be puzzled by it and not the other. We constantly
> hover between regarding it as sense and nonsense, and hence the trouble arises.[31]

Wittgenstein begins by saying that, though the utterance in question – 'I feel his pain' – is

nonsense, 'this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word'.

Since, on the austere view, all nonsense is sheer lack of sense, resulting from our failure

to give to the words a meaning, what is the difference Wittgenstein signals here? The

difference is this: that 'we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning', where

we would not be so inclined were it composed not of familiar words of English, but of

words – like 'abracadabra', say, or 'zlllg' – which we know to be meaningless. The

temptation is to think that 'I feel his pain' is nonsense for a deeper reason than its merely

lacking a sense, that the nonsensicality of this particular string reflects some important

fact about the world. So the temptation is to think that the string does make a kind of

sense – that we do understand what it says – but that that sense is rendered nonsense by

the way the world is; that 'pains and personality' just don't go together in that way.

Against that temptation, then, the task as Wittgenstein characterises it is to show that the

difference here is one of psychology. The string lacks a meaning in just the way sheer

gibberish does – no meaning has been given to the words involved. The difference

between the two cases lies, as Wittgenstein puts it elsewhere, 'in the jingle of the words'

(*AWL* p.64).

Across these three remarks, then, and as in the *Tractatus*, we find a repeated

rejection of the idea that nonsense-sentences have illegitimate or impermissible senses, or

consist of anything more than words to which we have failed to assign a meaning. What

they suggest, taken together, is that Wittgenstein's commitment to an austere view of

nonsense remained constant throughout his later work. And that idea is reinforced, I

think, by Wittgenstein's many meta-philosophical remarks too;[32] the idea, opposed to the

austere view, that Wittgenstein is concerned to put forward his own theory of sense,

against which certain sentences, such as 'I feel his pain', which combine only English

words, fail to measure up, is markedly at odds with Wittgenstein's insistence that he is

not putting forward philosophical doctrines or theses. If a 'substantial' reading of

Wittgenstein's remarks on nonsense – or any reading that sees nonsense as the outcome

of violating certain bounds on sense set by Wittgenstein – were correct, we would have to

say that Wittgenstein was quite radically mistaken about the kind of enterprise he was

engaged in, that he spectacularly failed to meet his own demands here.

VI

As well as offering an account of the austere view and some reasons for thinking that

view favourable to a substantial conception of nonsense, I hope to have offered in the

above enough evidence to suggest that the austere view is at least a plausible account of

Wittgenstein's own view of what nonsense might be throughout his philosophical work. In the following chapters, I shall want to address a number of criticisms of that view and the ascription of it to Wittgenstein and, in so doing, go some way to establishing that it is the correct view – both of Wittgenstein and of nonsense. Before turning to those criticisms, however, I want very briefly to say in concluding something about the consequences of that view, and in particular of the attribution of it to Wittgenstein.

One such consequence, as I suggested above, is in the overall shape we find in Wittgenstein's work, the kind of solution to the problems of philosophy that we see him as attempting to make. That is, if we see Wittgenstein's notion of nonsense not as the outcome of some theory or other of sense put forward by Wittgenstein, in either the *Tractatus* or the *Investigations*, then we will not be obliged to view Wittgenstein's criticisms of traditional philosophy as springing from his own philosophical theories: the way will be open to us to see his work very differently from that, and, as he suggests, as offering instead some kind of therapy for the need to philosophise. Here, however, I want to turn to two potentially negative consequences of that view, which have this much in common: that both focus on the use of the term 'nonsense' as a term of philosophical criticism.

The first of these might be captured in the following question: if nonsense is only ever plain, or 'mere', nonsense, as it is on the austere view, how can it do the kinds of things Wittgenstein wants it to be able to do? That is, if nonsense consists only of words lacking any meaning at all, how can it play a role, as Wittgenstein wants it to, in valid

arguments, for instance of the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*, and why should it matter, as it clearly does, what Wittgenstein wrote in the *Tractatus* if, logically, what he wrote is no different from, say, 'piggly wiggle tiggle'? It would seem, so the suggestion goes, that if nonsense really were for Wittgenstein what the austere view says it is, then there could be no reason why Wittgenstein chose the forms of expression he did choose in the *Tractatus*, nor could there be any explanation of how nonsense functions within valid arguments as it seems to do in the *Investigations*. So that is one kind of negative consequence that might get drawn from the austere view and its attribution to Wittgenstein.

Let me begin with the point about the *Tractatus*: the suggestion that it would not matter, were the austere view correct, what Wittgenstein actually wrote there. That criticism makes two errors. First, there is an error about what a Resolute reading[33] must be saying. For the criticism suggests that all of the propositions of the *Tractatus* must be taken to be nonsense, and that is not what is implied at *Tractatus* 6.54 unless we also take it that all the propositions of the *Tractatus* are intended to function as elucidations; nor must a Resolute reading claim that, although it might. Second, and more importantly, such an objection would overlook the simple fact that, though all nonsense is logically equivalent, nonsense-sentences can nevertheless have all manner of other sorts of differences on the austere view – and that those myriad differences may themselves make a great deal of difference to the success one has if what one is trying to capture is not the content of a thought but rather an illusion on someone's part of making sense at all.[34] So it is not the case that what Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus* becomes unimportant

given an austere view of nonsense, though the feeling that it might may arise from the

rhetorical stress placed upon nonsense-sentences being no more than 'gibberish' by

proponents of that view.

There are other, related objections in the vicinity of this. For instance, one might

ask whether it is plausible to hold that the *Tractatus* is really plain – austerely conceived

– nonsense, given that the sentences within it do seem to make good sense, and given too

that one seems to be able to reason between them. A species of that objection is

contained in Meredith Williams' claim[35] that some theory of sense just *must* be assumed

in calling the sentences of the *Tractatus* nonsense, given the appearance they have of

making good sense. One reply might simply be that unless they did have the appearance

of making good sense, unless we were attracted to them, or prone to take them for sense,

there would be no need to debunk them in the way that the *Tractatus* aims to. The

appearance of sense, however, does not guarantee that they do make sense; nor does it

require that a theory of sense be in place in order to show them to be nonsensical.

Furthermore, that we can apparently reason between nonsense-sentences does nothing to

show that they do make sense, though it may help to compound the illusion that they do.

To take Adrian Moore's example: it seems to follow from the sentence 'All borogroves

are mimsy', that 'Nothing non-mimsy is a borogrove'.[36] But if it turns out that no

meaning attaches to either 'borogrove' or 'mimsy' then this reasoning might seem itself

to have been merely a pretence. The related objection – put forward by, for instance,

Marie McGinn – that it is unclear how austerely-conceived nonsense could elucidate any

kind of point at all, might be thought to rest on construing the point of the *Tractatus* to be

something more substantial than the uncovering of nonsense as such, and also on not

seeing the potential for this kind of operation upon and between nonsense-sentences.[37]

Not withstanding those responses, however, there is still a question-mark hanging

over the later Wittgenstein's use of the word 'nonsense', given the role nonsense plays in

the *Investigations*.   Hans-Johann Glock makes the point this way: 'Monism', Glock

writes, that is, the view that there is only one logical kind of nonsense, 'is incompatible

with *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, including Wittgenstein's own'.[38]   That is, I think,

a good objection, and it surely tells us something about Wittgenstein's use of the word

'nonsense', but it does not do quite what Glock wants it to do.   Glock wants it to be an

objection about the kind of thing that nonsense could be: whether something can be

nonsense only by way of lacking any meaning at all, or whether something can be

nonsense, say, because the signs for certain expressions are there being misused, used in

violation of the rules for their correct use, and so end up expressing nothing.   So the

suggestion Glock makes is that if nonsense were as the austere view says, we could make

no sense of the idea that we uncover bits of latent nonsense (i.e. come to see them as

patent nonsense) by pursuing a *reductio* of them (deriving a piece of patent nonsense

from them).   We could only do that if the nonsense-sentences did involve (misuses of)

specifiable and determinate (signs for certain) expressions.   But the problem encountered

in employing some piece of nonsense within the structure of a *reductio ad absurdum* is

surely not *what kind* of nonsense it is, but *that it is* nonsense at all; in other words, the

problem is that it lacks a truth-value, and that applies whether we think that it is nonsense

because it lacks a meaning, or because it has the wrong kind of meaning, or for any other

any other reason.[39] What that suggests is not that when Wittgenstein does offer *reductio*

arguments and talks in relation to them of nonsense, he must there mean substantial

nonsense, but rather that his use of the term is far more colloquial in that instance – that it

is the ordinary English use of the word to mean 'absurd' or 'plain false' that is being

invoked.

The second consequence of an austere view that I want to consider here is due to

Warren Goldfarb. Goldfarb asks, in relation to a Resolute program for reading the

Tractatus, 'whether there is already irresoluteness, chickening out, in Wittgenstein's use

of "nonsense" as a term of criticism'.[40] Goldfarb continues:

> The lesson is that 'nonsense' cannot really be a general term of criticism. As a
> general term of criticism, it would have to be legitimised by a theory of language,
> and Wittgenstein is insistent that there is no such thing ('Logic must look after
> itself'). ... The way out of this morass has already been canvassed.
> Wittgenstein's talk of nonsense is just shorthand for a process of coming to see
> how the words fall apart when worked out from the inside. What Wittgenstein is
> urging is a case-by-case approach. The general rubric is nothing but synoptic for
> what emerges in each case.

This objection, I agree with Goldfarb, is 'a good one'.[41] I take it that the lesson Goldfarb

draws here is one genuine consequence of adopting an austere view, and that at times the

use of that term 'nonsense' by Resolute readers and by Wittgenstein himself[42] appears to

contravene this in appearing to present itself as a general term of criticism. But no

utterance is irredeemably nonsense, and no area of discourse can simply and generally be

labelled 'nonsense'. Thus, when Wittgenstein declares, in the penultimate remark of the

Tractatus, that his propositions are nonsense, that remark too will need to be treated with

caution. As a term of criticism, then, 'nonsense' is limited to a case-by-case application;

there will be no telling in advance of our attempts to find a sense in some remark whether it is nonsense or not.[43]

One way in which Goldfarb's objection might be developed, however, and in such a way as to link it to the first objection noted above, is this: that given what we have said nonsense is for Wittgenstein, it would seem that the discovery that the (pseudo-) propositions of the *Tractatus* collapse into meaninglessness could not have the kind of consequences for us that it might be thought that Wittgenstein intended it to have, or indeed that would make the process of coming to realise that they are merely nonsense a worthwhile endeavour. That is, if Goldfarb is right, and he surely is, then our coming to the conclusion that these propositions fail to make sense should have no consequences whatsoever for the nonsensicality or otherwise of any other proposition or set of propositions that we might wish to come out with. And while that may accord with the piecemeal approach advocated in *Tractatus* 6.53 – that we should wait for someone else to say something metaphysical, and then demonstrate to them that they have failed to give certain signs in their propositions a meaning – it does not sit at all well with the labelling there of an entire region (or regions) of discourse – metaphysics, everything that is not a proposition of natural science – as nonsense. At best, what can be said here is that this realisation that our attempts to put together words in such a way as to make sense sometimes fall short of that aim, though it will not entail the nonsensicality of any other bit of discourse, may yet lead us to question whether there was anything coherent in the desire that led us to think there was something we needed to say there. And, it might be

said that even in these closing remarks of the *Tractatus* there is still material that needs to

be overcome in some sense.

In sum, then, in this chapter, I have outlined the austere view of nonsense and

some of the evidence for that view being Wittgenstein's view throughout his life, and I

have drawn a couple of the consequences of that view. My defence of an austere view

here has largely been set against a 'substantial' view of nonsense; I want to turn now , in

the following chapter, to an alternative account of nonsense put forward by P.M.S.

Hacker, and with it, to two views of what logical syntax in the *Tractatus* might be.

Notes to Chapter One

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[1] This point has been used to criticise Resolute readings as much as their Standard alternatives: thus, some have wondered whether austerely-conceived nonsense could present anything sufficiently ladder-like for there to be any point to reading (or writing) a book consisting solely of it. I discuss this kind of objection briefly towards the end of this chapter.

[2] Cora Diamond, 'Throwing Away the Ladder: How to Read the *Tractatus*', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.179-204 (p.179).

[3] 'Falling apart' is the metaphor used by Warren Goldfarb in his 'Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 22 (1997), 57-73 (p.71).

[4] Cora Diamond, 'Frege and Nonsense' and 'What Nonsense Might Be', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.73-93 & pp.95-114. What I am here calling (after Conant's term) the 'austere' view of nonsense, or 'austerity', Diamond calls (in 'What Nonsense Might Be') the 'Frege-Wittgenstein' view. What Diamond terms the 'natural' view, Conant calls the 'substantial' conception. See, for instance, James Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.13-61.

[5] I have simply followed Diamond in her choice of examples. This particular example, however, might be thought to be a bad one since, as Diamond notes, it would for Frege be false and not nonsense. (This is because, for Frege, a concept must yield the value True or False for every object in the domain: there can be no as it were truth-value 'gaps'.) Diamond invites anyone who thinks that this is simply a bad example of category-clash nonsense, but that such nonsense is possible, to substitute their own example. Someone who, however, takes the view that all supposed instances of such are in fact false, not nonsense, takes a line distinct from either of the two views discussed by Diamond. (See Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.96.) I discuss this third point of view – which might be called 'falsidical' – below, Section *III*, pp.44-47.

[6] What exactly substantial nonsense is, how it should be described, is a question that gains importance in comparison with P.M.S. Hacker's view of Tractarian nonsense, as considered in Chapter Two below. My initial characterisation here is quite loose, reflecting a lack of specificity in accounts of the substantial not only on behalf of Resolute readers such as James Conant, but also on behalf of critics of that (Resolute) view. So, for instance, although the substantial view is often (perhaps most often) described as one in which some nonsense consists only of meaningful words, but put together in such a way as to express a logically flawed, or illegitimate, sense, one way (perhaps the most charitable way) of interpreting Genia Schönbaumsfeld's remark below (this chapter, p.58 and note 26) is to read her as adopting a weaker notion of the substantial (as, for instance, with Hans-Johann Glock's use of the term 'combinatorial nonsense' – see below, Chapter Three, p.103 and note 5). Here are two descriptions of substantial nonsense from the same paper by James Conant: (a) 'Substantial nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way – it expresses a logically incoherent thought'; (b) 'a proposition composed of signs that symbolise, but which has a logically flawed syntax due to a clash in the logical category of its symbols' (James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.374-462 (p.380 and p.400)). Hacker, as we shall see, might agree that some nonsense is composed of intelligible ingredients combined in an illegitimate way, but would vehemently deny that it expresses as a result a logically incoherent thought. See below, Chapter Two, Section *III*, pp.78-83.

[7] It can, after all, be given a sense (see below, pp.42-44). One instance of how it might be is given by Lars Hertzberg in his 'The Sense is Where You Find It', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.90-103 (pp.92-93). Hertzberg's paper is also available (with a passage omitted from the published version) at:
http://www.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Staff/lhertzbe/The_Sense_Is_Where_You_Find_It.doc [Accessed: 02.03.2005].

[8] I do not, however, want to imply here (as might seem to be implied) that sentences, as opposed to mere words, can or do have a sense acontextually, apart from some context of use. See Hertzberg, 'The Sense Is Where You Find It', p.93.

[9] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', pp.102-103.

[10] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.41, note 45.

[11] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.103.

[12] W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), p.229.

[13] My strong and weak versions of falsidical correspond approximately to L. Goddard's positions (b) and (c), to R.J. Haack's *Positions* (*B1*) and (*B2*), and to the positions occupied (respectively) by R. Routley's soft and hard 'no-typers'. Although some (e.g. Routley) have attributed to Quine on the basis of the passage quoted above (what I am calling) the strong falsidical view, I follow Haack in thinking this presumptuous. Note also that while I talk of strong and weak versions of the falsidical view, for Haack, at least, only the strong position – (*B1*) – counts as properly falsidical. See: L. Goddard, 'Nonsignificance', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 48(1), May 1970, 10-16; R.J. Haack, 'No Need for Nonsense', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 49(1), May 1971, 71-77; R. Routley, 'The Need for Nonsense', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 47(3), December 1969, 367-384. The falsidical position gets outlined first – so far as I know – by A.N. Prior in his article, 'Entities', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 32(3), December 1954, 159-168.

[14] Quoted below, p.60.

[15] Diamond herself writes that this view together with the austere view are the 'only serious contenders' for the title 'Most Plausible View of Nonsense', with the substantial view coming, as Diamond puts it, 'a poor third'. Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.96.

[16] W.V.O. Quine, *From A Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd Edition, Revised (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.150.

[17] Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic: A logico-mathematical enquiry into the concept of number*, trans. J.L. Austin, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.x.

[18] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.97.

[19] I return to the question of Wittgenstein's contextualism and how it bears on his view of what nonsense might be below, in Chapter Three, in response to Hans-Johann Glock's arguments about this issue.

[20] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.25.

[21] Not, let me emphasise here, that Hacker is forwarding a substantial of nonsense (though see above, note 6, for a qualification based on a degree of vagueness surrounding the notion of the 'substantial'). Hacker certainly explicitly rejects some key elements of the substantial view as typically described, though it may nevertheless be the case that elsewhere, in unguarded moments, he slips into what amounts to a substantial view. See below, Chapter Two.

[22] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.41, note 45.

[23] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.41, note 45. See also James Conant, 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.374-462 (pp.451-452, note 109).

[24] Genia Schönbaumsfeld, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', unpublished manuscript presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 11.09.2005, p.13.

[25] Schönbaumsfeld, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', pp.13-14.

[26] A somewhat surprising claim, since it seems to me that Hacker's view, which Schönbaumsfeld appears to share, gains what plausibility it has only insofar as it does represent, as Hacker says it does, a genuine possibility between the substantial and the austere views (i.e. and is not simply conflated with the substantial view). I want to allow at least the possibility that Hacker might have such a genuine third position, even if at times he appears to lapse into expressing a substantial view (as he on occasion seems to for instance in an interview with Edward Kanterian: see P.M.S. Hacker, 'An Interview with Edward Kanterian' (November-December 2001). Available at: http://www.information-philosophie.de/philosophie/kanterian.html [Accessed: 09.08.2004]).

[27] Diamond makes much the same point against Hacker's account of Tractarian nonsense in her 'Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.55; No.218 (January, 2005), 78-89 (p.89).

[28] In his paper 'The Sense is Where You Find It', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.90-103 (pp.92-93).

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[29] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.106.

[30] See Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', pp.106-107.

[31] Ludwig Wittgenstein (quoted in Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', pp.106-107), from unpublished notes taken by Margaret Macdonald on a lecture in 1935. Other remarks I might have quoted here include, for instance, *PG*, pp.126-7 (quoted above, Introduction, p.33, note 3), or the following remark from *AWL*, p.64:

> Most of us think that there is nonsense which makes sense and nonsense which does not – that it is nonsense in a different way to say 'This is green and yellow at the same time' from saying 'Ab sur ah'. But these are nonsense in the same sense, the only difference being in the jingle of the words.

[32] It might be said that there is a circularity here, since in the introduction to this chapter I suggested that what view of nonsense we ascribe to Wittgenstein will itself shape our conception of the kind of solution to the problems of philosophy he is trying to effect. This, I think, is no criticism however – the circularity is not vicious – since interpretation just is circular in this way.

[33] One, recall, which rejects the ascription to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* of (i) a theory of sense, such that certain sentences are nonsensical because they do not measure up against whatever standard that theory lays down; and (ii) a notion of 'ineffable insight' which the nonsense-sentences of the *Tractatus* attempt to convey, as chickening out, as lacking the courage to follow through on the demands the *Tractatus* makes on its readers. See Introduction, above, pp.28-29.

[34] Cf. Conant, 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors', in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp.248-331.

[35] Discussed above, Introduction, pp.30-31.

[36] Moore, *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.208.

[37] McGinn's question is this: '[I]f the ladder by which we climb from unselfconscious nonsense to self-conscious sense turns out to be an illusion, how can we have got anywhere by climbing it? McGinn, 'Between Metaphysics and Nonsense: Elucidation and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (1999), 491-513 (p.496).Daniel Hutto asks a similar question. See Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read, 'An *Elucidatory* Interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: A Critique of Daniel D. Hutto's and Marie McGinn's Reading of *Tractatus* 6.54', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.14(1), 1-29 (p.6).

[38] Hans-Johann Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the* Philosophical Investigations, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.221-245 (p.222).

[39] Glock surely recognises this too, for he reserves for discussion in the final section of his paper the following question: 'how can latent nonsense feature in a *reductio*, given that it is incapable of being either true or false?' Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.223.

[40] Goldfarb, 'Metaphysics and Nonsense', p.70.

[41] Goldfarb, 'Metaphysics and Nonsense', p.71.

[42] I am thinking here for instance of Wittgenstein's provocative (and uncharacteristically un-tentative) use of the term in the passage from *On Certainty* (§10) quoted above, in which the exclamation 'Nonsense!' *precedes* any account of the context of the original remark.

[43] This realisation may serve to undermine, too, the ready sense of contrast one might think exists between a Tractarian approach to the problems of philosophy, and the approach of the *Investigations*, as suggested for instance by §133 – between, as Diamond puts it, an 'all-at-once demonstration' and a 'problem-by-problem' approach. See Cora Diamond, 'Criss-Cross Philosophy', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the* Philosophical Investigations, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.201-220 (pp.201-206).

Chapter Two

Nonsense and Logical Syntax in the *Tractatus*

I

The previous chapter outlined, and made the beginnings of a case for, an austere view of

nonsense, and presented some of the evidence for finding such a view in Wittgenstein's

work. In this chapter, I shall want to focus on two things: first, on an alternative account

of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, one which purports as it were to cut between the austere and

the substantial views; second, on two different accounts of logical syntax in the

Tractatus. The first of those two accounts is James Conant's. Conant holds that, on the

Tractatus conception of logical syntax, there is no room for the idea that we might

combine signs or symbols in ways that contravene the rules of logical syntax.[1] The

second conception of Tractarian logical syntax, and the alternative account of nonsense

there, are both due to P.M.S. Hacker.[2] Although Hacker is often seen as attributing to

Wittgenstein (early and later) a substantial conception of nonsense, Hacker is himself

adamant in his rejection of that view. Instead, and in opposition to Conant's view,

Hacker holds that there is such a thing as using signs in ways that violate the rules of

logical syntax, and that nonsense is the outcome of misusing signs in such ways. Such

violations do not, however, for Hacker, leave us with a case of substantial nonsense, but

with strings of signs which, in that context and in Hacker's words, '*do not stand for their*

customary meanings'; they do not mean there what they usually do.[3] I shall want to

outline Hacker's view in more detail below, and then subject it to some criticisms. In

doing so, I shall rehearse and build upon some objections to Hacker's view made by Cora

Diamond.[4] Before turning to Hacker's view, however, I shall need first to give a

summary of Conant's account of Tractarian logical syntax, against which Hacker's view

is set out.

II

Conant outlines his account in opposition to a view of Wittgenstein that Conant thinks is

unduly indebted to Carnap.[5] For Conant, 'most commentators'[6] have attributed to the

Tractatus a conception of logical syntax that is largely 'Carnapian', and that bears little

resemblance to the view that Wittgenstein himself actually held there.[7] That Carnapian

conception is one in which certain combinations of signs or symbols are ruled out,

excluded, by the principles of logical syntax; logical syntax provides us with a set of rules

for combining expressions such that these combinations are prohibited – they violate the

principles of logical syntax. On that kind of conception, Conant thinks, what we end up

with is a case of '*fully determinate* nonsense': a sentence whose sense, that is, is logically

flawed, and flawed, moreover, in a '*determinately specifiable respect*'.[8] Such a

conception of logical syntax and its violation, then, for Conant, yields a substantial

conception of nonsense: one in which some nonsense-sentences combine only meaningful words, but in ways that are logically improper. Hence, the sense they do make is as it were outlawed, as logically defective, despite our being able on that account in some sense to grasp it in thought and frame it (albeit improperly) in language.

Conant then wants to contrast that account of Tractarian logical syntax with his own account. For Conant, far from being concerned to prohibit certain combinations of signs or symbols, logical syntax in the *Tractatus* is not a combinatorial theory at all; Tractarian logical syntax, Conant writes, 'is concerned neither with the proscription of combinations of signs nor with the proscription of combinations of symbols'.[9] It is not concerned to proscribe combinations of signs, Conant writes, because 'it does not treat of (mere) signs'. The sign is simply what can be perceived of a symbol (*Tractatus* 3.32): the mark on paper, or noise. Whatever Tractarian logical syntax is concerned with, it is not concerned with signs merely *as* signs. Instead, Tractarian logical syntax 'treats of symbols'; that which, as Conant puts it, 'only has life in the context of a significant proposition'. But, Conant continues, logical syntax in the *Tractatus* is not concerned to *proscribe* combinations of symbols, for here, according to Wittgenstein, there just is nothing that it could sensefully proscribe; there are no illegitimate, or logically flawed, combinations of symbols since, as Wittgenstein writes (at *Tractatus* 5.4733), 'any possible proposition is legitimately constructed'.

So Conant denies that Tractarian logical syntax is concerned to proscribe combinations of signs, on the grounds that it doesn't concern itself with mere signs at all,

and he denies that it is concerned to proscribe combinations of symbols on the grounds

that there is nothing there for it to proscribe. Instead, for Conant, Tractarian logical

syntax treats of the ways that signs symbolise, of their methods of symbolising,[10] and, far

from seeking to demarcate 'legitimate from illegitimate sequences of signs or symbols', it

functions rather as, in Conant's words, 'a *tool* of elucidation': that is, logical syntax

'allows us to recognise the logical contributions of the constituent parts of a *Satz* [a

propositional symbol], and the absence of such a contribution on the part of the

constituents of a *Scheinsatz* [a pseudo-proposition]'.[11] Logical syntax, then, does not in

the *Tractatus* function to exclude combinations of signs or symbols that are not excluded

by the (on that view, logically inadequate) rules of ordinary language grammar; instead, it

serves as it were to lay bare to view the logical structure already present in the ordinary

sentences of everyday language (or, where there is no such structure, through our failure

to give the signs a meaning, to lay that fact bare to view instead).

That view of Tractarian logical syntax is motivated by the following remarks, in

which Wittgenstein first draws our attention to certain features of ordinary language, and

then makes an appeal to a sign-language governed by or obeying logical syntax as a

means of avoiding the errors those features may lead us into. Here is what Wittgenstein

writes:

> 3.323   In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same
> word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different
> symbols – or that two words that have different modes of signification are
> employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way.
>   Thus the word 'is' figures as a copula, as a sign for identity, and as
> an expression for existence; 'exist' figures as an intransitive verb like 'go',
> and 'identical' as an adjective; we speak of *something*, but also of
> *something's* happening.

(In the proposition, 'Green is green' – where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective – these words do not merely have different meanings: they are *different symbols.*)

3.324   In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them).

3.325   In order to avoid such errors we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammar – by logical syntax.

(The conceptual notation of Frege and Russell is such a language, though, it is true, it fails to exclude all mistakes.)

The kind of errors at stake here are clearly not those imagined by a substantial conception of nonsense. What is at issue is not a category of nonsense-sentences well-formed by the lights of ordinary grammar, but ill-formed by those of a truly logical grammar. Rather, as Conant emphasises, what is excluded when one adopts a sign-language governed by logical grammar are simply two kinds of equivocation that occur in the sentences of everyday language and that serve to obscure from view the logical structure present in those sentences. The 'most fundamental confusions' are produced not by inadvertently using expressions contrary to the rules for their correct use, but simply by two misleading features of our everyday use of signs: that we sometimes use one sign for two different symbols, or employ two very different symbols in ways that make them appear similar. What is involved here, then, is, as Conant puts it, simply 'cross-category equivocation'.[12]

What a sign-language governed by logical syntax can do for us, then, is not make up for logical inadequacies present in ordinary grammar, but exclude ambiguities present in our use of signs and that may serve to confuse us, by making our use of signs instead track logical differences. In a logical syntax, the use of one sign for two different symbols will presumably be disallowed, or at any rate will not occur, and so the

ambiguities which obscured our view will not arise. The idea that logical syntax is not

required to correct certain deficiencies present in ordinary grammar also sits well with

another remark of Wittgenstein's that otherwise is hard to square with the appeal to

logical syntax. Thus, at *Tractatus* 5.5563, Wittgenstein writes, '[i]n fact, all the

propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order'.

Needless to say, but that remark does not sit at all well with a conception of Tractarian

logical syntax as a corrective to ordinary grammar, and does square with one in which

logical syntax simply helps us to get clear on, makes perspicuous, the structure already

present in the propositions of our everyday language. And, as Conant notes, his

interpretation is reinforced too by Wittgenstein's exchange with C.K. Ogden on the best

way in which to translate *Tractatus* 4.112. Rather than philosophy resulting in 'the

clarification of propositions' (as D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness have it), Wittgenstein

suggests instead (and after several exchanges on the subject) the following: 'the

propositions *now have become clear* that they ARE clear'.[13] The point which, Conant

writes, 'the young Wittgenstein's horrendous English seeks to bring out' is this:

> [T]he transition from unclarity to clarity ... that is at issue here is not one that is
> effected through a transformation in the logical character of the *propositions* of
> ordinary language, but rather through a transformation in the view that *we*
> command of their logical character. What is cloudy and indistinct – and is
> rendered transparent with the assistance of a logical syntax – is our view of the
> logical structure that is present in the propositions all along.[14]

Though Ogden ignores Wittgenstein's suggestion, it nevertheless makes clear just what

the appeal to logical syntax is meant to achieve for us, and so too the nature of the error it

is intended to remedy: one of equivocation or ambiguity.

III

For Conant, then, there is no such thing, on the *Tractatus* conception, as a violation of

logical syntax.   Instead, in a sign-language that is governed by logical syntax, the

difference between the signs will track more closely and clearly logical differences

among symbols than is the case in ordinary language, thereby making clearer what

structure our everyday propositions have, or, if they lack a structure, making clear that

they do lack one, that they have at most the appearance of such a structure. I want to turn

now to Hacker's alternative conception of Tractarian logical syntax and, with it, his

alternative account of what nonsense is there too. Then I shall want to consider Hacker's

objections to Conant's view, and develop and build upon Diamond's response to those

criticisms. I shall start with Hacker on nonsense.

Hacker, as I noted above, is often accused of ascribing to Wittgenstein a

substantial view of nonsense, of attributing to Wittgenstein the view that some nonsense-

sentences, such as 'A is an object', say, are nonsense because the meanings of the

expressions contained therein cannot be combined in such a way, because the

combination has a sense that is logically flawed. That conception, however, is one that

Hacker explicitly and forcefully disavows. Instead, Hacker writes, 'A is an object', like

'A is a frabble', is simply nonsense, and he writes that the two are nonsense, moreover,

'in exactly the same sense'.[15] Furthermore, Hacker adds, 'there are no different *senses* of

the word "nonsense". Nor are there different *kinds* of nonsense – nonsense no more

comes in kinds than it comes in degrees'.[16] Nonsense, then, for Hacker as on the austere

view, just is nonsense, and there are no two ways about it.

Nevertheless, Hacker *does* claim that 'A is an object' and other Tractarian

pseudo-propositions differ from 'A is a frabble', and he claims that they do so in four

different ways: (1) 'they involve the use of expressions which do indeed have a use in our

language'; (2) 'they involve *misuses* of these expressions, *incorrect* uses – uses which do

not accord with the rules of logical syntax or grammar'; (3) 'they are ... attempts to state

necessary truths which are not tautologies'; and (4) 'they are attempts to say what can

only be shown'.[17] For Hacker, then, though the outcome is in each case the same (i.e.

plain, unadorned nonsense), what that nonsense arises from – what misuse of which

expressions, what violation of which rules (and in the service of an attempt to state what

ineffable content) – may in each case differ. Thus, while Hacker 'adamantly repudiate[s]

any conception of nonsense understood as a sequence of words that expresses a

proposition that lacks a sense'[18] and, furthermore, 'emphatically reject[s]' the idea that

'the illegitimacy of the sentential combination [should be attributed] to the fact that the

meanings of the expressions cannot be so combined',[19] Hacker nonetheless does hold

'that philosophical nonsense results from the illicit combination of meaningful words'.[20]

Hence, 'the correct point', as Hacker sees it, at which to locate the disagreement between

his view and an austere view is not over whether or not a nonsense-sentence such as, say,

'Caesar is a prime number' presents a sense which is nonsense – since on that point

Hacker would agree with the follower of the austere view in thinking the idea absurd –

but it is rather whether or not, as Hacker puts it, 'the constituent words of [for instance]

"Julius Caesar is a prime number" are meaningless'.[21]

For Hacker, the constituent words themselves are very much meaningful, in this sense: they have a use in the language. But here, the constituent words are being misused, put to an incorrect use, and what that misuse consists of, Hacker writes, is their being used in ways that 'do not accord with the rules of logical syntax or grammar'.[22] Instead of that producing a sense-that-is-nonsense, however, or describing an impossible-possibility, what violating the laws of logical syntax results in, for Hacker, is merely plain nonsense:

> [T]he rules of logical syntax are constitutive rules. Failure to follow them does not result in a form of words that describes a logical impossibility, for logical impossibilities are expressed by logical contradictions – which *describe* nothing since they are senseless. ... [F]ailure to comply with the rules of logical syntax does not result in a form of words that describes a logical or metaphysical necessity either – for the only expressible necessities are logical necessities, which are expressed by tautologies that describe nothing since they are senseless. ... Failure to comply with the rules of logical syntax results in nonsense.[23]

Since the rules of logical syntax are constitutive of what it is to make sense, violating those rules results not in an impermissible sense, but no sense at all: nonsense. Thus, the rules of logical syntax are analogous in some ways to the rules for drawing up contracts: failure to follow those rules results in an invalid contract, and that, Hacker notes, is not itself a kind of contract at all.[24]

Where Conant, then, denies that there is any room within the Tractarian conception of logical syntax for the violation or transgression of its rules, Hacker's conception of Tractarian nonsense is one in which philosophical nonsense is produced when we do exactly that: transgress the laws of logical syntax. Such violations result in nonsense, but not, for Hacker, in nonsense substantially-conceived: his view is not that the words add up to a nonsensical proposition, or that they express an illogical thought.

The result, as it were, is the same as if we had simply failed to give the words a meaning: the utterance is just plain nonsense. Nevertheless, the individual words themselves are not, as followers of austerity would have it, simply or straightforwardly meaningless either. Thus, Hacker writes:

> That the sentence 'Julius Caesar is a prime number' is nonsensical is not due to the meaninglessness of its constituent words, but to its failure to conform to the requisite combinatorial rules. But of course that they are not meaningless does not imply that they *stand for* a meaning (a *Bedeutung*). 'Julius Caesar' is the name of the author of *The Gallic Wars*, but the author of *The Gallic Wars* is not the meaning of his name. 'Is a prime number' is a meaningful phrase, it has a use, and in 'Caesar is a prime number' it is being misused, used contrary to the rules for its use. But its meaning (which is given by the explanation 'is a number divisible only by 1 and by itself') is not an entity for which it stands (such as a Fregean concept).[25]

The sense in which these words are meaningful is that they do have a rule-governed use in the language; though here the words are being misused, they do elsewhere have a correct use. Here, as constituents of nonsense-sentences, the words are being used in ways that (borrowing from Wittgenstein's later discussion of rule-following) are simply not provided for by the rules for their correct use. Hacker's point is not that a nonsense-sentence can after all contain symbols – that is not what he wants to say, for a symbol 'just is a sign used according to the rules for its correct use' and, of course, in a nonsense-sentence the signs are being misused.[26] To say on the other hand, however, that nonsense-sentences consist only of 'a meaningless combination of meaningless signs', would, Hacker writes, be 'exceedingly misleading', since the signs do elsewhere have a use. Instead, one should say that the expressions are being '*misused* – used contrary to the rules of logical syntax'.[27]

The conception here, then, is one in which philosophical nonsense is produced when we violate the rules of logical syntax. Like gibberish, philosophical nonsense just is nonsense, but unlike gibberish, it involves the misuse of certain expressions, the violation of certain rules. The signs in a piece of philosophical nonsense are not exactly meaningful – we are not dealing with genuine symbols, for a symbol just is a sign used according to the rules for its correct use, and the signs are not used correctly here. But nor would it be quite right to say that the signs are meaningless either – for they do have a use in the language, and their use here involves a transgression against the rules which give their correct use.

IV

In support of his account, Hacker deploys a number of quotations from Wittgenstein, and offers an array of criticisms of Conant's view. Before turning to some of that material, however, I want to examine more closely the plausibility of Hacker's own view of Tractarian nonsense. Although Hacker claims that the important difference between his account and Conant's is over whether or not the constituent expressions in a nonsense-sentence are meaningless, that difference might itself be thought to rest on a more basic difference between the two accounts. For the sense in which the words of a nonsense-sentence can be said to be meaningful, for Hacker, is that they involve a specific violation of specific rules for the use of an expression. And what is at issue here, in part at least, is whether it could ever be a sufficient condition for some utterance's being nonsense that the use of a sign within it does not follow some particular set of rules governing that sign's use. Diamond expresses the point this way:

> We need to bear in mind that what is at issue in the debate about logical syntax in
> the *Tractatus* is whether logical syntax fixes rules for the use of a sign as its
> correct use, so that a sufficient condition for a sign's being used incorrectly, a
> sufficient condition for the use to be a proscribed use, is that the sign is not, in
> some combination, being used in accordance with those rules. What is also at
> issue is whether departing from some set of rules for the use of a sign can ever be
> a sufficient condition for the nonsensicality of the would-be proposition of which
> the sign, so used, is part.[28]

For Diamond, then, there are two quite distinct parts to the debate with Hacker: (a) a

question about the sufficiency conditions for a use of a sign to count as 'proscribed', and

the notion of logical syntax appealed to or invoked there; and (b) a question about the

sufficiency conditions for a sentence to be nonsense. I want to begin by focussing on

Diamond's second point here, point (b), about what the sufficiency-conditions might be

for a sentence to be nonsense, and postpone for the moment discussion of point (a), and

syntactically correct or incorrect uses of signs. The question corresponding to Diamond's

second point here is something like this: is it ever enough, is it ever sufficient for the

resulting sentence to be nonsense, that some sign used within it deviates from the rules

for its use? To this, Hacker, I think, would be inclined to reply 'Yes', and Conant 'No'.

One way of taking that idea, of fleshing out the stance of someone like Hacker,

might then be this. There is presumably some set of rules applying, for instance, to the

use of the sign 'bank' as in the phrase 'the river bank'. Then we might say that any use

of that sign deviating from that set of rules will render the resultant sentence of which it is

a part nonsensical. That, however, is clearly not the case, at least in ordinary language,

since that sign also has other uses, say, as in 'piggy bank' or 'national bank', which

presumably follow different sets of rules. And that point is borne out by Wittgenstein's

own example, too, of 'Green is green' (at *Tractatus* 3.323) where the two occurrences of

the sign 'green' nevertheless symbolise in quite different ways. Still, however, there are two points we might make in reply: (i), that one of the features of a sign-language that is governed by logical syntax, one of its differences from ordinary language, is that such multiple uses of signs will not occur within it, and (ii) that even within ordinary language many signs do not have multiple uses and hence it may *sometimes*, we might reply, be enough that a sign deviates from a set of rules for its use there to be nonsensical.

Let me put aside for the moment the first of those points (point (i)), about what might be the case in a sign-language governed by logical syntax, and focus instead on the second criticism, that (point (ii)) some signs do not have multiple uses. (What I shall want to say in relation to that first case is that even there, in a sign-language obeying logical syntax, a deviant use of a sign would not alone be sufficient cause for us to think the use of the sign a nonsensical one). That second point might be supplemented, too, by insisting instead, in those cases, such as 'bank', where a sign does have multiple uses, that any use that departs from *all* the established sets of rules will be nonsensical. But in neither the case where we depart from the only set of rules governing the use of a sign, or all the many sets of rules governing the use of a sign, do we thereby and without further ado end up with nonsense. Conant's example – of Lloyd Bentson's utterance of the sentence 'Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy' to Dan Quayle in the 1988 vice-presidential debate – is an obvious instance.[29] We can safely assume that this use of the words 'Jack Kennedy' deviated from all previous uses and all established rules for their use, and yet we would not want to say that the utterance was therefore nonsensical for all that. Nor was it necessary for Bentson in advance, prior to his use of the words, to lay down rules

governing this kind of use. And this, though it is a famous instance of a sign's being

given a new use, is surely nothing out of the ordinary either. What this suggests is that

ultimately our uttering nonsense is due not to our violating certain rules, but to our failure

in the end to give a new use to signs used in hitherto unaccounted for ways. Even where

we deviate from all the established rules, and without stipulating in advance new sets of

rules, our words are not necessarily nonsense; if they were, we would not then be able to

account for innovative uses of language.

I want to turn back now to Diamond's point (a), about the sufficiency conditions

relating to a sign's being used 'incorrectly'. Hacker seems to claim in two places that

giving a sign more than one use would be syntactically incorrect. Thus, he writes:

> [Logical syntax] does not permit substituting certain signs for others, in particular,
> it prohibits using the same sign for different symbols or using in a superficially
> similar way signs that have different modes of signification (*Tractatus* 3.325).
> ...
> Once we have assigned a use to the sign 'object' as a variable, it will be incorrect
> to go on to use it in a form of words such as 'A is an object' (or 'A is not an
> object'), for there it does not occur as a variable but as a genuine name – and no
> such use has been assigned to the term 'object', nor should it be, since the term
> already has a use.[30]

Although Wittgenstein says nothing to suggest that giving a sign more than one use – as

in his example 'Green is green' – would be syntactically incorrect, it is also clear (from

Tractatus 3.325) that in a sign-language governed by logical syntax signs will

nonetheless not be given multiple uses. So, for instance, such a sign-language might

include a rule stating that signs should not be given more than one use; and giving a sign

multiple uses might then be called a 'violation of logical syntax'. But two things need to

be noted here. First, and as Diamond points out, such a rule would not be a 'rule of

logical syntax' in the sense in which Wittgenstein might use that phrase:

> When Wittgenstein speaks of 'rules of logical syntax', at 3.334, he specifies that
> all we need in order to be given such rules is knowledge of how the individual
> signs signify. A rule belonging to the notation as a whole, specifying that it was
> not to be mucked about by introduction of new uses, is not something 'given' with
> the use of the particular signs, and is quite different from what Wittgenstein meant
> by 'rules of logical syntax'.[31]

Hence, calling a transgression of that rule a 'violation of logical syntax' would be

misleading at least. Second (and to return to point (i) above (p.86)), such a violation

would not guarantee that the resultant string were nonsensical. If we did give a sign more

than one use, our sign-language, and our use of the sign, would then perhaps no longer be

said properly to be governed by logical syntax, but it would not thereby be nonsensical.

V

Hacker's account of nonsense, then, seems to me inadequate. If Diamond is right in

casting the issue in terms of a debate about sufficiency conditions, Hacker's view seems

not properly to be a view of nonsense at all; not following some set or sets of rules for the

use of a sign just does not give us sufficient cause for thinking that sign's (deviant)

application nonsensical. That realisation might well be what motivates the suspicion,

among some Resolute readers of the *Tractatus*, that Hacker must be relying on a more

substantial picture of nonsense than he is prepared explicitly to invoke in writing.

Whatever the truth of that suggestion, I do not wish to pursue it here. Rather, I want to

turn now to address some of Hacker's criticisms of Conant's account of Tractarian logical

syntax. Conant denies that there is any such thing, on the *Tractatus* conception, as using

words in ways that contravene logical syntax. On that conception of these rules, then,

although we can follow them, there is nothing we might call violating or contravening or

transgressing against them. I want to look at two objections Hacker raises (one exegetical

and one substantial) to that notion of a rule.

The first of those criticisms is based on Hacker's reading of *Tractatus* 3.325 and

the appeal Wittgenstein makes there to the notion of a sign-language 'governed by *logical*

grammar – by *logical syntax*'.[32] What Hacker writes is this:

> I agree with Conant that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* never speaks of 'violations
> of logical syntax'. He says only that in a logically correct notation, expressions
> will be used in accordance with logical syntax (*TLP* 3.325). But obviously there
> can be no such thing as using a sign in accordance with logical syntax if there is
> no such thing as using it in contravention of logical syntax.[33]

For Hacker, then, Wittgenstein does not talk directly of violations of logical syntax, but

he nevertheless does talk of using expressions in accordance with logical syntax, thereby

implying that we might also use them not in accordance with it.[34] I want to begin by

noting, with Diamond, a lack of fit between Hacker's description of *Tractatus* 3.325 and

what is actually going on in that passage. Here is how Diamond describes the difference:

> Hacker writes as if we had in 3.325 a reference to expressions used in accordance
> with logical syntax, and hence an implicit reference to the possibility of using a
> sign in contravention of logical syntax. What we actually have is a reference to a
> sign-language's being in accordance with logical syntax, and an implicit reference
> to sign-languages which are not in accordance with logical syntax, in that they use
> the same signs for different symbols, or in that they use in superficially similar
> ways signs that signify quite differently (or in that they have both sorts of use).[35]

Instead of some sign on some particular occasion of use being in accordance or otherwise

with logical syntax, Wittgenstein's remark concerns rather the accordance or non-

accordance of a sign-language as a whole with logical syntax. That difference is quite

crucial for the debate. What Wittgenstein does not say there, and what Hacker suggests

he does, is that, 'in a logically correct notation, expressions will be used in accordance

with logical syntax', thereby introducing some notion of expressions used not in

accordance with logical syntax too, Hacker thinks, in a notation that is not logically

correct. What Wittgenstein rather suggests is that a sign-language which is governed by

logical syntax will not be one in which we employ signs in ways that obscure their logical

role. A sign-language not so governed will then be one in which it will not be possible so

confidently to read off straight from the sign what logical role it fulfils, and that may be

confusing, but it will not be anything more than that.

Here, then, is how Diamond conceives of what it is for a sign-language to be

governed by logical syntax:

> The idea in 3.325 appears to be that a language can attend to, or hearken to or be
> governed by logical syntax, in the sense that linguistic distinctions run parallel to
> logical ones. There is a pattern of logical distinctions internal to logical syntax,
> and the pattern can be reflected clearly in a language or less obviously (as
> similarities and differences of sound in the spoken language may be reflected
> clearly in the pattern of spelling in the written language, which might in that case
> be said to be 'governed by' the sound pattern, or the similarities and differences
> may be reflected in a much less clear way).[36]

That idea, of a language 'hearkening to' or 'attending to' logical syntax, might seem, as

Genia Schönbaumsfeld remarks, somewhat weaker than the sense implied by

Wittgenstein's original German at 3.325, and his use there of (the third person singular

form of) the term *'gehorchen'*: 'to obey'.[37] But even then, there is still a clear sense in

which a sign-language might be said to obey logical syntax if the employment of signs

within that notation follows logical differences among symbols, or marks individual sets

of rules, without entailing a corresponding sense of disobeying logical syntax that would

amount to anything more than a lack of clarity in a symbolism. Ordinary language

clearly does not obey logical syntax if that means employing signs in ways that reflect

clearly differences among the corresponding symbols; but nor does it therefore violate

logical syntax if that means employing signs in ways that are prohibited by the rules for

their correct use and are therefore nonsensical.

Still, though, while Wittgenstein does not talk of violations of logical syntax or

using signs in syntactically incorrect or correct ways in the *Tractatus*, he does

nevertheless talk of 'rules of logical syntax' there (*Tractatus* 3.334) and, in a letter to

Ogden, introduces talk of 'syntactically correct' use of signs. Commenting on *Tractatus*

3.326, Wittgenstein writes:

> [I]n order to recognise the symbol in a sign we must look at how this sign is *used*
> significantly in propositions. I.e., we must observe how the sign is used in
> accordance with the laws of logical syntax. Thus 'significant' here means as
> much as 'syntactically correct'.[38]

Does this mean, then, that one can after all, for Wittgenstein, use signs syntactically

incorrectly, in ways that violate logical syntax? Diamond distinguishes two senses of

correct and incorrect use: a weak sense and a strong sense. We might call any use of a

sign departing from its established use 'incorrect', or we might only say a use was

incorrect if it departed from all established uses and if as well there were no other use

being given to it there. There would then, Diamond says, be nothing wrong in using the

latter (weak) sense of 'incorrect' in outlining Wittgenstein's views, even though he does

not himself anywhere talk of incorrect uses. In that sense, however, there can be no

inference from a sign's not being used correctly in accord with some one set, or all

established sets, of rules for its use, to its therefore being used incorrectly, or its therefore

being nonsensical.[39]

The second criticism Hacker makes of Conant's conception of logical syntax and

of the notion of a rule assumed there is this. Hacker writes:

> Conant's view is akin to claiming that the pawn in chess cannot be moved three
> squares at a time, since if one were to move a piece thus, it would not be a pawn –
> a transcendental argument to prove that one cannot cheat in chess. One *could*
> speak thus, but would it make any difference? Is it any *clearer* than the way we
> ordinarily speak?[40]

I want to push aside, at least for the time being, the suggestion here that the difference

between the two views might be more linguistic than substantial and focus instead on the

analogy Hacker presents.

That analogy, Diamond thinks, is problematic, because 'question-begging'.[41]

That is, in order for the analogy to apply, to work, it must be the case that the rules of

language are like the rules of chess in the relevant sense, i.e. in that by fixing what moves

can be made by a 'piece' the rules must thereby exclude that piece being moved in any

other ways (and ignoring that some pieces can have multiple uses in chess, as a pawn is

given the powers of a queen in certain circumstances). Where Hacker wants any

departure from the established rules for using some sign to result in one's doing

something outlawed, as it might be thought to in chess, Conant is arguing that such a

departure may result in one's doing something else, or else in one's not doing anything at

all, but will not itself constitute a 'violation' of a rule (and so will not for that reason issue

in nonsense), and thus is arguing that the rules of language are precisely unlike the rules

of chess in this regard. Hence, Diamond writes:

> The idea that we should take Hacker's analogy to be a helpful one presupposes
> what is at stake, namely whether it is a sufficient condition for a would-be move

in language to be illegitimate that one's use of a sign departs from the established rules fixing the use of that sign.[42]

Insisting on the applicability of that analogy may manifest one's disagreement with Conant's view of what kind of rules the rules of logical syntax are, but it does not amount to any kind of argument against it.

Still, what that might also suggest is, as Schönbaumsfeld argues, that if insisting on the applicability of the analogy is merely question-begging, then equally so will be insisting on its inapplicability.[43] That is surely true, but what it ignores is just that there are some very good reasons for thinking the analogy not to apply, not least of which is the fact that one can, in ordinary language at least, use signs in innovative ways, or even in ways that depart entirely from the ways of good grammar,[44] and yet still not end up talking nonsense. That fact is clearly manifested in the Lloyd Bentson case, and we can conjure up as many other examples as we care to of words being used in new but senseful ways. Against that, the first person to pick up the ball during a game of football and run with it clearly would have been violating the rules of that game (at least as now understood) even if creating at the same time (and as legend has it) an entirely new one too.[45]

VI

I have outlined two conceptions of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, and the account of what nonsense might be there that Hacker puts forward in conjunction with his account of Tractarian logical syntax. And I have offered some arguments against Hacker's account of nonsense, and deflected two of his criticisms of Conant on logical syntax. There are

other points that could be made against Hacker too; for instance, the difficulty he faces

(as noted in Chapter One) in squaring his account not only with what appears to be an

explicit statement of an austere view of nonsense in the *Tractatus* 5.473s, but also with

the 'correct method' in philosophy espoused by Wittgenstein at *Tractatus* 6.53. There

are, however, also further points Hacker makes against Conant's account of both

nonsense and logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, and I want to consider some more of those

briefly here.

The first of those criticisms, culminating in the analogy just described, focuses on

Tractatus 4.1272.[46] That passage, Hacker thinks, implies a notion of incorrect use that is

stronger than that which Diamond would countenance, and that would license the

inference from a sign's being used not in accordance with some one set of rules for its

correct use to its therefore being nonsense. So, Hacker writes that 'Wittgenstein explains

that formal concepts have a *correct use*', namely as bound variables, and also '*an

incorrect use*', as pseudo-concept-words, and the latter use results in 'nonsensical

pseudo-propositions'.[47] To be sure, Wittgenstein does talk of 'correct use' here; he writes

that '[w]herever the word "object" ("thing", etc.) is correctly used, it is expressed in

conceptual notation by a variable name'. And, Wittgenstein continues, '[w]herever it is

used in a different way, that is as a proper concept-word, nonsensical pseudo-propositions

are the results'; and Wittgenstein illustrates the point with instances of what 'one cannot

say', what it is 'impossible to say', and what it 'is nonsensical to speak of'. Finally,

Wittgenstein applies the point to other formal concepts, such as 'number': 'It is just as

nonsensical to say, "There is only one 1", as it would be to say, "2+2 at 3 o'clock equals

4".'

These remarks can be read as making trouble for an austere view of nonsense, and

for Conant's account of logical syntax, but they need not be read so. There is no

reference here to incorrect uses or violations of syntax. What there is in the passage is

reference to a correct use, and to the use of signs in a logical role other than their correct

use (as 'proper concept-words'), resulting in nonsense. Nothing in the passage suggests

that that is due to anything other than their not having been given a meaning in that kind

of use, as 'identical' has as yet not been given a meaning as adjective. So, for instance,

though '2+2 equals 4' surely has a sense (or at any rate is not nonsense), it does not have

a sense such that what time it is is relevant to what it says; hence, we simply have not

given a meaning to the combination of signs '2+2 at 3 o'clock equals 4'. Where

Wittgenstein does at one point in the *Tractatus* talk of 'arguments of the wrong kind

[making] the proposition itself nonsensical' (5.5351), the point again is not necessarily

that the nonsense is due to anything other than their being arguments to which no

meaning has been assigned in that context.[48]

Even disregarding Hacker's criticisms of Conant's interpretation of Carnap on

nonsense and logical syntax, I have not considered all of the criticisms of Conant's view

that Hacker puts forward. Those criticisms which I have not addressed consist primarily

of two lists: first, of a series of ten quotations, from a variety of sources (*LWL*, *RLF*,

WWK, *PR*, *BB*, and *PI*),[49] which purport to show that Wittgenstein's conception, first of

logical syntax, then of grammar, was one of rules determining the bounds of sense, licensing some combinations of words and excluding others as nonsensical; and, second, of a further series of five quotations (again from a variety of sources) in support of the view that Wittgenstein thought that there could be 'transgressions' of rules of grammar.[50] There is also a further quotation, from *LWL* (p.3), which seems to suggest that nonsense arises if we substitute for one another in a sentence words of different kinds, and another quotation, this time from *PG*, which Hacker claims Conant misinterprets the import of.[51] Many of these remarks need to be treated with caution,[52] and not all of them appear straightforwardly or obviously to be doing what Hacker suggests they are,[53] but I cannot hope to address all of them individually here.

Finally, nor have I addressed the conception of grammar which supersedes the early Wittgenstein's notion of logical syntax (and which is the subject of some of the quotations Hacker marshals against Conant just referred to). The conception of those rules often attributed to Wittgenstein is one which, for all its differences, nevertheless inherits certain flaws from its earlier counterpart. In particular, it shares with the related conception of logical syntax the idea that nonsense is produced when we deviate from certain rules or sets of rules in our use of expressions. Though rules of grammar are autonomous, in the sense that, unlike the laws of logical syntax, they are not conceived as tracking or mirroring some structure set deep in the nature of things, they do nonetheless play the same role in the production of nonsense as their predecessor. Different arguments will be of course required than those given here to counter the suggestion that

that was Wittgenstein's later conception of these rules, though it may be that some of the

same objections apply substantially.[54]

VII

Conant's conception of the laws of logical syntax is one in which failing to follow those

rules may result in one's doing something quite different, or else it may result in one's

doing nothing at all, but it will not result in one's doing something that is outlawed, and

nor will it result in nonsense. We might introduce a new rule, and we might even call it a

rule of logical syntax, such that a sign can only have one use, but then our violating this

rule, and in that sense violating logical syntax, will have no immediate relevance to the

question of whether or not our use of words is nonsensical; nor would such a rule be a

'rule of logical syntax' in Wittgenstein's sense. That conception of rules might seem

odd, perhaps in that it is unlike the notion at play in the rules of chess, which are

constitutive in that they determine what is and what is not a valid move in that game, but

it is not either incoherent or wrong for all that.

I have tried to defend that view from some of the criticisms Hacker makes of it,

and at the same time I have tried to argue that there are a number of problems in Hacker's

own account, both of nonsense and of logical syntax, and both as applied to ordinary

language and as attributed to Wittgenstein. 'Violations of logical syntax' as Hacker uses

that phrase are not enough to make an utterance nonsense; what makes an utterance

nonsense is our failure to assign some sense to those signs in that context of use. In the

following chapter, I shall want to turn to a number of criticisms of the austere view of

nonsense put forward by Hans-Johann Glock, from a similar perspective to Hacker's, but

focussing on Wittgenstein's interpretation and use of the context-principle, early and

later, and its relation to Wittgenstein's view of what nonsense might be.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] The paper of Conant's I shall be focussing on is his 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.13-61. Conant also touches on the question of logical syntax in the *Tractatus* in his 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.174-217; and in his 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', in *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Erich H. Reck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.374-462.

[2] I shall focus on two of Hacker's papers: 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.353-388 (and reprinted in Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Connections and Controversies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.98-140); and 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.53; No.210 (January 2003), 1-23.

[3] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.17.

[4] In her paper 'Logical Syntax in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.55; No.218 (January 2005), 78-89. See also Cora Diamond, 'Criss-Cross Philosophy', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the* Philosophical Investigations, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.201-220 (pp.205-206).

[5] In particular, to the conception of logical syntax and its role that Conant finds Carnap putting forward in his 'The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language', (trans. Arthur Pap, in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), pp.60-81) under the (to Conant, mistaken) impression that it tallies with Wittgenstein's Tractarian account. See also Edward Witherspoon, 'Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.315-349.

[6] This is the phrase Conant uses. Hacker seizes upon it as evidence of a lack of critical rigor in Conant's reading of 'Standard' interpretations of Wittgenstein's work. Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.13; Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', pp.2-3.

[7] Conant makes a similar point in relation to the later Wittgenstein's conception of 'grammar', as does Edward Witherspoon in his 'Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein'. My focus in this chapter, however, will be on the *Tractatus*. Part of the dispute between Hacker and Conant (and Witherspoon) is also over the interpretation of Carnap, but I shall not be concerned with that issue here.

[8] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.23.

[9] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.42.

[10] Wittgenstein writes at *Tractatus* 3.33 the following:

> In logical syntax the meaning of a sign should never play a role. It must be possible to establish logical syntax without mentioning the *meaning* of a sign: *only* the description of expressions may be presupposed.

Conant interprets this to mean not that Tractarian logical syntax does after all treat only of signs, but that it treats of how signs symbolise and not what the individual symbols actually mean. 'Logical syntax', Conant writes, 'prescinds from all content and considers only the bare form of significant thought' ('Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.43).

[11] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.45. 'Pseudo-proposition': something that looks like, or that we take to be, a genuine propositional symbol, but to which we have not in fact given any sense; a propositional sign masquerading as a propositional symbol. Although I have translated Conant's use of the term 'Satz' in the above as 'propositional symbol', it is important to note that such a translation would not hold good for all of the instances of that word as it features in the *Tractatus*, as Conant explains:

> [T]he term 'Satz' in the *Tractatus* floats between meaning (1) a propositional symbol (as e.g. in §§3.3ff and §§4ff) and (2) a propositional sign (as e.g. in §§5.473 and §6.54). It is important to

the method of the *Tractatus* that the recognition that certain apparent cases of (1) are merely cases of (2) be a recognition that the reader achieve on his own. Consequently, at certain junctures, the method of the *Tractatus* requires that the reference of *Satz* remain provisionally neutral as between (1) and (2).

See (for instance) Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.26; note 19. The point is repeated in Conant and Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.46-99 (p.88; note 6).

[12] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.44.

[13] Wittgenstein, *Letters to C.K. Ogden with Comments on the English Translation of the* Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, ed. G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), p.49, and quoted in Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', pp.46-47. (Conant gives a brief summary of the correspondence between Ogden and Wittgenstein on this remark on p.47, note 55.)

[14] Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung*', p.47.

[15] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', p.363.

[16] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', p.365. (Cf. James Conant, 'Must We Show What We Cannot Say?', in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), pp.242-283 (p.253): 'there are no *kinds* of nonsense'.)

[17] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', pp.364-5.

[18] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.9.

[19] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', pp.2-3.

[20] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.9.

[21] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.9. Again, the example might be thought to be a bad one: see above, Chapter One, p.71, note 5.

[22] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', p.365.

[23] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', pp.366-7.

[24] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', pp.365-366.

[25] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', pp.9-10. What work is the notion of 'standing for' doing in this quotation? Hacker clearly thinks that the notion being ascribed to him is one in which meanings are entities which words stand for, and which themselves either fit or do not fit together; in other words, a conception of 'meaning-bodies'. That idea, for Hacker, seems to be the one at the root of the substantial view of nonsense.

[26] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.13.

[27] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.10.

[28] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.82.

[29] Conant cites this in 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', p.398.

[30] Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle', p.366.

[31] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.81. *Tractatus* 3.334 reads: 'The rules of logical syntax must go without saying, once we know how each individual sign signifies'.

[32] *Op. cit.,* this chapter, pp.77-78.

[33] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.13; quoted in Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.79.

[34] It is perhaps worth noting here that elsewhere Hacker, writing in conjunction with Gordon Baker, writes the following in discussing the *Tractatus* view: 'A further curious twist to the tale is given by the insistence that in a sense these rules of logical syntax cannot be violated!' That sense, one suspects, is quite different from that with which Conant might say something similar, but it is interesting that Baker and Hacker choose this form of words here. See G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, Vol. 2: Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p.36.

[35] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.79.

[36] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.80. What are the differences, if indeed differences there are, between Diamond's and Conant's accounts of logical syntax in the *Tractatus*? One suggestion might be this, that where for Conant logical syntax is concerned with symbols (and not with signs, nor with the proscription of combinations of symbols), for Diamond, logical syntax seems rather to be concerned with signs, or systems

of signs, and with their tracking or not tracking logical distinctions among symbols. That idea (perhaps as much an idea of a difference of emphasis as anything), however, and though it might be suggested by this remark of Diamond's, I am not at all sure is the correct one. Rather than diverging from the substance of Conant's account here, I take it that Diamond is agreeing with Conant's account of logical syntax, but also supplementing it with a story of what it is for a sign-language to be 'governed by' logical syntax.

[37] So, Wittgenstein's remark ends: '*eine Zeichensprache also, die der* logischen *Grammatik – der logischen Syntax – gehorcht'*. See Genia Schönbaumsfeld, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', unpublished manuscript presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 11.09.2005, p.15.

[38] Wittgenstein, *Letters to Ogden*, p.59; quoted in Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.83, note 9.

[39] See Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', pp.82-83.

[40] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.16.

[41] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.86.

[42] Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.86.

[43] Schönbaumsfeld, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', p.16, note 68.

[44] See, for instance, the example Diamond gives in her 'Logical Syntax', pp.87-88.

[45] One place where Wittgenstein himself explicitly discusses the analogy or otherwise between certain rules of chess and certain rules of language is the following passage from *Philosophical Grammar*:

> 81   Are the rules that say that such and such a combination of words yields no sense comparable to the stipulations in chess that the game does not allow two pieces to stand on the same square, for instance, or a piece to stand on a line between two squares? Those propositions in their turn are like certain actions; like e.g. cutting a chess board out of a larger sheet of squared paper. They draw a boundary.
>
>   So what does it mean to say "this combination of words has no sense"? One can say of a name (of a succession of sounds): "I haven't given anyone this name"; and name-giving is a definite action (attaching a label). Think of the representation of an explorer's route by a line drawn in each of the two hemispheres projected on the page: we may say that a bit of line going outside the circles on the page makes no sense in this projection. We might also express it thus: no stipulation has been made about it. (*PG*, p.125.)

Wittgenstein does not exactly reject the comparison mooted in the first sentence, but neither does he accept it; instead, he begins by clarifying what those rules of chess which he wants to talk about are doing, as if to suggest we have not quite got clear on that point yet, such as to give sense to the comparison at all. Having clarified it, however, he might be taken to confirm the analogy. Does Wittgenstein, then, side with Hacker, and against Diamond on this? I think that the kind of analogy Wittgenstein is postulating here is quite different from the one that Hacker wants.

The analogy Hacker wants to draw, against Conant, is brought out by his characterising Conant's view in the following way:

> Conant's view is akin to claiming that the pawn in chess cannot be moved three squares at a time, since if one were to move a piece thus, it would not be a pawn – a transcendental argument to prove that one cannot cheat in chess? (Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.16.)

That point, about cheating, brings out very clearly the kind of rule of chess that Hacker has in mind here, and the point I want to make is this: that that kind of rule is very different from the kind that Wittgenstein has in mind here. It might be cheating in chess, or it might just be an error, to move one's pawn three squares at a time (or that pawn may quite legitimately be moved thus, if it has acquired the powers of a queen). But rules of that kind are not what Wittgenstein has in mind. Putting one's piece between two squares, or putting two pieces on the same square, would not rightly be called 'cheating'; the kind of rules Wittgenstein is talking about here are such that, without them, we could not make sense of cheating at all. So I take it that Wittgenstein's comparison goes somewhat deeper than Hacker's; cheating is still understandable within chess, but Wittgenstein's comparison suggests that, for him, nonsense is not like cheating, but more like putting one's piece between squares. For that kind of move, we simply have not made any stipulations; we cannot make sense of it in that context at all.

[46] *TLP* 4.1272 runs as follows:

> Thus the variable name '*x*' is the proper sign for the pseudo-concept *object*.
> Wherever the word 'object' ('thing', etc.) is correctly used, it is expressed in conceptual notation by a variable name.
>
> ...
>
> Wherever it is used in a different way, that is as a proper concept-word, nonsensical pseudo-propositions are the result.
> So one cannot say, for example, 'There are objects', as one might say, 'There are books'. And it is just as impossible to say, 'There are 100 objects', or, 'There are N_0 objects'.
> And it is nonsensical to speak of the *total number of objects*.
> The same applies to the words 'complex', 'fact', 'function', 'number', etc.
> They all signify formal concepts, and are represented in conceptual notation by variables, not by functions or classes (as Frege and Russell believed).
> '1 is a number', 'There is only one zero', and all similar expressions are nonsensical.
> (It is just as nonsensical to say, 'There is only one 1', as it would be to say, '2+2 at 3 o'clock equals 4'.)

[47] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.15.

[48] See Diamond, 'Logical Syntax', p.88. *TLP* 5.5351 runs as follows:

> There are certain cases in which one is tempted to use expressions of the form '$a = a$' or '$p \rightarrow p$' and the like. In fact, this happens when one wants to talk about proto-types, e.g. about proposition, thing, etc. Thus in Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* 'p is a proposition' – which is nonsense – was given the symbolic rendering '$p \rightarrow p$' and placed as an hypothesis in front of certain propositions in order to exclude from their argument-places everything but propositions.
> (It is nonsense to place the hypothesis '$p \rightarrow p$' in front of a proposition, in order to ensure that its arguments shall have the right form, if only because with a non-proposition as argument the hypothesis becomes not false but nonsensical, and because arguments of the wrong kind make the proposition itself nonsensical, so that it preserves itself from wrong arguments just as well, or as badly, as the hypothesis without sense that was appended for that purpose.)

Diamond, building on Kremer, argues something like this: that nonsense is only ever a matter of our failing to have assigned a meaning to the words – but Russell's symbolism requires that we exclude giving new uses to signs, and hence that option is already foreclosed to us. Hence, an argument of the 'wrong kind' cannot, given that requirement, be assigned a new meaning, since it already has one, and so the whole fails to have a sense.

[49] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', pp.12-13.

[50] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', pp.13-14.

[51] Hacker, 'Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians', p.16 and p.14 (respectively).

[52] For instance, because of their progeny, as compilations of notes taken by others on Wittgenstein's lectures (see, here, e.g. the editor's introduction to *LWL*), or because they were not as it were groomed for publication by Wittgenstein. So, as an example of the former, Wittgenstein's saying what he is claimed to have said at *LWL* p.3 contradicts what he is there claimed to have said moments earlier (p.2), where he outlines a version of contextualism.

[53] For instance, numbers 9 and 10 from the first list, and numbers 1 and 5 from the second.

[54] On this topic, see Witherspoon, 'Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein'.

Chapter Three

Contextualism and Nonsense

A Reply to Hans-Johann Glock

I

Contextualism, broadly speaking, is the view that the whole – be it judgement, thought,

proposition, or sentence – has priority in some sense over the individual parts – be they

words or concepts – when it comes to giving an account of meaning, or of understanding.

Some version of that view lies behind Frege's context-principle, which is reformulated by

Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* and quoted approvingly in his *Philosophical Investigations*

(as well as appearing in various formats and at several places in between[1]). In this

chapter, I shall want to consider a number of objections levelled at the austere view of

nonsense by Hans-Johann Glock in his paper 'All Kinds of Nonsense', and which focus

in large part on Wittgenstein's contextualism.[2]

Glock, like P.M.S. Hacker, rejects the austere view of nonsense both substantially,

as offering the correct account of nonsense, and exegetically too, as offering the correct

account of Wittgenstein's view of nonsense, either in the *Tractatus* or in the later work.

In short, for Glock, Wittgenstein's contextualism neither in the *Tractatus* nor in the

Investigations will serve to justify the attribution to Wittgenstein of an austere view of

nonsense.   Wittgenstein's later 'non-restrictive' contextualism is, Glock suggests,

substantially plausible but 'militates' against the austere view; and his earlier version,

Glock argues, though it could be used to provide an argument in support of austerity, not

only relies on a notion of meaning unavailable to Resolute readers (i.e., unavailable to

those very readers who would most want to attribute to Wittgenstein there an austere

view), but is also plain wrong. And these points are supplemented, too, by a number of

others that Glock makes, and that are aimed at undermining any independent plausibility

that the austere view might be thought to have, exegetically or otherwise. I shall want to

dispute much of what Glock writes, but before turning to his criticisms I want first to note

one key difference between Glock's view and a view which is in many respects very

similar to Glock's, that of P.M.S. Hacker.

Glock identifies the following two strands to the austere view of nonsense:

(1)   *the privation view*: for austerity, nonsense only ever arises from privation,

from our failure to assign to the words (in that context and to date) a

meaning; there is no such thing as 'positive' or 'substantial' nonsense,

consisting of words which do in such contexts have meanings;

(2)   *nonsense monism*: all nonsense is logically equivalent; there is only one

logical kind or there are no logically different kinds of nonsense.[3]

Against austerity, both Glock and Hacker maintain that there can be such a thing as what

Glock terms 'combinatorial nonsense' – nonsense, that is, that results from the logico-

syntactically illegitimate combination of otherwise meaningful words.[4] Hence, both

reject (1), the privation view. Some nonsense results not from a simple failure to assign

meanings to the words, but from using words in ways that are prohibited by or that

violate the logico-syntactical rules for their correct use. Since in a nonsense-sentence, so

the story goes, the words are being misused, they do not there stand for a meaning, but

they are meaningful nonetheless in that they do have a rule-governed use in the

language.[5]

But whereas Hacker nevertheless maintains, along with followers of an austere

view, that nonsense 'no more comes in kinds than it comes in degrees',[6] and so affirms

(2), Glock on the contrary (and as the title of his paper suggests) takes their shared stand

on the existence of combinatorial nonsense to constitute grounds for rejecting (2), or

nonsense monism. Thus, Glock writes: 'There are many kinds of nonsense, and one of

them results from the illicit combination of meaningful words'.[7] For Glock,

combinatorial nonsense does amount to something logically distinct from mere privation,

whereas for Hacker it does not.

The reason for this difference is, I think, quite simple, and is not to be traced (say)

to Glock's holding a stronger, more robust (or, some would say, more honest)

understanding of what combinatorial nonsense consists in than does Hacker. Rather, the

difference is over what would constitute a logical difference between nonsense-sentences.

For Hacker, such a difference would have to be one in the end-product as it were, in the

sense of the resultant whole, and for there to be differences in that sense one would first

have to hold a genuinely substantial view of nonsense (in which the individual words of a

nonsense-sentence do have their ordinary meanings and together express a logically

incoherent thought), which Hacker, of course, does not. For Glock, on the other hand, a

logical difference here is rather one in the cause, in what makes the string of signs

nonsense. Hence, on that way of counting, strings of signs which are nonsense because

we have failed to give them a meaning are a logically distinct kind of nonsense from

strings of signs which violate logical syntax, say. Thus, for Glock, points (1) and (2) are

much more closely related than they are for Hacker; where for Hacker, one can

consistently maintain (2) whilst rejecting (1), for Glock, rejecting (1) would require one

also to reject (2). The difference, then, between Glock and Hacker here is largely

terminological, and it is that difference that allows them to say such seemingly

contrasting things about the idea of there being different kinds of nonsense, whilst

nevertheless saying such similar things on many related substantial points. Although

much of their discussion is aimed at the idea of substantial nonsense (and so logically

distinct kinds of nonsense primarily in Hacker's sense), I take it that followers of the

austere view would reject the notion that there can be logical differences between

nonsense-sentences in either sense (since giving up on (2) in either Glock or Hacker's

sense would require one to give up on (1) also).

II

That is all that I want to say about the differences between Glock's view and Hacker's. I want to turn instead now to Glock's criticisms of austerity, especially in relation to the *Tractatus*, and beginning with his focus on the appeal, among Resolute readers, to Wittgenstein's reformulation there (at *TLP* 3.3 and 3.314) of Frege's context-principle.

That principle appears in different guises four times in Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic*: in the introduction, as one of three guiding principles – 'never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition'; at §60 – 'we ought always to keep before our eyes a complete proposition. Only in a proposition have the words really a meaning. ... It is enough if the proposition taken as a whole has a sense; it is this that confers on its parts also their content'; at §62 – 'it is only in the context of a proposition that words have any meaning'; and in conclusion at §106 – 'we must never try to define the meaning of a word in isolation, but only as it is used in the context of a proposition'.[8] In the *Tractatus*, the principle becomes 'Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning' (*TLP* 3.3) and 'An expression has meaning only in a proposition' (*TLP* 3.314).[9]

Although Wittgenstein himself, as Glock emphasises, does not actually use the context-principle to justify an austere view of nonsense, it has nevertheless been used that way by New, or Resolute, readers of the *Tractatus*.[10] But there are many different interpretations of the context-principle, and of what Frege and Wittgenstein might have meant by it at different points in their writings; Glock distinguishes between a strong,

'restrictive' version of it, and a weaker, 'non-restrictive' version. Whatever exactly

Glock means by each of these terms, it is clear that, for him, the former, strong version

requires at least that words only have a meaning when actually used in a proposition,

while the latter version 'is compatible with the idea that individual words can mean

something without *actually* occurring in a proposition' – rather, they must only be

capable of occurring in a proposition; they must have been given a (rule-governed) use in

the language.[11] With these two versions of contextualism come two different notions of

what it is for a word to 'occur in the context of a proposition' – a narrower and a broader

interpretation of what that context must be exactly: in the former, strong sense, the

context is that of an actual proposition of which the word must be part; in the latter, weak

sense, the context is rather that of propositions more generally – a word must only have a

role in them, and need not actually be employed in that role at any one time for it to be

said to have a meaning.

Then Glock's argument is this: if the Tractarian formulation of the context-

principle is to be taken to offer support for the austere view of nonsense, or evidence that

Wittgenstein held such a view in the *Tractatus*, then it must be taken in the strong sense –

since if it is only by virtue of a general *possibility* of occurrence in propositions that a

word has a meaning, as the weaker version would have it, then words occurring in a

nonsense-sentence may still have a meaning even though they do not there actually occur

within a genuine proposition; in one sense, the stronger sense, of the phrase, we would

then be able to ask after the meaning of a word taken in isolation, outside the (immediate)

context of a proposition, and so too therefore in the context of a nonsense-sentence.

Taken in the strong sense required by austerity, however, Glock maintains, the principle is plain wrong: words can and do have meaning outside the context of a proposition – for instance, numbers on pages, names used in greeting or as labels on jars, entries in dictionaries, and so on. Thus, if Wittgenstein did hold this view in the *Tractatus*, then, Glock thinks, Wittgenstein was simply mistaken. And while that mistake might, at least in part, be accounted for, such an account will of necessity have to go by way of an appeal to certain technical, picture-theoretic commitments on Wittgenstein's behalf, such as his extraordinary notion of 'meaning', and which are simply not open to Resolute readers or readings to appeal to. So while there is some evidence that Wittgenstein did hold a restrictive version of the context-principle in the *Tractatus*, that evidence itself, Glock argues, counts against his having held an austere view of nonsense there.

On the other hand, however, Glock continues, there is good reason perhaps not to attribute such a (restrictive) view to Wittgenstein at all, or at least good reason to see Wittgenstein as already, in the *Tractatus*, moving away from that restrictive view towards the weaker version Glock thinks is to be found in the *Investigations*, since the restrictive principle is at odds with certain other elements of the *Tractatus*: namely, its compositionality – the idea, expressed for instance at *Tractatus* 4.024-4.03,[12] that the sense of a sentence is in some sense dependent upon, or built up out of, or arrived at by reflection upon the meanings of its constituent parts, the individual words (together with the structure of their arrangement).[13] Much better perhaps, then, Glock suggests, to attribute to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* a weaker, non-restrictive understanding of the

context-principle,[14] thus dissolving any sense of inconsistency but, with it, too, anything that could constitute a contextual justification for the austere view of nonsense.

Glock, then, presents those, primarily Resolute readers, who either favour an austere view of nonsense substantially or who find such a view in Wittgenstein (or, worse still, both), with something of a Scylla and Charybdis between which to navigate. On the one hand, a strong context-principle would provide evidence for Wittgenstein having held an austere view of nonsense, but at the expense of both plausibility and internal (to the *Tractatus*) consistency – with the only reasonable explanation of either the latter incoherence or the former error going by way of notions unavailable to Resolute readings. On the other hand, a weaker version of the context-principle would restore both plausibility and consistency to the *Tractatus* view, but at the expense of any justification for an austere view of nonsense.

So far, the argument, if correct, would entitle Glock to conclude only that (exegetically or otherwise) austerity receives no support from the contextualism of the *Tractatus*, not that the austere view is either wrong or not Wittgenstein's. But Glock goes further: for Glock, this argument serves also to undermine the preferred reading of *Tractatus* 5.473 and 5.4733 as explicitly stating an austere view of nonsense, as well as diminishing any independent appeal austerity might have had. And, Glock continues, the case only gets worse for austerity when we turn to Wittgenstein's later work, where Wittgenstein's uncompromisingly non-technical use of the word 'meaning' renders the

restrictive principle untenable, and whose philosophic procedure anyway assumes the existence of combinatorial nonsense.[15]

III

Glock, then, argues for two overarching conclusions: first, that the austere view is not Wittgenstein's view of nonsense, early or later; second, that, substantially speaking, the austere view is mistaken. Glock's arguments to those conclusions can be broken down into the following steps. First, Glock's exegetical case proceeds by way of the following four steps:

(1) The attribution to Wittgenstein (early and later) of an austere view of nonsense relies on two kinds of evidence:
a. Apparent statements of the view – e.g. *TLP* 5.473-5.4733 and *PI* §500;
b. Wittgenstein's contextualism – e.g. *TLP* 3.3 and *PI* §49.

(2) Wittgenstein's contextualism, (1)b, will not support the attribution to him of an austere view of nonsense.

(3) The austere view lacks independent (and substantial) plausibility.

(4) Hence, without the support offered by Wittgenstein's contextualism (1)b, the evidence of (1)a is more plausibly read as in support of a different conception of nonsense.

Glock's claim, then, is that the evidence of (1)b will not justify the attribution to Wittgenstein of an austere view of nonsense, and that the evidence of (1)a alone will not then suffice either. Why won't Wittgenstein's contextualism provide an argument for his having held an austere view? Glock's argument for (2) consists of the following points:

(i) Wittgenstein's contextualism must be *either* such that a word can only be said to have a meaning when it is actually being used in a proposition (strong, or restrictive contextualism) *or* such that a word can have a meaning outside the context of a proposition (weak, or non-restrictive contextualism).[16]

(ii) Only strong, restrictive contextualism can provide an argument for the austere view (since if a word can have a meaning outside a genuine proposition, as the weak version allows, it can also have a meaning in a nonsense-sentence).

(iii) Later Wittgenstein's contextualism is non-restrictive.

(iv) Therefore, later Wittgenstein's contextualism will not support the attribution to him of an austere view of nonsense.

(v) If the contextualism of the *Tractatus* is non-restrictive, then it will not support the attribution of an austere view of nonsense to Wittgenstein there.

(vi) If the contextualism of the *Tractatus* is restrictive, then it requires (for substantial plausibility) a theoretical notion of meaning.
$(p \rightarrow q)$

(vii) A theoretical notion of meaning is incompatible with the austere view of nonsense (since austerely-conceived nonsense 'cannot constitute a theory').[17]
$(q \rightarrow \sim r)$

(viii) Restrictive contextualism is incompatible with the austere view of nonsense.
$(p \rightarrow \sim r)$

(ix) If the contextualism of the *Tractatus* is restrictive, then it will not support the attribution of an austere view of nonsense to Wittgenstein there. (From (viii).)

(x) Therefore, early Wittgenstein's contextualism will not support the attribution to him of an austere view of nonsense. (From (v) and (ix).)

(xi) Neither early nor later Wittgenstein's contextualism will provide support for attributing to him an austere view of nonsense. (From (iv) and (x).)[18]

Point (3) is then established by the argument that, unless restrictive contextualism is correct, the prohibition on words having a meaning in nonsense-sentences will violate the 'privation'[19] element of austerity: that is, Glock suggests, if a word can have a meaning outside the (immediate) context of a proposition, but not in a nonsense-sentence, their lack of meaning in the nonsense-sentence will then in part be a result of their context, and not simply of our failure to give them a meaning. And Glock's case for point (4) then proceeds by noting other passages (and from a variety of sources) which Glock claims

allow for 'combinatorial nonsense' – nonsense, that is, which combines meaningful words[20] in illegitimate ways – and by way of the additional point, that the austere view (specifically, its 'monism'[21]) is incompatible with Wittgenstein's later philosophical method, and his use there of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.[22]

Finally, Glock's exegetical case is supplemented by the following substantial objections, which largely rehearse features of the former (exegetical) argument:

(A) The austere view must be either independently plausible or receive support from (either strong or weak) contextualism.

(B) Weak contextualism will not support the austere view.

(C) Strong contextualism is wrong (since it relies on an incorrect notion of meaning and since it conflicts with compositionalism[23]), so will not support the austere view.

(D) The austere view lacks independent plausibility.

(E) The austere view neither receives support from contextualism nor is independently plausible, and therefore is incorrect.

IV

In the following pages, I will want to dispute a number of Glock's claims, focussing especially on Glock's arguments for point (2), his discussion of the context-principle, and its interpretation by Wittgenstein. I want to begin with Glock's claim, repeated both in his exegetical and in his substantial arguments against the austere view, that only the strong, restrictive version of the context-principle could secure the case for the austere view of nonsense. That claim is made in step (ii), as I have numbered them, but before I turn to that step, I want to say something about Glock's interpretation of the austere view itself, and to the assumptions that might seem to underlie his criticisms of austerity.

The suspicion here is that Glock treats the austere view, throughout his paper, as a very different kind of view to the kind that it is, that Glock mistakes what sort of view it is. Glock, that is, treats the austere view of nonsense not as the primarily negative view that it is, a view of what nonsense is not, but as involving a positive thesis about nonsense. That, in large part, comes from his not taking sufficiently seriously how that view arises: namely, out of the rejection of the very idea of a theory of sense, and out of the rejection of the idea that Wittgenstein was himself genuinely concerned at any period to put forward a theory of sense, or of meaning. By ignoring or not taking seriously the possibility of austerity's arising out of that rejection, Glock ends up treating the austere view as itself a positive philosophical theory about what nonsense is, and not as a simple affirmation of the commonsense notion of nonsense arising when our words fail to say anything, coupled with the rejection of the idea that there is any other, more sophisticated and philosophical kind of nonsense over and above the kind involved in that ordinary notion.

That suspicion is, I think, borne out by Glock's treating the austere view as consisting of two basic premises or assumptions – as Glock calls them, the privation view and nonsense monism – and then treating those two premises as themselves standing in need of positive philosophical justification and argument. Glock excludes from that picture the possibility that the austere view might be the outcome of the kind of rejection that it *is* in fact an outcome of, at least in the sense in which Conant and Diamond talk of

an austere view of nonsense; instead, those premises, and the arguments in favour of them, must themselves be part of a theory of sense or of meaning.

What I want to suggest here, then, is that at the very beginning of his paper, in his setting-up of the issues at stake, Glock mispresents the kind of view that the austere view is and, in so doing, closes off from consideration certain arguments in favour of the view and lays down a demand for an altogether different kind of argument, justifying austerity as part of a theory of sense or meaning and not as standing outside such theories.[24] Instead, against Glock, the conception of nonsense at work in the austere view, and invoked by Wittgenstein in his use of that word, is just our ordinary notion of having failed to say anything by our words, of not having given to our words a meaning, in that context and to date. That notion brings with it the idea that we could give those words a meaning – that there is nothing as it were internal or essential to that combination that renders it nonsensical. We could, for any combination of signs, assign to them a meaning such that the whole would make sense, and so, ultimately at least, if such a combination does not make sense it will be down to our failure to make just such an assignment. That idea, Glock (slightly grudgingly) acknowledges is at least trivially true,[25] but he assumes that the austere view must be meant in some other, stronger sense than that trivial one, and not that it simply denies the existence of any further kind of nonsense over and above this trivial kind.

Glock's claim, then, that the austere requires the restrictive version of the context-principle seems to rest on an error about the kind of view the austere view is, and so also

about the kind of justification it requires. I shall want to argue, however, that even were we to follow Glock in his characterisation of the issues at hand, still his arguments do not present a sound case against the austere view, exegetically or otherwise.

I want to turn back, then, to the claim of (ii), that only the strong, restrictive version of the context-principle could possibly provide an argument for the austere view. Thus, it is the restrictive principle, Glock writes, that 'provides the crucial premise for the following argument':

P₁   A word (name) has meaning only in the context of a proposition.
P₂   A proposition is a sentence with a sense.
C   No component of a sequence of signs that lacks a sense can have a meaning.[26]

But whether or not the restrictive version of the context-principle is the version that is required depends, in part at least, also on what other versions there are available, and whether they too are capable of ruling out enough for the austere view. Hence, Glock's claim in (ii) in turn depends on the claim of step (i), that Wittgenstein's contextualism must either be strong (restrictive) or else it must be weak, and so must maintain instead that words can have a meaning outside the immediate context of a proposition. I want to raise a question about the distinction Glock draws here between the strong and the weak versions of the context-principle, and about his claim that the former strong version is what is required if Wittgenstein's contextualism is to provide evidence of his having held an austere view of nonsense, or in order for a substantial case for the austere view to be built upon the context-principle.

Those last claims, about what is required of contextualism (whether exegetically or substantially) by an austere view of nonsense, depend upon the weak, non-restrictive view being taken in a particular way, like this: a word has a meaning if it can be used in a proposition – if, that is, it has a role in propositions generally. That version or interpretation would leave open the possibility of Glock's combinatorial nonsense (resulting from prohibited combinations), and also of substantial nonsense (resulting from illegitimate or prohibited combinations, and expressing an incoherent sense). Hence, if that view is the only alternative to the restrictive view, then it looks very much as if the strong, restrictive view is what is required in order to make the case for austerity. But the contrast that Glock presents between strong, restrictive contextualism and the weaker, non-restrictive variety is actually this: on the strong view, no word has a meaning except when it is actually being used in a proposition; on the weak view, words can mean something 'without *actually* occurring in propositions'. Although Glock clearly associates the latter position with the view that he attributes to the later Wittgenstein, and which Glock himself endorses, that a word must only be *capable* of occurring in a proposition – in the sense that it has been given some rule-governed use in the language – in order for it to have a meaning, that is not the only way of denying the restrictive view.

There are, in effect, two ways of describing the terrain here. *Either* the weak view is just the view that words can at least sometimes mean something without actually occurring at that moment as a component of a proposition; and in that case, there will be many different ways in which one might hold such a view, many different views which might all nevertheless count equally as 'weak' in that sense. On this way of counting, for

instance, simply acknowledging the existence of exceptions to the restrictive principle

(as, e.g., Rupert Read might be taken to suggest[27]) would be sufficient for one's view to

count as weak.   If we describe the terrain in this way, the restrictive version of the

context-principle is not required to secure the case for austerity because there may be

versions of the weak view, which are not yet as weak as Glock's version of that view, but

which would still provide support to austerity.   *Or* we might describe the weak view as

Glock's favoured view, that to have a meaning a word must only be capable of occurring

in a proposition.   In that case, however, the strong and the weak versions no longer

between them cover all the ground there is to be had: there will be scope for a variety of

positions in between those two, and neither strong nor weak.   Hence, again, the strong

view would not – not clearly at any rate – be required to make the case for austerity.

What Glock wants is something from each of these descriptions: from the first, he wants

the idea that the two positions between them take up all the territory available, so that if

one's version of the context-principle is not one then it must be the other; and he wants

from the second the association of the weak view with the version of contextualism that

Glock favours, which effectively closes off that position to the austere view and its

followers.   Needless to say, but he cannot actually have it both ways.   The point here,

though, is just this: that if rejecting the strong view does not as it were automatically lead

to one's adopting Glock's own view, then it is not at all clear that the strong view *is*, as

Glock says that it is, what is required in order for contextualism to provide support for

austerity.   Nor, crucially, would it then be clear that Glock's objections to the strong view

are so much as relevant to the exegetical or substantial plausibility of the austere view of

nonsense.[28]

Clearly, the restrictive view would support austerity (even if, as Glock notes,

Wittgenstein himself does not actually use it explicitly to provide an argument for

austerity); and it is a view that, for instance, Diamond ascribes to the Frege of the

Foundations of Arithmetic.[29] Frege's view there, Diamond notes, does not allow for the

meaningful use of, e.g., proper names in isolation, as in greetings.[30] But Diamond also

adapts that contextualism to Frege's later treatment of sentences as complete names, and

that view would, Diamond says, allow for the meaningful use of proper names in such

cases.[31] So Diamond clearly does not take herself, or Frege, to whom she also ascribes an

austere view of nonsense, to be committed to Glock's strong view. Rather, what

contextualism must rule out, if it is to be taken as providing support for an austere view

of nonsense, is simply this much: as Diamond puts it, 'senseless whole and parts with

content'.[32] Thus, Diamond writes of Frege:

> [H]e does not merely mean that a word has meaning if it contributes to the sense
> of any sentence in which it occurs, in accordance with general rules; that is, he is
> not saying that it is the *general* possibility a word has of contributing to sense that
> confers meaning on it. That would allow for the possibility of a senseless
> sentence composed of words which had had content conferred on them by general
> rules. But what he actually says ... is that it is through the sense of the whole that
> the parts get their content, and if this means anything at all, it must rule out the
> combination: senseless whole and parts with content.[33]

That combination is the bare minimum that contextualism must exclude if it is to provide

a case for austerity. And ruling out that much requires, according to Diamond, ruling out

one way of taking Frege's principle – the way favoured by Glock. But that need not

(though it might actually) result in one's taking the strong view as Glock describes it.

There is, then, a question-mark over whether the contrast Glock presents between the strong and weak views is quite as straightforward as he seems to suggest that it is and, given that, there is then a further question-mark too over whether what would be required by austerity is that strong view at all. Although the restrictive view might be used to provide an argument for austerity, there is a deal of scope for less restrictive interpretations of the context-principle (such as that involved in Diamond's discussion above), and which are not yet as weak as Glock's non-restrictive version, but which would still be capable of excluding the possibility of, e.g., Glock's combinatorial nonsense. That scope for different varieties of contextualism which would nevertheless still be potent enough to provide an argument for the austere view of nonsense may also serve to undermine the import of Glock's objections to strong contextualism, if those objections hinge on features of that view absent from those less restrictive versions.

My claim, then, is that Glock misrepresents the contrast between the strong and weak versions of the context-principle, and that in doing so, he exaggerates how much must be excluded by the context-principle for it to be compatible with, or provide a case for, the austere view of nonsense. Despite that, however, the version of the context-principle to be found in the *Tractatus* does indeed look very much like the restrictive principle, that words only have meaning when actually used in a proposition, in much the same way that its ontological counterpart in the *Tractatus* seems to rule out the idea of a simple object ('thing') occurring not in some state of affairs. Wittgenstein asserts the parallel as follows:

> 2.0122   Things are independent in so far as they can occur in all *possible* situations, but this form of independence is a form of connexion with

states of affairs, a form of dependence. (It is impossible for words to appear in two different roles: by themselves, and in propositions.)

If that were the case, and the version of the context-principle at work in the *Tractatus* is indeed the restrictive version as this remark suggests, then notwithstanding the objections to Glock already posted, his criticisms of the austere view, at least in relation to the *Tractatus*, might seem to hold good (by combining steps (vi) to (ix) in the above argument with the claim that Wittgenstein's Tractarian contextualism is indeed restrictive). I shall want to argue now that even if the version of the context-principle to be found in the *Tractatus* is, as it seems to be, restrictive, still Glock's arguments do not amount to a sound objection to attributing the austere view of nonsense to Wittgenstein there.

V

Glock's argument here, then, begins with the claim that the restrictive principle, at least in relation to our ordinary use of the word 'meaning', is plain wrong. Hence, in order to have any substantial plausibility at all as a view, this version of the context-principle requires a theoretical notion of meaning. And that, Glock claims, is at odds with austerity and the Resolute programme.

Glock's argument here goes by way of the simple fact that, in ordinary thought and talk, words can and do very often have a meaning outside the context (in the strict sense at least) of a proposition. So, for instance, Glock gives two examples. First, the following list of words:

to be	to abide
to have	to arise
to do	to awake

Second, a dictionary entry:

> **nonsense** *n* 1 a: words or language having no meaning or conveying no intelligible ideas b(1): language, conduct, or an idea that is absurd or contrary to good sense (2): an instance or absurd action 2 a: things of no importance or value: trifles b: affected or impudent conduct.[34]

In the first example, Glock notes, the words are not part of a proposition, but nor are they simply meaningless: rather, the left-hand column lists the auxiliary verbs, and the right-hand column the first of the irregular verbs of the English language. Of the second case, Glock writes: 'It would be absurd to maintain that the words printed in bold at the beginning of dictionary entries are meaningless, all the more so since the text that follows specifies what they mean'.[35]

Glock may well be right that, in one sense of the word 'meaning', that claim would be absurd, i.e. obviously false. But that point, one might reply, fails to engage with the restrictive principle (as invoked by Frege and the early Wittgenstein), precisely because the sense of 'meaning' appealed to or assumed there is a quite different one. So, as Diamond writes:

> You may use the word 'meaning' in any way you like, but nothing that logically can be a characteristic of a word in isolation can help to explain its meaning in the sense of 'meaning' in which what a sentence says depends on the meanings of its working parts.[36]

In that sense of the word 'meaning' – described broadly enough to encapsulate Frege's different conceptions as well as that of the *Tractatus* – it clearly would not be absurd to say of 'nonsense' as it appears in bold in the dictionary entry cited above that it is

meaningless; though the text of the definition does indeed specify the various roles that word can play as a working part of a proposition, it does not there actually fulfil any one of those roles. And similar things might be said of Glock's first example, too. For instance, some of these 'verbs' can have very different propositional roles (we talk of a 'to do' list, for example, or exclaim 'What a to do!') and they each could be given others, but they do not play any such role at all in Glock's list.

That response, however, plays nicely into Glock's hands. For Glock argues that such an objection is not open to New or Resolute readers of the *Tractatus* – i.e. those who would most want to find an austere view of nonsense there – since it relies on adopting a theoretical notion of meaning as against Glock's ordinary use of the term (step (vi)) and since such a notion is itself incompatible with the austere view of nonsense (step (vii)).

Glock's claim here is just this: that if one thinks of the *Tractatus* as consisting – in whole or in large part – of 'plain' (i.e., austerely conceived) nonsense, then one cannot also claim to find at work there a theoretical notion of meaning since, as Glock writes, 'such nonsense cannot constitute a theory'.[37] That much, at least, is surely true: nonsense, however conceived, cannot constitute a theory, but it is less clear why it should follow from this that Resolute readers cannot find in the *Tractatus* a technical notion of meaning.[38] That, on the contrary, seems to be part of the backdrop against which any reading of the *Tractatus* must situate itself. What is clear is that if Resolute readers wish to discard the Tractarian statement of the context-principle as elucidatory nonsense at the climax of the book (and not all will wish to do so), then they will not then also be able to

rely on it as substantial evidence for the austere view. If they do that, they might still want to rely on it as exegetical evidence, as forming part of the Tractarian ladder which one climbs up but must kick away afterwards, and if so some story will be needed of how that is so much as possible. Still, such a story may not be as hard to find as might at first be thought, since the austere view does allow for all kinds of other differences between nonsense-sentences – differences not logical, but, say, psychological or aesthetic, for instance – and which may suffice to provide such a story. It would, however, be fair to say that the burden here would lie with those Resolute readers who followed this route (even if alternative – standard – readings are likely to themselves require a parallel story of their own). Nevertheless, it simply is not clear that no such story is possible, and Glock provides no reason for thinking it to be. Hence, even if we grant that the restrictive principle is required, and if we grant too that that relies on a technical notion of meaning, that provides no clear-cut case against attributing to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* an austere view of nonsense.

VI

Glock's exegetical case against the austere view in relation to the *Tractatus* is supplemented by the point that the restrictive version of the context-principle is at odds with, or conflicts with, another view there: namely, the *Tractatus*'s compositionalism. Glock's suggestion here is that that conflict undermines the attribution to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* of such a restrictive principle, and that it suggests that a substantial case for the austere view could not be built upon the restrictive principle, since, for Glock, the compositional view is clearly correct. Thus, Glock concludes that the conflict suggests

that 'the early Wittgenstein did not take *TLP* 3.3 [the Tractarian reformulation of Frege's context-principle] as literally as proponents of the austere view suppose', and that the restrictive version of the principle must be wrong.[39]

Roughly, compositionalism is the view that the sense of a sentence is in some sense determined by the meanings of its constituent parts, and the way that those parts are put together. In the *Tractatus*, that view gets expressed in the following remarks:

> 4.024   To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true.
>
>   (One can understand it, therefore, without knowing whether it is true.)
>
>   It is understood by anyone who understands its constituents.
>
> 4.025   When translating one language into another, we do not proceed by translating each *proposition* of the one into a *proposition* of the other, but merely by translating the constituents of propositions.
>
>   (And the dictionary translates not only substantives, but also verbs, adjectives, and conjunctions, etc.; and it treats them all in the same way.)
>
> 4.026   The meanings of simple signs (words) must be explained to us if we are to understand them.
>
>   With propositions, however, we make ourselves understood.
>
> 4.027   It belongs to the essence of a proposition that it should be able to communicate a *new* sense to us.
>
> 4.03   A proposition must use old expressions to communicate a new sense.

The merit of that view, as Wittgenstein's remarks suggest, is that it seems to be the only way of explaining our ability to understand new sentences: we do, that is, understand sentences we have not previously encountered, and the most plausible – perhaps the only plausible – way of explaining that fact seems to be that we are familiar with the constituent words and with certain patterns of combining them.

Though Glock does not expand further on the sense of contradiction between that view and restrictive contextualism, reasons for thinking them in conflict are not hard to find. For where contextualism (of any stripe) asserts the 'primacy of the proposition', as it were, over its constituent parts, compositionalism on the contrary stresses (or seems to) the primacy of the individual words over the proposition.

One way of seeing how those two views might not conflict after all is to ask what follows from compositionalism; that is, compositionalism itself might be held to be trivially true, but what is a matter of contention is what that view then entails. On Glock's interpretation of it, compositionalism has the consequence that a word has a meaning independently of any sentence in which it occurs. On another reading, however, it might be taken to entail instead only that when a component of one sentence occurs again as a component of another sentence it must have the same meaning in both occurrences. That second reading would then clearly be compatible with the restrictive view, but it might seem to leave mysterious the very feature of natural languages that compositionalism intuitively seems to be required in order to explain: namely, the fact that we can understand sentences which we have not previously encountered. Does restrictive contextualism – and the latter view of the consequences of compositionalism – then leave that fact a matter of mystery? One explanation of why it does not is given (again) by Diamond in her discussion of Frege.

Diamond reads Frege as maintaining not only a strong form of contextualism, but also the compositional view that 'we understand a sentence only because we know the

language – know, that is, the general rules fixing the content of expressions in the

language'. Thus, Diamond writes:

> We need to see how Frege can do both: can mean what he says about the parts
> getting their content through the sentence's having sense, and can recognise that
> we grasp what a sentence says via our grasp of general rules determining the
> meaning of expressions in the language.[40]

Diamond's answer, in short, is that we do arrive at the sense of a sentence by means of

attributing content to the parts, but that we proceed to an understanding of the sense of a

sentence by attributing that content only provisionally, conditionally upon the whole

sentence expressing a thought of such-and-such a form. Thus, *only if* the sentence as a

whole expresses a thought of such-and-such a form will the parts have the content

provisionally assigned to them.

So, for instance, Diamond takes as an example the sentence 'Venus is more

massive than Mercury', and she begins by assuming that there are two kinds of general

linguistic rule. The first enables us 'to break down whole sentences into elements with a

syntactic characterisation'; the second fixes 'the meanings of proper names, concept

expressions and relational expressions of various sorts'.[41] And both kinds of rule apply

only conditionally. Now, faced with an utterance that we have not previously come

across, we can apply each kind of rule in turn. Supposing that 'Venus is more massive

than Mercury' is such an example, we might apply the first kind of rule in order to give

us a characterisation of what the syntactic structure of the sentence might be – what

combination of what kinds of expressions. So we might take certain pointers – the

presence of capital letters for instance – to signal that what we have here is a proper

name, followed by a relational term, followed by another proper name. But, crucially, we

apply these rules only conditionally – we are, as it were, offering a prognosis, and not a

diagnosis. Diamond writes:

> [T]he sentence may be taken to be a two-term relational expression completed by
> the proper name 'Venus' in the left-hand place and the proper name 'Mercury' in
> the right-hand place, *but only if* the thought expressed by the whole sentence is
> that the object 'Venus' stands for, whatever that is, has whatever relation it is the
> relational expression stands for to whatever object it is 'Mercury' stands for.[42]

The sentence will have such a syntactic structure only if the thought it expresses does

actually have a form of this kind. And the same is true of the second kind of rule: we

might know, for instance, that 'Venus' is sometimes used as a proper name to stand for

the particular object Venus; but again, that will be borne out only if the thought expressed

by the sentence as a whole is a thought asserting of Venus whatever the rest of the

sentence says.

On Diamond's account, then, we do arrive at the meaning of a sentence

compositionally, but crucially also conditionally, and because our hypotheses as to what

the parts of the sentence mean are conditional on what the overall thought expressed by

the sentence actually is, that process is perfectly compatible with even strong

contextualism.

Diamond's account here, then, suggests one way in which Glock's objection

might be countered on both an exegetical and a substantial level. I do not want to

endorse Diamond's account unconditionally; it seems to me that more needs to be said

about exactly what these rules look like, how exactly a conditional application of a rule

differs from an application of a conditional rule, and perhaps too in expressing the

process in a way that does not beg any questions. That said, however, something like this account, one which explains our arriving at the meaning of the whole by way of hypotheses about the meanings of the parts, seems to me at least plausible, and also not to conflict with the restrictive principle.

Moreover, the force of Glock's exegetical conclusion here – that Wittgenstein's compositionalism suggests he did not hold such a restrictive version of contextualism – is further undermined by Glock's apparent acceptance elsewhere in the same paper that Wittgenstein did in the *Tractatus* hold a restrictive understanding of the context-principle; a stance which Glock explains by way of certain features of Wittgenstein's picture-theory of propositions and by Wittgenstein's extraordinary notion of meaning.[43] Thus, Glock might be taken to acknowledge that there are, after all, good reasons to attribute to the early Wittgenstein a restrictive form of contextualism. Furthermore, and on the same kind of *ad hominem* note, it might be thought to be undermined, too, by Glock's discussion elsewhere of the *Tractatus*'s compositionalism as forming the 'implicit rationale' for Wittgenstein's early restrictive contextualism (even if Glock goes on to say that, as a rationale, it is not strong enough to justify the restrictive view).[44] Whatever the force of those two points, however, it simply is not the case that restrictive contextualism and compositionalism are obviously in conflict, such that one would be forced to abandon one or other position; again, if Glock's point here is to work, more argument is needed.

VII

I have argued that Glock's criticisms of the austere view of nonsense, and of the

attribution of that view, at least to the early Wittgenstein, by way of the context-principle,

do not succeed. Some of those arguments – for instance, against Glock's way of

presenting the austere view itself, and also the contrast between the forms of

contextualism Glock distinguishes – apply equally to Glock's arguments against

attributing the austere view to the later Wittgenstein too. There, Glock claims that

Wittgenstein's contextualism is far weaker than the version present in the *Tractatus*:

> [I]n the *Investigations* Wittgenstein quotes Frege's restrictive principle with
> approval.... But, with occasional exceptions, Wittgenstein explains the context-
> principle in a non-restrictive way, one that is compatible with the idea that
> individual words can mean something without *actually* occurring in a
> proposition.... What he insists on is that they must be *capable* of occurring in
> propositions.[45]

There, Glock claims, Wittgenstein's view is that 'the meaning of a word is determined by

how it can be used in sentences', that a word has a meaning if it has a use. And, Glock

emphasises, '[t]here is a difference between *having a use in the language* and *being*

actually used on a particular occasion'.[46] Hence, words even in the context of a

nonsense-sentence can, in that sense, have a meaning.

Glock recognises that 'New Wittgensteinians', as he calls them, would deny that

that is the extent of Wittgenstein's contextualism in his later work. Thus, the stricture is

applied once more at the level of sentences (which may consist of only one word), and

the range of variables making up the relevant context is extended to include the 'whole

language-game', though, as Lars Hertzberg writes, 'there is no way of determining in

advance what contextual considerations will be relevant'.[47] But what Glock does not

recognise is that his account of Wittgenstein's contextualism and of nonsense is

susceptible to a similar objection to that put forward by Diamond against Hacker in

relation to the *Tractatus*. That is, in order for Glock to make the case for the existence of

combinatorial nonsense, consisting of prohibited combinations of words, he needs the

words within a nonsense-sentence to be capable of having meaning in a sense over-and-

above the sense in which they simply have a use in the language; for it may be the case

that the words have a use in the language, but are not being used in that way here, in

some nonsense-sentence, nor in any other way, and in that case their nonsensicality

would be due not to the meaning they do have, but to their not having any meaning at all

in this occurrence. So, like Hacker, what Glock needs to supplement his view is either

the claim that words can have at most one meaning, or a violation-conception of the rules

for their use, such that any deviation from that would result in nonsense. Both of these

options are incompatible with linguistic creativity, with the idea that we can give words

new uses, without laying down in advance the rules governing such uses, and Glock

provides no evidence for thinking either to be true to Wittgenstein's later view.

VIII

I have argued, then, that Glock's objections to the austere view of nonsense, and to its

ascription to Wittgenstein, early and later, by way of the context-principle, fail for a

number of reasons. First, Glock's presentation of the austere view distorts what kind of

view it is, and in doing so lays down a requirement for a particular kind of justification

which the austere view need not meet. Further, Glock's presentation of the context-

principle, and of his different versions of it, impose a version of that principle upon the

austere view that it need not accept. Hence, it seems, Glock's objections to the austere

view based on his understanding of the context-principle may not even be relevant to the

austere view at all. Finally, I have tried to show that even were we to accept Glock's way

of presenting the matters at stake, still his arguments against the austere view do not

succeed – for instance, because it is not clear that Resolute readers cannot make some

kind of appeal to a technical notion of meaning in the *Tractatus* (though such a notion

will have to be, in some sense, 'overcome'), or because it is not clear that restrictive

contextualism and compositionalism are incompatible as Glock suggests. I have also

wanted to suggest, in the previous section, that Wittgenstein's later contextualism is not

at all how Glock suggests, but that even were it so, that would not suffice to establish the

case for Glock's understanding of nonsense there; rather, Glock's account, like Hacker's

must be supplemented with a further idea, and that it is implausible to attribute to later

Wittgenstein. These points serve to undermine Glock's arguments for point (2), as laid

out above (section *III*), and their substantial counterparts (B) and (C). Without those

points, and without the mispresentation of the austere view assumed in Glock's paper,

Glock's claim that the austere view lacks independent plausibility ((3) and (D)) is also

undermined. Hence, Glock's case against austerity fails.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] For instance: *M*, p.54; *PG*, p.44, p.63; *PR*, pp.58-59; *BB*, p.5; *RFM*, p.41.

[2] Hans-Johann Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the* Philosophical Investigations, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.221-245.

[3] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.222.

[4] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.223. What Glock means by this phrase – 'combinatorial nonsense' – is quite distinct from what, e.g., James Conant would mean by it, were he to use it.

[5] Glock expresses this view in his 'All Kinds of Nonsense', for instance, on p.222, where he writes: '[B]oth early and late [Wittgenstein] allowed that nonsense can result not just from failure to assign a meaning, but also from combining meaningful expressions in a way that is prohibited by the rules for the use of these expressions'. For evidence of this view in Hacker, see the previous chapter.

[6] P.M.S. Hacker, 'Was He Trying to Whistle It?', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.353-388 (p.365).

[7] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.222. That Glock means *logically* distinct kinds here is to be inferred from the material preceding this remark on p.222.

[8] Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic: A logico-mathematical enquiry into the concept of number*, trans. J.L. Austin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.x; §60; §62; §106. Frege's three methodological principles are listed in full above, Chapter One, p.48.

[9] Frege's context-principle is nowhere explicitly adapted by him to his later distinction between sense and meaning (*Sinn* and *Bedeutung*) and, though the principle does appear in Frege's later work (i.e. post the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction), there is a question-mark over how it might be so adapted and, indeed, over whether it can be or should be so adapted. (Much of the evidence of Frege's later contextualism – post-*Grundlagen* and post-'Sense and Meaning' – is compiled in Theo M.V. Janssen, 'Frege, Contextuality and Compositionality', *Journal of Logic, Language and Information* 10 (2001), 115-136; see especially pp.125ff.) Wittgenstein not only reformulates the sense and meaning distinction in the *Tractatus*, but also adapts the context-principle to it. Although *Tractatus* 3.3 talks explicitly of names, I do not think it absurd to hold that Wittgenstein already in this work is attacking the view that all words function as names for entities, just as he does in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

[10] See, for instance, Cora Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.95-114 (especially pp.97-100) – although this paper of Diamond's is concerned largely with the discussion of Frege, it is also intended to suggest parallels with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (see p.112 and note 7); and James Conant, 'Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.174-217 (especially section 5, pp.189-195).

[11] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', pp.227-228 and p.229. Since Glock seems to note the point that 'it is individual words rather than whole sentences that have a meaning' (p.229; similarly, p.226) as though it counts against strong contextualism, it might be thought that he associates the latter view with the absurd position that the individual words of a sentence no more have a meaning than do the individual letters of a word. See also here Michael Dummett, 'Sense and Tone', in *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1973), pp.1-7 (p.3).

[12] So, for instance, Wittgenstein writes in that passage that a proposition 'is understood by anyone who understands its constituents' (4.024); or that translation between languages proceeds not by translating whole propositions 'but merely by translating the constituents of propositions' (4.025); or that a proposition 'must use old expressions to communicate a new sense' (4.03). See below, pp.124-125.

[13] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.228. Glock also notes the incompatibility of restrictive contextualism and compositionalism (in general) as a substantial objection to the restrictive principle (i.e. and not simply as an exegetical objection) on pp.226-227.

[14] Glock makes this suggestion in 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.228, where he writes as follows: 'This [the compositionalism of *Tractatus* 4.024-4.026] suggests that the early Wittgenstein did not take TLP 3.3 [Wittgenstein's Tractarian context-principle] as literally as the proponents of the austere conception

suppose, and as they themselves need to do in order to construct the aforementioned argument against combinatorial nonsense'. (The argument Glock refers to here is given at the bottom of p.225 and is cited below, p.116.) Nevertheless, Glock also seems to concede that the early Wittgenstein *did* hold a restrictive view (p.227 and p.228), but argues that that view involves a notion of meaning incompatible with the aims of a Resolute reading. Glock seems to want further to suggest that Wittgenstein was already moving away from his restrictive principle in the *Tractatus*, even if he had not explicitly resigned it.

[15] That objection – namely, that the austere view of nonsense is incompatible with Wittgenstein's later use of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments – I address at the end of Chapter One above. Similar arguments to some of Glock's here based around Wittgenstein's interpretation of the context-principle are rehearsed by Genia Schönbaumsfeld in her paper, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?' (unpublished manuscript, presented at 'The *Tractatus* and Its History' conference, Stirling, 11.09.2005), specifically in relation to Conant's work on the *Tractatus*. Like Glock, Schönbaumsfeld claims that if we take Wittgenstein's Tractarian context-principle 'absolutely literally' – in the way presupposed by Conant's reading, as implying that 'words *only* have meaning in the context of a proposition', then (1) 'it just has to be false'; (2) it 'contradict[s] the later Wittgenstein's dictum that the meaning of a word is its use in the language'; (3) it 'renders superfluous the employment of dictionaries'; and (4) it 'leaves it altogether mysterious how a *sentence* gets to mean anything in the first place'. See Schönbaumsfeld, 'Is Wittgenstein's Ladder Real?', pp.17-20. Much of my argument against Glock is also applicable to Schönbaumsfeld's objections.

[16] The latter view, Glock associates with the position he attributes to the later Wittgenstein, and which Glock himself endorses, that a word has a meaning if it is capable of occurring in a proposition; if, that is, it has a (rule-governed) use in the language.

[17] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.227.

[18] It is not entirely clear which version of contextualism Glock thinks is to be found in the *Tractatus*. On the one hand, Glock writes of 'the early Wittgenstein's restrictive principle' (p.227), and explains its restrictiveness in terms of Wittgenstein early notion of meaning, and in terms of the picture-theory (p.228). On the other hand, Glock asserts that the compositionalism of *Tractatus* 4.024-4.03 contradicts the restrictive principle, suggesting 'that the early Wittgenstein did not take *TLP* 3.3 [Wittgenstein's context-principle] as literally as proponents of the austere conception suppose' (p.228). (The purpose of the latter point may be to suggest that Wittgenstein already in the *Tractatus* had reasons to be moving towards the weak version of contextualism Glock claims is to be found in the *Investigations*. A version of the point also appears as part of Glock's substantial case against austerity (pp.226-7).) Glock's argument (above) covers both eventualities.

[19] The view that nonsense is only ever a result of our failure to give to words (in such a context and to date) a meaning.

[20] Again, in the sense that they have a use in the language, even if they are on such occasions being misused, and so cannot be said to have, or stand for, a meaning.

[21] The view that there are no logically distinct kinds of nonsense.

[22] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.222 and p.237.

[23] Nevertheless, there is some confusion about the sense of conflict between those two views in Glock. In that same paper ('All Kinds of Nonsense'), for instance, Glock describes restrictive contextualism as the 'flipside' of compositionalism: 'The flipside of this compositionalism is that the role of names is to contribute to the determination of the sense of an elementary proposition. Outside that context, Wittgenstein seems to have held, they cannot have such a role' (p.227). Likewise, elsewhere Glock refers to compositionalism as forming the 'implicit rationale' behind strong contextualism, even if, as Glock goes on to say, as such a rationale, it proves insufficient (*A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.87).

[24] The suggestion that Glock treats the austere view as itself amounting to a substantial philosophical position is also made by William H. Brenner in his review of the collection in which Glock's paper appears. Brenner writes: 'I believe that Glock's criticisms of Diamond depend on ascribing to her some special, draconian notion of nonsensicality, over and above the ordinary notion of having failed to say anything'. Brenner, 'Review of *Wittgenstein and Scepticism* (ed. Denis McManus) and *Wittgenstein at Work* (ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer', *Philosophical Investigations*, 2005, 375-380 (p.380).

[25] That, however, is not to say that that fact is not worth emphasising, nor that the view itself is not worth defending, precisely because, and in spite of its apparent triviality, it is nevertheless very often the case that it is assumed that nonsense can be more substantial than that, and for a variety of purposes. Moreover, that

acknowledgement brings the view into line with what the later Wittgenstein has to say about what philosophy does result in, or consist of (*PI* §§126-128).

[26] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.225.

[27] Rupert Read, 'What "There Can Be No Such Thing As Meaning Anything By Any Word" Could Possibly Mean', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.74-82 (p.77).

[28] Thus, the rhetorical role played by Glock's argument (cited above, p.9) is crucial; it is the construction of that argument on behalf of the austere view that makes it seem as if the restrictive view *is* what is required when in fact nothing nearly so strong is.

[29] See above, note 8.

[30] Cora Diamond, 'Frege and Nonsense', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.73-93 (p.80).

[31] That might seem like little consolation, since Frege's later view here is widely regarded as false, as a retrograde step. My point here, however, is just that Diamond clearly does not think that the austere view of nonsense must deny that words can be used meaningfully outside propositions, and so need not take Glock's strong, restrictive view. Rather, austerity only rejects certain ways – such as Glock's – of cashing out the idea that words can have meanings in contexts other than their immediate use in propositions.

[32] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.109. Of course, were Diamond talking of the early Wittgenstein here that use of the word 'senseless' might be misleading, given the distinction between 'senseless' and 'nonsense'. See Introduction, p.3.

[33] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.109. See also Diamond, 'Frege and Nonsense', p.79 and p.81.

[34] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.226.

[35] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.226. Again, Glock goes on to note that a further reason for thinking the restrictive principle wrong is that it clashes with compositionalism; I discuss this below, section *VI*.

[36] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.98. (Note, by the way, the appeal Diamond makes here to (some form of) compositionalism in her explanation of (some form of) contextualism.)

[37] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.227.

[38] One reason for thinking that might be this: that there would then be no such thing as recognising the occurrence of a sign – such as 'meaning' – as a logical element at all, as one symbol rather than another. That is correct, but it ignores the idea – central to Wittgenstein's work – that we very often do, in practicing philosophy, imagine ourselves to make sense, imagine our words to make sense, where in fact we, and they, make none: our use of words can have all the appearance to us of making sense when all along we are failing to say anything. What Glock ignores is just the idea that Wittgenstein's words might be written with the intention that they induce in the reader the illusion that they are being put to some, technical use, but that they fall apart when we try to make sense of them from the inside as it were. An apparently technical notion of meaning might be utilised in this way, and may bring us to an understanding of nonsense as not consisting of words with meaning. But abandoning the idea that there was any sense behind those remarks would leave us not abandoning the austere view too, since that view follows not from a theory of sense or meaning, but from the rejection of such a theory.

[39] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.228 and p.226.

[40] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.109.

[41] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.109.

[42] Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', p.110.

[43] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', pp.227-8.

[44] Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p.87.

[45] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.229.

[46] Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', p.229.

[47] Lars Hertzberg, 'The Sense is Where You Find It', p.6. Available at: http://www.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Staff/lhertzbe/The_Sense_Is_Where_You_Find_It.doc Accessed: 02.03.2005. (NB. This quotation is taken from a passage omitted from the version published in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).)

Chapter Four

Austerity and Ineffability

A Reply to Adrian Moore[1]

I

The previous chapter was concerned with a number of substantial objections to the austere view of nonsense, and to its ascription to Wittgenstein, early and later. In this chapter, I shall want to turn to address a different kind of objection, focussing instead on the role of austerity within New or Resolute readings of the *Tractatus*. Two views are central to such readings: first, that Wittgenstein did not hold that there is such a thing as ineffable insight and nor did he hold that such insights are what it is the purpose of Tractarian nonsense to communicate;[2] second, that Wittgenstein did not hold that his propositions there in the *Tractatus* are nonsense as a result of their failure to meet certain criteria or others laid down either in the *Tractatus* in those self-same nonsensical propositions or elsewhere. A corollary of that second feature, of course, is that Wittgenstein held instead to an austere view of nonsense, such that nonsense results only when we fail to give to our words a meaning, and not for any reason more philosophically substantial than that.[3]

Adrian Moore, in his paper 'Ineffability and Nonsense', presents an argument which seems to show that the austere view of nonsense in fact involves a commitment to the existence of ineffable understanding (or insight) and so that these two core or defining features of the Resolute program are in conflict.[4] That would not exactly amount to a criticism of austerity, and in fact Moore himself clearly subscribes to such a view of nonsense and, furthermore, attributes such a view to Wittgenstein too.[5] But such an argument would nevertheless have force against a raft of views typically held by New or Resolute readers and would present a substantial obstacle to the Resolute program.

Against such an argument, then, I argue in this chapter that the austere view *is* compatible with the general rejection of the very idea of ineffable insight (of any kind). Sections *II* to *V* outline Moore's argument and develop a response to it; and sections *VI* to *VIII* then apply part of my response in reply to a similar objection to the austere view made by Ben Vilhauer, and focussing especially on part of Cora Diamond's attempt to carry through the Resolute program.[6] Before I turn to outlining what I shall call 'Moore's argument', however, I need first to note one qualification. Although Moore develops the argument I rehearse below, it would be wrong to take Moore himself to endorse the argument, at least in relation to the kind of example I use below. Rather, for Moore, it is only when it comes to a particular 'family' of illusions of sense – those of transcendental idealism[7] – that austerity commits us to ineffable understanding, and so not in relation to the kind of fairly pedestrian illusion of sense with which both Moore and I develop the argument. There may be reasons for thinking Moore to be more committed to the

applicability of the argument beyond simply the case posed by transcendental idealism

than he himself says; I shall not speculate on those reasons here.[8] Even so, however, that

argument is worth considering in its own right, and independently of Moore's committing

to it. I call the argument 'Moore's argument' since Moore develops it, and not because I

take him (in general or in an unqualified sense) to be committed to it.

II

On the austere view, all nonsense, logically speaking, is pure gibberish; there is no such

thing as nonsense that results from the meanings of the words so combined. How could

this view be thought to involve a commitment to ineffable understanding? Moore's

argument centers on the understanding involved in recognising that a given sentence *is*

nonsense. In brief, the point is this: that our understanding that any particular string of

words is nonsense will always depend upon a prior understanding – understanding, say,

of how not to use concepts[9] – that, on the austere view, will be inexpressible. Hence,

followers of the austere view ought, if they are to be consistent, also to adhere to the

existence of some kind of ineffable understanding. This does not mean that we must

reject the austere view of nonsense out of hand; there is still a clear sense in which

austerity is correct.[10] Nevertheless, however, the argument, if correct, will have serious

implications for austerity's usefulness for New interpretations of Wittgenstein's

Tractatus, since the novelty of such interpretations depends in large part upon their

opposition to the notion of ineffability. The consequence of such an argument, then, will

be not that austerity must be abandoned in general, but that, insofar as they do want to

oppose any notion of ineffability (and not just, say, the notion of ineffable truths), it must

be abandoned by New readings.[11]

Moore's argument runs as follows. On the austere view, nonsense 'is only ever

sheer lack of sense' – though it may not always seem like it – and the judgement that a

particular string of words is nonsense 'is always a judgement about the actual history, to

date, of some particular sign'.[12] Such a judgement, that is, on the austere view, will

always be 'empirical' – arrived at by observing the signs in use –, 'provisional' – since

the fact that the signs have no use in this context does not preclude their being assigned a

meaning in the future –, and 'metalinguistic' – the judgement is always about the signs

themselves, that no meaning has been attributed to them here. Thus, the judgement that a

certain string of signs is nonsense can, on the austere view, only be expressed by

mentioning, not using, those signs; the judgement is about the signs themselves, not any

concepts lying behind them since, if they are meaningless, no concepts lie behind them at

all. So, for instance, Diamond writes:

> [I]f you cannot make sense of the sentence 'God is three persons' then you can
> say that Smith uttered the words 'God is three persons' and you can say that he
> uttered them with the intonation of asserting something, but you cannot say of
> him that he said that God is three persons. 'Smith said that p' is itself nonsense
> unless what we put for 'p' makes sense.[13]

For austerity then, the judgement that, say, the string of signs 'a is F' is nonsense, should

be expressed as follows: 'No meaning has so far been given to "a is F".'

Illusions of sense, however, Moore notes, have varying degrees of force, varying

degrees of hold over us; we are more prone to some, more inclined to take some for sense

than we are others, and more effort is required to rid us of some than of others too:

> Some illusions of sense are very superficial indeed ('The square root of 2 is green'); some, a bit deeper ('It is five o'clock on the sun'); some, deep enough that a little reflection is needed to carry conviction that they are illusions of sense at all ('It is five o'clock at the North Pole'); some, so deep that it can be a matter of unresolved controversy whether that *is* what they are ('I have performed infinitely many tasks').[14]

What this suggests, however, is that the judgement that some string of words is nonsense

'is sometimes arrived at by reflection on concepts' and, if this is the case, then that

judgement, contra austerity, is not simply empirical, provisional and metalinguistic.[15] In

fact, far from it: in order to judge that *no* game is played with the signs in which the

sentence in question counts as a legal move, we must first reflect upon each game in

which those signs do feature. So, for instance, for a sentence 'S', consisting of the signs

'x', 'y', and 'z', we need to judge, for example, that (i) in game A, played with x, S is not

a legal move; and (ii) in game B, played with y, S is not a legal move; and so on for each

game in which 'x', 'y', or 'z' feature, until judging (n) no other game is played with these

signs.[16]

   While this last, along with our conclusion (that as yet no meaning has been given

to the signs), *does* report a brute matter of fact, and does qualify as empirical, provisional

and metalinguistic, the others (i, ii, and so on) do not. On the contrary, such judgements

are carried out at the level of concepts and are therefore judgements which, Moore

suggests, are properly expressed 'by using, not mentioning, the corresponding signs',[17]

and so, for instance, in a sentence such as the following: 'There is no such thing as its

being five o'clock at the North Pole'.[18] But if that is the case then the understanding or

judgements in question will, on the austere view, prove ineffable since, in order to be

used, the signs must be embedded (play a logical role) in a sentence that does make sense

and that, if they are meaningless, is precisely what cannot be done.

This argument does not amount to a criticism of austerity; it does not imply that

austerity should be rejected. In fact, the claim that some string of signs is nonsense *is*, as

Moore notes, 'always empirical, provisional, and metalinguistic'.[19] But such a claim

presupposes a *prior* judgement (or judgements) that is about the concepts involved – the

concepts, for Moore, that the utterer of nonsense intends to invoke[20] – and so is neither

empirical, nor provisional, nor metalinguistic. 'Reflection on those concepts', Moore

writes, 'is required to recognise the illusions as illusions' but, furthermore, he continues,

'reflection on those concepts is required to recognise that, at least as far as *they* go, no

meaning has so far been given to these signs'.[21] The challenge to New interpreters of the

Tractatus, and to the Resolute program in general, that the argument presents, then, is to

explain why their commitment to austerity does not also commit them, in the way

suggested, to some notion of ineffability.

III

How, then, might New readers defend their use of austerity against such a challenge?

There are, I think, a number of ways to contest the point. One way would be to claim that

it simply is not most appropriate to use rather than mention the signs; that the

understanding is, after all, adequately captured by the sentence 'No meaning has so far

been given to "It is five o'clock at the North Pole".' Something like this objection is

clearly what Moore has in mind when he imagines the following response:

> Someone might say, 'This is all very well. But you have still not explained how it
> can be appropriate to express such recognition – the recognition that something is
> a mere illusion of sense – by using, rather than mentioning, the relevant signs.
> Why is it not just as nonsensical to say, "There is no such thing as its being five
> o'clock at the North Pole" as it would be to say, "There is no such things as its
> being frumptiliously quirxaceous"?'[22]

Moore's own response to this is interesting for its similarities to certain remarks of

Diamond's, though, as Moore notes, 'Diamond does not herself talk in terms of ineffable

understanding'.[23] Should she talk in terms of ineffable understanding? Is it best to use

rather than mention the relevant signs?

One reason for answering 'no' to both of these questions is that, for Diamond, the

reflection involved in arriving at the judgement that, as Moore puts it, as far as these

concepts go, no meaning has been given to the signs, might be purely psychological

since, for Diamond, one of the things Wittgenstein inherits from Frege is a narrow,

objective conception of what counts as a thought. From that perspective, the reflection

on concepts involved in judging that a sentence is nonsense just doesn't count and so is

not best expressed by using the signs in the context of a sentence that attempts to pass

itself off as a thought. Instead, as a purely psychological process, it is perfectly

adequately expressed by simply mentioning the signs. Only if the judgement constituted

a genuine thought would the use of the signs be a requirement for its expression.

Against this, however, the force of Moore's argument seems to lie precisely in his

having shown that reflection on concepts is required – in all but cases of the most obvious

gibberish, cases where there just are no relevant concepts (however exactly what is 'relevant' might be determined here) that might be substituted for the signs – in order to determine that a nonsense-sentence is nonsense. Thus, Moore's argument might be taken to show that even if this reflection is a psychological process, still what it is a reflection on must be the concept itself, its logical role, since otherwise we would not be able to arrive at the judgement we need to arrive at prior to concluding that a given sentence is nonsense; we would not, that is, be able to judge, for any given concepts, that as far as they go, no meaning has been given to the signs. If Moore can correctly be taken to have shown this much, then if this reflection on concepts is purely psychological it must be possible for there to be a logical component of a psychological process and, as a result, what would be required for the expression of this judgement would still be, as Moore says, a use not a mention of the corresponding signs.

Indeed, it seems hard to deny that using the relevant signs and not merely mentioning them would be not simply more appropriate, but necessary for any expression of the judgement in question. If we simply mention the signs (as in the sentence 'No meaning has so far been given to "a is F"'), we express the empirical, provisional and metalinguistic judgement that the signs, for the time being at least, have been given no meaning. But that is simply a different, more general judgement than the one that we want to express: namely, the judgement that, for a given pair of concepts (rather than for *any* given pairs of concepts, of all those that the signs call to mind), those same concepts do not stretch to fit the case in hand. The expression of *that* judgement, as opposed to the

metalinguistic one, requires that we use the signs in order to establish which concepts it is

that we are making a judgement about.

So it seems, then, as if it is indeed best to use rather than mention the relevant

signs, and from that it seems to follow that this judgement will, at least from the point of

view of austerity, prove ineffable. There is, however, a way of accepting this first point

without accepting the second. There is, in other words, a way of accepting that it is best

to use not mention the relevant signs, but without contradicting either the austere view of

nonsense or the context principle, and also without committing oneself to the existence of

ineffable understanding or judgements. Thus, were we to replace Moore's sentence

('There is no such thing as its being five o'clock at the North Pole') which uses (or

attempts to) the signs and (so) is undeniably nonsense, with the following sentence – one

that does not simply mention the signs but engages with the concepts behind them and yet

is not, on the austere view, nonsense – there would be no trouble of the kind Moore's

argument suggests:

> There is no such thing as meaningfully saying, "It is five o'clock at the North
> Pole" and (i) meaning by "five o'clock" what you ordinarily would in arranging to
> meet someone in a particular place at five o'clock, and also (ii) meaning by "the
> North Pole" what you ordinarily would in saying that the North Pole is that Pole
> which was first reached by Wally Herbert.

The judgement, so expressed, would be effable and not, at least on the austere view,

nonsense. It asserts that, in the nonsense-sentence, the signs – however else they may be

being used – are not being used to express these concepts. All that is required for the

example to work is that there be a recognisable similarity of sign (and not of symbol)

between the genuine use of the sign and its occurrence in the nonsense-sentence.[24] Given

that basic similarity, it is possible to assert the key difference that in one case the sign *is*

being used to express this concept and in the other, however else it may be being used, it

is not being used to express the same concept. Thus, the sentence clearly expresses the

particular judgement that we want – and not simply the empirical, provisional and

metalinguistic judgement that Moore elsewhere refers to – since it does engage with the

relevant concepts; it says of these particular concepts that, as far as they go, no meaning

has been given to the signs 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole'. Since the sentence

requires only a recognisable similarity between the sign's two occurrences, between its

use and its occurrence in the nonsense-sentence, the expression is perfectly compatible

with austerity.

IV

For austerity, then, there is a perfectly adequate means of expressing the judgement. The

reformulated sentence shows that even if Moore is correct (exegetically or otherwise) and

Diamond wrong in counting this a purely psychological process, still the judgement is not

ineffable.

The sentence with which Moore illustrates his argument – 'There is no such thing

as its being five o'clock at the North Pole' – is not, then, the most appropriate attempt to

express the judgement, but it might still be the best expression in that it might be

understood as a kind of shorthand for the longer, more wordy and awkward expression

outlined above. In this way, then, we might, as Moore seems to want to, be able to 'make

room for the straightforward truth of an assertion of "Henry thinks that it is five o'clock

at the North Pole"".[25] Such a statement might be understood as simply shorthand for the

following:[26]

> Henry thinks that there is such a thing as meaningfully saying, "It is five o'clock
> at the North Pole" and (i) meaning by the words "five o'clock" what one
> ordinarily means when arranging to meet someone in a particular place at five
> o'clock, and also (ii) meaning by "the North Pole" what one ordinarily does when
> using those signs in talking about the Pole that Wally Herbert was the first to
> reach.

Whether or not Moore's version of the sentence may indeed be substituted for this longer

sentence, however, the latter shows that austerity can offer a plausible way of

empathising with the utterer of nonsense as suffering from a *particular* illusion of sense

rather than simply from some, not further specifiable, illusion. The purely psychological

sense of understanding open to austerity's followers does indeed go deep enough into the

illusion; it is capable of distinguishing one illusion from the next. It is capable of

expressing that the particular illusion that Henry is suffering from is one in which, when

he utters the words 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole', he imagines himself to be

employing in his utterance of the signs 'five o'clock' and 'the North Pole' the very

concepts that those same signs actually do express when used, for instance, in arranging

to meet at five o'clock and in talking about the North Pole. What it will not do, of

course, is let you into that illusion in the way that Henry himself inhabits it, or is gripped

by it. It will not, that is, let you see it from the inside, as it were. Something more is

required for that. But it does provide the austere view with a perfectly adequate means by

which to distinguish between illusions of sense, and to specify an illusion as being that

illusion in particular: e.g. the illusion of employing *those* concepts by means of *that*

combination of signs. It is not at all clear that any more than this is needed.[27]

V

New readings of the *Tractatus* can, then, meet the challenge presented by Moore's

argument, and without having recourse to ineffable understanding: if not simply because

they operate with a different notion of what a thought is, then because, regardless of

which conception is being used, there still is an adequate means of expressing the

judgement or understanding in question. Thus, the austere view of nonsense does not

involve, as Moore might be taken to suggest it does, a commitment to the existence of

ineffable understanding. Nor does austerity prevent us from differentiating between

illusions of sense, or from specifying which illusion in particular someone is labouring

under. None of this is to say that austerity is incompatible with ineffability;[28] only one

way of taking that idea – as meaning ineffable truths – is specifically ruled out by the

austere view of nonsense. All I have been concerned to show here is that the animosity

towards any notion of ineffability often displayed by New readers of the *Tractatus* is not

in contradiction with what may be thought to be the one unifying principle of such

readings: the austere view of nonsense.

VI

In the previous sections, then, I hope to have established that the two basic features of the

Resolute program are not, contrary to the suggestion of Moore's argument, in

contradiction with one another; New readers can meet the challenge Moore's argument

presents.[29] In this section and the following ones, I want to put part of my argument

against Moore's to work in response to a different criticism; in particular, I want to show

how this way of expressing what is involved in coming to see that a sentence is nonsense,

developed in response to Moore, can be instrumental too in deflecting a criticism made

by Ben Vilhauer. Vilhauer's objection focusses on Cora Diamond's account of

elucidation in the *Tractatus*, and that account, Vilhauer thinks, reveals 'a tension in

Diamond's account of nonsense'.[30] I first outline (two different parts to) Vilhauer's

objection and then argue that there is no such tension.

Vilhauer actually identifies two separate, though related, areas of conflict in

Diamond's account, the first of which has much in common with Moore's criticism.

Vilhauer's criticisms focus on Diamond's ability to accommodate, within her austere

conception of nonsense, Wittgenstein's notion of elucidation. That is, for Vilhauer,

certain remarks of Diamond's on Wittgenstein's approach to ethics make use of a notion

of elucidation that is incompatible with the austere view of nonsense. This way of

describing the focus of Vilhauer's critique might make it seem to be more a tension

between two separate areas of Diamond's reading of the *Tractatus* – between her account

of nonsense and her account of elucidation and of ethics. It is, however, a tension

specifically within Diamond's account of nonsense insofar as both Diamond's account of

ethics and Wittgenstein's remarks on elucidation make it a requirement that nonsense be

capable of functioning as an elucidation. It is, for instance, Wittgenstein's *elucidatory*

propositions that, at *Tractatus* 6.54, he declares to be nonsense.

What, then, is this notion of 'elucidation'? Wittgenstein gives us some idea,

Vilhauer notes, in some central remarks in the *Tractatus* on philosophy (remarks which,

incidentally, might be thought to be part of the 'frame' of the *Tractatus* on Diamond's

reading and so should, perhaps, be treated as straightforwardly senseful remarks, and not

as nonsense[31]). Thus, Wittgenstein writes that 'Philosophy aims at the logical

clarification of thoughts' and that 'A philosophical work consists essentially of

elucidations' (*TLP* 4.112). For Vilhauer, this is enough to conclude that 'we can

understand elucidation as the logical clarification of thought'.[32] This may be rather brief

(as well as, perhaps, being a little quick) but, for Vilhauer, even this minimal explanation

of elucidation is enough to give cause for concern about Diamond's account of nonsense.

It is, Vilhauer thinks, hard to see how Diamond's account of nonsense could find room

for this understanding of elucidation. If nonsense is, as it is for Diamond, only ever plain

nonsense – no better or worse than 'piggly wiggle tiggle' – then how could it, Vilhauer

asks, 'yield logical clarification of thoughts'?[33]

Vilhauer develops this initial suspicion by way of certain of Diamond's remarks

on the ethical point of the *Tractatus* and focusing on two aspects of Diamond's account

of nonsense. First, that 'in a nonsense-sentence, there are no [logical] elements because

there is no sensical proposition to *have* [logical] elements'.[34] This, Vilhauer notes, is a

consequence of Diamond's strict interpretation of Wittgenstein's adoption of Frege's

context-principle.[35] Second, that a nonsense-sentence, being nonsense, 'cannot appear as

a logical element of a sensical sentence'.[36] This, for instance, is the point of Diamond's

remark that ' "Smith said that p" is itself nonsense unless what we put for "p" makes

sense'.[37]

For Vilhauer, these two elements of the austere view of nonsense conflict directly

with Diamond's illustrations of two stages in her account of elucidation.[38] These two

stages, as Vilhauer sees them, are as follows:

> The first stage is becoming conscious of the fact that some of the things we say,
> especially when doing philosophy, are nonsense. This step involves coming to
> criticize nonsense's nonsensicality. The second step is allowing ourselves to
> continue making our nonsensical utterances, but making them in a way that
> manifests our consciousness of their nonsensicality.[39]

For Vilhauer, these two stages conflict respectively with the two aspects of Diamond's

view of nonsense outlined above.   When Diamond criticises the nonsensicality of

nonsense, Vilhauer thinks, she treats nonsense-sentences as though they can and do have

logical elements. And when Diamond attempts to make nonsensical utterances in a way

that manifests her consciousness of their nonsensicality, for Vilhauer, she treats

nonsense-sentences as though they can be logical elements in senseful sentences. Against

this, my argument against Moore can, I think, show that in the first instance Diamond

does not (and does not have to) treat nonsense-sentences as having logical elements.

Other arguments, however, will be needed against the second.

VII

Vilhauer's first criticism runs as follows. If, on the austere view of nonsense, a nonsense-

sentence cannot have a logical element, then that view will have the following

consequence:

> [T]here is no way of equating the words in a nonsense-sentence with those same
> words as they appear in sensical sentences, and explaining that the nonsense-
> sentence is nonsense because if the words it contains are to yield sense, they must
> play the roles they play in the sensical sentences of which they are elements.[40]

That point is actually two: there is no way of logically equating the words and so there is

no way of explaining the nonsense of the one in terms of the sense of the other. These

consequences, Vilhauer explains, put Diamond's account of nonsense at odds with certain

other remarks Diamond makes about ethics and which, for Vilhauer, exhibit the first

stage in Diamond's understanding of 'elucidation'.

Diamond's attempts to articulate the ethical point of Wittgenstein's writing

involve repeated use of the phrase 'attitude to life' or 'attitude to the world as a whole'

but, as Diamond herself notes, such phrases are problematic:

> [M]y own phrases – 'attitude to life', 'attitude to the world as a whole' – are
> curious ones. An attitude is an attitude to something or other: to a person, or
> something else in the world; or to things being this way rather than that, as I may
> be disappointed or pleased by something's having turned out as it has. The phrase
> 'attitude to the world as a whole' is not only curious, but from the point of view of
> the *Tractatus* anyway, mere nonsense. If I am using a phrase which is simply
> nonsense in supposedly articulating Wittgenstein's views, what can I think I am
> achieving?[41]

Vilhauer is less interested in Diamond's answer to this question than in the self-criticism

that prompts it, and in what that shows about the first stage in her account of elucidation:

criticising the nonsensicality of nonsense. 'If nonsense-sentences have no logical

elements', Vilhauer writes, 'then nonsense-sentences cannot have any [logical] elements

in common with sensical sentences'.[42] But if this is the case, Vilhauer continues, 'then

studying the roles played by logical elements in sensical sentences should have no role in

the criticism of nonsense'. Here, however, according to Vilhauer, Diamond's criticism of

her own remarks proceeds exactly as if it could play a role, and so as if there were a

'logical relationship' between the sign as it appears in a nonsense-sentence and as it

appears in a senseful sentence:

> When she explains the nonsensicality of the phrase 'attitude to the world as a whole', her explanation appears to be grounded in the role of the word 'attitude' as a logical element in the sensical sentences in which it appears. In other words, she seems to be saying that 'attitude to the world' is nonsense *because* of the role attitude must play if it is to yield sense.[43]

This, Vilhauer continues, were it the case, would be obviously incompatible with the austere view of nonsense. It is, he writes, 'exactly what her account rules out'.

Vilhauer proceeds to note two possible objections to his criticism. The first is an objection to his way of describing what is going on in Diamond's self-criticism; that he appears to be playing a little fast and loose with Diamond's account in attributing to her a causal link between the senseful and the nonsensical occurrences of the sign 'attitude'. That is, Vilhauer is aware that his insertion of the word 'because' in his description of Diamond's view (above) is prejudicial since no such link between the role of the word 'attitude' as it occurs in genuine sentences and as it occurs in nonsense-sentences is explicitly asserted by Diamond. Nevertheless, Vilhauer thinks, it is implicit in her remarks:

> [W]hether or not Diamond explicitly states a logical connection between 'attitude' in the nonsense-sentence and 'attitude' as a logical element, the logical connection is clearly implied by adverting to 'attitude' as a logical element in the process of criticizing 'attitude' as nonsense.[44]

For Vilhauer, then, there is a more-or-less tacit appeal to a causal connection of some kind in Diamond's explaining that her attempts to articulate Wittgenstein's view of ethics fall into nonsense, and why they do so; an explanation that is ruled out by her account of nonsense.

Against this, I do not think that Diamond need imply nor does imply any logical relationship between the two occurrences of the word 'attitude'; nor need she or does she imply that a nonsense-sentence can, after all, have a logical element. Before I say why, however, I want to consider the second objection to his criticism that Vilhauer imagines and draw out the similarities between (what I have been calling) Moore's argument and Vilhauer's, similarities that may perhaps not be evident when focusing on this one specific instance. Vilhauer's second imagined objection, then, is this: 'how can we criticize nonsense at all, without saying the kind of things Diamond says about "attitude"?'[45] It is, he replies, a good question, but one which gives us reason to be concerned about Diamond's general account of nonsense. Vilhauer, then, is suggesting that Diamond's account of nonsense leaves us with no means of criticising nonsense as nonsense at all, since for that we seem to need to be able to treat nonsense-sentences as having logical elements. Just as for Moore we seem to need to be able to reflect on the ordinary concepts of 'five o'clock' and of 'the North Pole' in coming to see that 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole' is nonsense, for Vilhauer, to criticise nonsense as nonsense, and to say why it is nonsense, we need to treat signs appearing in nonsense-sentences as logical elements standing in logical relationships to signs in other, senseful sentences. And indeed, like Moore, Vilhauer might suggest, though he does not, that this could call into question the effability of our critique of nonsense and so the compatibility of 'New' interpretations' opposition to ineffability and their reliance on austerity, rather than simply casting doubt on austerity itself.

If Vilhauer's criticism shares a similarity with Moore's argument, however, it also shares a susceptibility to the same objection. Vilhauer's insertion of a causal link into his description of Diamond's account of the nonsensicality of her phrase is disingenuous because there need be no such logical relationship between the two signs for Diamond's account to work. When Diamond discusses the role 'attitude' plays in ordinary sentences, we can say of this the sort of things Moore says in discussing the sentence 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole'. For Moore, the rules of language 'can proscribe as well as prescribe', but they do so only, he says, 'by default'. Diamond, then, in describing the role of 'attitude' as always being 'an attitude to something or other: to a person, or something else in the world'[46] is, of course, ruling things out as well as in. As far as what she says goes, we might say, no meaning attaches to the phrase 'attitude to the world as a whole'. This judgement we might express as follows:

> There is no such thing as uttering the phrase, 'attitude to the world as a whole' and meaning by the word 'attitude' what one ordinarily means when talking about one's being disappointed or pleased at how something has turned out, and also meaning by 'the world as a whole' not some thing in particular, but everything.

Again, as above, there is no need to recognise in the nonsense-sentence a logical element; all that is required is a recognisable similarity of sign. We can say that as far as these concepts go, no meaning has been given to the signs, without saying that it is because of the meaning the signs do have that the sentence is nonsense. If we can take this to make clear the psychological process involved in criticising or recognising that something is nonsense, this makes plain that nonsense-sentences need not be capable of having logical elements for it to be possible to criticise them as nonsense. It is, perhaps, Vilhauer's readiness to assume that if two sentences do not have a logical element in common then they can have no element in common at all, that leads him to overlook the possibility of

comparison offered by the repetition of signs and so the judgement that, as far as *these*

concepts go, no meaning has been given to *those* signs.

VIII

This first tension is, then, I think, no tension at all. Vilhauer's second objection is that the

second stage in Diamond's account of elucidation commits her to holding, contra

austerity, that nonsense-sentences can themselves be logical elements in senseful

sentences. The second stage in Diamond's account of elucidation involves continuing to

use and utter nonsense, but 'with an awareness of its nonsensicality'.[47] This, Diamond

thinks, is part of the method of the *Tractatus*; it employs nonsense-sentences, but does so

self-consciously and Wittgenstein frames this nonsense with other remarks (such as *TLP*

6.54) that indicate how he himself views those elucidatory remarks. Diamond illustrates

this as follows:

> If I say 'I am inclined to say that the letter e is green', I frame the sentence by
> putting at the beginning words that may in a particular context indicate that I do
> not regard the sentence 'e is green' as sense. Note how this differs from 'I should
> like to believe that Vitamin C prevents colds'. The framing words there are
> entirely consistent with the sentence 'Vitamin C prevent colds' being good sense.
> But 'I am inclined to say that e is green' may be meant to distance the speaker
> from any commitment to the sensefulness of saying 'The letter e is green'.[48]

What is wrong with this, Vilhauer notes, is that 'a sentence that has nonsense as a part is

nonsense as a whole'[49] and so the framing device 'I am inclined to say', when prefixed to

a nonsense-sentence as above, will itself be nonsense and therefore bears no logical

relationship at all to those same signs as they appear in a senseful sentence. 'So how',

Vilhauer asks, 'can "I am inclined to say" in a nonsense-sentence "indicate" anything at

all?'[50]

Diamond's chosen means of expression here is, Vilhauer is right, not overly cautious, but two things can nevertheless be said in her defence. First, we should beware the extent of the criticism. While it may be a sound objection to Diamond's mode of illustrating her point, that is as far as it does go. Though the notion of the frame, and in particular which remarks are and which are not parts of the frame, is in dire need of further specification (see below, note 31), still those remarks which most obviously fulfil this function do not take the form of Diamond's illustration. They do not, that is, attempt to include the frame and the nonsense within the same sentence; rather, the framing sentences occur as separate sentences and so do not require that nonsense-sentences be capable of functioning as logical elements within them. Such remarks as 'this book is not a textbook' (*TLP* Preface), 'Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity' (*TLP* 4.112) and *Tractatus* 6.54 are not susceptible to Vilhauer's objection and so neither is Diamond's general account of Tractarian elucidation. But a way of rescuing Diamond's remarks may be possible too. I suggested earlier that we might make room for the assertion of 'Henry thinks that it is five o'clock at the North Pole' by considering it to be a kind of shorthand for a longer form of expression that is compatible with austerity. Something similar might be possible here. That is, you may express your understanding of an illusion that still has some hold over you, or may continue to use nonsense in a self-conscious way as follows:

> I am inclined to say or I feel I need to be able to say 'the letter e is green' and mean by 'the letter e' the letter that features twice in the word 'green', and also mean by 'green' what one ordinarily does in a sentence such as 'Grass is green'.

It may be that Diamond's version could then be considered a kind of shorthand for this means of expression. Either way, however, her account of Tractarian elucidation in general is quite compatible with the demands of austerity. Vilhauer's second tension is, then, at best, too local to be worth troubling over.

IX

In this chapter, then, I have outlined two possible objections to the austere view of nonsense and its role within New or Resolute readings of the *Tractatus*. Moore's argument may show – as Moore himself wants it to – that the austere view is not incompatible with a notion of ineffable understanding or insight, as distinct from the idea, which Moore in agreement with Resolute readers finds 'foreign' to the *Tractatus*, of ineffable truths. But Moore's argument (as considered here) will not suffice to establish the stronger point that the austere view is incompatible with the rejection of ineffable insight in all its forms. Instead, I hope to have shown that there are ways (or at least one way) of expressing the understanding in question and which are not incompatible with an austere view of nonsense (and hence that the understanding is not, from the perspective of austerity at least, ineffable). In sections *VI* to *VIII* I have argued that an in some ways similar objection by Ben Vilhauer, and focussing specifically on Cora Diamond's development of the Resolute program is at least in part susceptible to essentially the same point as made against Moore's argument. Vilhauer's first criticism or tension rests on not seeing possibilities of expression that are available to austerity such as that outlined in response to Moore's argument; and Vilhauer's second objection is simply too narrow or localised a point to have any significant force.

Notes to Chapter Four

[1] This chapter is followed by a postscript which revisits parts of my discussion here. An abbreviated version of the chapter is forthcoming in the journal *Philosophical Writings*. Both that version and this chapter benefited from comments from Cora Diamond, Richard Gray, Adrian Moore, Alessandra Tanesini and two anonymous referees for *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

[2] Although much of their argument is directed specifically at the idea of ineffable truths, I assume that most Resolute readers would also be opposed to any other kind of ineffable insight (in general or as ascribed to Wittgenstein, as constituting the 'lesson' of his *Tractatus*); that is certainly what is implied by Cora Diamond and James Conant's description of the two basic features of the Resolute program. See Conant and Diamond, 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely: Reply to Meredith Williams and Peter Sullivan', in *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*, ed. Max Kölbel and Bernhard Weiss (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.46-99 (p.47).

[3] Again, for this view of nonsense, see Cora Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp.95-114. Diamond and Conant's account of these two general features of 'Resolutism' is given in their 'On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely', pp.47-8 and notes 7 and 46. Peter Sullivan describes that corollary – the austere view – as one of Resolution's 'core commitments'. See Sullivan, 'On Trying to be Resolute: A Response to Kremer on the *Tractatus*', *European Journal of Philosophy* 10:1 (2002), 43-78 (p.49).

[4] A.W. Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* LXXVII (2003), 169-193.

[5] See, for instance, Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186, where he writes of the austere view as being 'fostered by the *Tractatus*', and also his *Points of View*, Chapter 9, especially pp.197-203.

[6] Ben Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account of Tractarian Nonsense', *Philosophical Investigations* 26:3 (July, 2003), 230-238.

[7] See, for instance, the remarks immediately following Moore's 'Third Response' on p.188 and p.189 of his 'Ineffability and Nonsense'. I discuss this part of Moore's argument more fully in the postscript to this chapter.

[8] It has been suggested to me that it is at least possible – if perhaps uncharitable – to read Moore as wanting to suggest a commitment to ineffability from within austerity along the lines of the argument I outline, rather than just indicating their compatibility. If that were the case, this paper would constitute an objection to Moore. It is, however, open to Moore to agree with almost everything I write here.

[9] This is how Moore characterises it. See Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.184. (Again, I discuss this further in the postscript to this chapter.) Moore in fact talks in that passage of our 'knowledge' (rather than 'understanding') of how not to use concepts, since Moore holds that, in his words, 'states of understanding *are* states of knowledge'; he would nevertheless, however, be prepared, so he claims, to give up on that claim were it to be proved that there could be no such thing as ineffable knowledge, and in that way leave room for the possibility of ineffable understanding. See 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.178, note 35.

[10] As, indeed, Moore notes ('Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186).

[11] This raises the question: 'What would be left of a New reading were it to abandon austerity?' The answer, I think, is 'virtually nothing'. Since austerity just is more central to New readings than their opposition to ineffability (see, for instance, James Conant, 'Two Conceptions of *Die Überwindung der Metaphysik*: Carnap and Early Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.13-61; note 42, where he states as much), I take it that New readers would sooner abandon the latter than the former.

[12] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186.

[13] Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of the *Tractatus*', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.149-173 (p.156). Diamond makes the same claim elsewhere in the following way:

You are not ascribing a belief to someone if you say that she believes that piggly wiggle tiggle, if 'piggly wiggle tiggle' is nonsense.... If 'piggly wiggle tiggle' is nonsense, then 'Mary thinks that piggly wiggle tiggle' or 'Mary says that piggly wiggle tiggle' is nonsense.

(Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the *Tractatus*', p.151.)

[14] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.185.

[15] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186.

[16] I owe this way of phrasing the matter to a reviewer for *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

[17] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186.

[18] Moore uses this sentence ('There is no such thing as its being five o'clock at the North Pole') to illustrate the sort of thing our attempt to express our understanding may issue in. Moore himself is clearly not committed to maintaining that the understanding in question must be expressed in just such a formulation, but neither does the argument require this for its conclusion. See Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', pp.188-9. Again, I discuss further what Moore is and is not committed to in this region in the postscript to this chapter.

[19] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186.

[20] This, at least, is how Moore describes the relevant concepts (see Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.186). Peter Sullivan qualifies this a little. See Peter Sullivan, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* LXXVII (2003), 195-223, (p.212).

[21] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.187.

[22] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.187.

[23] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.189, note 69.

[24] My example, and especially my discussion of it, assumes that what is required in parts (i) and (ii) is the coordination of a mentioned occurrence of the signs with a use of *those same* signs. Does it, then, require something that would count as *both* a use and a mention at once (for instance, something like, in the case of (i), the following: '(i) meaning by "five o'clock" what you ordinarily would when using those same signs in a sentence such as "I'll meet you outside the museum at five o'clock"'), and so something that could not be replaced by a use of a different sign expressing the same concept? – I do not think so, although of course were, say, (ii) to be re-written to reflect this (e.g.: '(ii) meaning by "the North Pole" what you ordinarily would when using those same signs in talking about the Pole that Wally Herbert was the first to reach') my description of what is going on in the example would have to be altered accordingly.

[25] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.189. Moore suggests that we might make room for this via his 'second response' (p.188): roughly, that despite the surface grammar of the expression, it involves a mention, not a use of the signs following 'Henry thinks that...'. Such a response is open to Moore here (though it will only express the understanding that Henry thinks *some* sense attaches to the words, and not which concepts he does intend to call upon in uttering it). Where Moore originally moots it, however, it is not a response that is open to him.

[26] This suggestion runs counter to Diamond's claim that '"Smith said that p" is itself nonsense unless what we put for "p" makes sense' (*op. cit.*, see above, p.136 and note 13). Little, however, hangs on the difference between my account and Diamond's here.

[27] My view differs from Diamond's at this point. For Diamond, the *Tractatus* presupposes a very particular use of the imagination: the imaginative understanding of the utterer of nonsense. If we are to understand or empathise with the utterer of nonsense, Diamond thinks, we need more than is provided by the perspective offered by empirical psychology. That perspective, whereby we remain 'outside' the speaker's thought, does not go deep enough into the illusion. From there, 'all you can see is someone inclined to put together words, to come out with them in certain circumstances, to associate them with images, feelings and so on' (Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the *Tractatus*', p.157). What is wrong with this, according to Diamond, is just that it gives us nothing that could be called an illusion that so-and-so.

On the other hand, however, Diamond recognises that, in understanding the utterer of nonsense, 'you are not inside his thought as you are when he makes sense and you understand what he says, because there is no such internal understanding, there is no thought that such-and-such to understand'. There is, then, no 'inside', but, for Diamond, 'what it is to understand a person who utters nonsense is to go as far as one can with the idea that there is' (*Ibid*).

I think that the understanding captured in my sentence above about Henry's beliefs probably *is* as far as one can go with that idea, and so I think there is little to be said for Diamond's imaginative

understanding of the utterer of nonsense insofar as it is intended to go further than this. Certainly, my account goes beyond mere empirical psychology, and shows how one can engage with the concepts (where there are any) that the utterer of nonsense intends to invoke, but without contradicting austerity. Whether it goes far enough for Diamond, however, and just how far her imaginative understanding is intended to go, I do not know. It should be noted here that since it is this role for the imagination that forms a key difference, for Diamond, between her reading and a positivist one, my view has the consequence that I need to find another story of that difference. See Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the *Tractatus*', Sections 4 and 7.

[28] In fact the point of Moore's argument (from p.186 through to the midway point on p.189) seems to be largely to establish just that these two ideas or views are *not* incompatible.

[29] As noted above, I do not include in this the especial difficulty Moore thinks is posed by that class of illusions of sense of which transcendental idealism is perhaps the exemplary case; I shall have more to say about this in the postscript to this chapter, below.

[30] Ben Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account of Tractarian Nonsense', *Philosophical Investigations* 26:3 (July, 2003), 230-238. It may be that Vilhauer's (first) objection, in the light of comments already made on Moore's argument, is all-too-obviously flawed. However, it is, I think, worthy of inclusion here, partly as a means of showing that Diamond's account of nonsense is capable of accommodating some notion of elucidation, and partly because the only previous response that I know of to Vilhauer (in Rupert Read and Rob Deans, ' "Nothing is Shown": A "Resolute" Response to Mounce, Emiliani, Koethe, and Vilhauer', *Philosophical Investigations*, 26:3 (July, 2003), 239-270 (pp.261-263)) seems by and large to accept his argument. Thus, Read and Deans write:

> We acknowledge our deeper-than-deep indebtedness to Diamond's groundbreaking work, but regard the early work from which Vilhauer quotes very much as a prolegomena for a resolute reading, not as the reading itself. ...
> There is of course very much in Diamond that we are in agreement with. However, in our opinion, Diamond's account is in part susceptible to the criticisms that Vilhauer makes. (p.262.)

Read and Deans do of course detail other objections to Vilhauer's argument, but ones aimed primarily at defending resolutism in general and not Diamond's account of it. As will become clear, the only part of Diamond's paper that is susceptible to Vilhauer's objection, in my opinion, is itself largely inconsequential.

[31] The notion of the 'frame' (as opposed to the body) of the *Tractatus* is a controversial one. For Diamond, the frame consists of a number of remarks that straightforwardly make sense, rather than being elucidatory nonsense. They are 'remarks about the aim of the book and the kind of reading it requires' (Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the *Tractatus*', p.149):

> The frame of the book contains instructions, as it were, for us as readers of it. Read it in the light of what it says at the beginning about its aim, and what it says at the end about how you are meant to take what it contains. (*Ibid*, p.151.)

I discuss this distinction, and a couple of criticisms of it, briefly above, Introduction, pp.23-25.

[32] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.231.

[33] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.231.

[34] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.232. There is, I suspect, something telling about Vilhauer's ommittance of the word 'logical' here. Initially, he writes that 'nonsense-sentences have no logical elements', but drops the 'logical' when repeating the sentiment. It may, of course, simply be that, second time round, he feels the qualification unnecessary. On the other hand, there may be some substance to the feeling that Vilhauer's criticism only works if one assumes, as this suggests he might, that if a senseful sentence and a nonsense-sentence cannot share a logical element, then they cannot share any kind of element at all. For more on this, see below, note 42 and pp.154-155.

[35] See above, Chapter One, pp.48-50 and Chapter Three.

[36] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.234.

[37] *Op. cit.* See above, this chapter, p.139. This, of course, runs counter to my suggestion (above, this chapter, p.146) that there may be a way of making room for the sense of this kind of assertion. However, little hangs on the difference.

[38] Vilhauer notes that, although Diamond does not enumerate the different stages of her account, were she to do so, there would be at least these two. Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.234, note 4.

[39] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.234.

[40] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', pp.232-3.

[41] Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', p.155.

[42] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.235. Again, Vilhauer might be interpreted as implying, in dropping the word 'logical' second time round, that if no logical elements can be shared, no other elements can be shared either. As we saw in arguing against Moore, however, all that needs to be shared between a nonsense-sentence and a senseful sentence for the kind of comparison Diamond wants to make, is a sign, not a symbol. See above, this chapter, pp.144-145 (and note 24), note 34, and below, pp.154-155.

[43] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.235-6.

[44] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.236.

[45] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.236.

[46] *Op. cit.* This chapter, pp.151-152.

[47] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.236.

[48] Diamond, 'Ethics, Imagination and the *Tractatus*', p.160.

[49] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.237.

[50] Vilhauer, 'On a Tension in Diamond's Account', p.237.

Postscript to Chapter Four

Austerity and Ineffability Revisited

I

In this postscript, I should like to return to Adrian Moore's paper ('Ineffability and Nonsense') and to his argument there for the possibility of some form of ineffable understanding. Although Moore does not commit to – indeed he explicitly distances himself from – what I have been calling 'Moore's argument', there is also a sense in which he does commit to a version of the argument specifically as it applies to a restricted range of 'illusions of sense'. I shall want to outline that argument and why my previous response to it might be thought to beg the question to some degree against it, and then I shall want to attempt to develop a more robust, non-question-begging response to Moore here.

First, then, I want to return to the role of (what I have been calling) 'Moore's argument' within his paper. That argument, as I have described it above, goes something like this:

(1) On the austere view, the judgement that a sentence is nonsense is provisional, empirical (or contingent), and metalinguistic.

(2) Such a judgement is best expressed by mentioning not using the signs involved (e.g. 'There is no such thing as meaningfully saying "It is five o'clock at the North Pole"').

(3) That judgement, however, depends upon a prior judgement (or judgements) that is (or are) about the concepts involved (e.g. that *these* concepts will not suffice to give the sentence a sense).

(4) The latter is not merely provisional, empirical, and metalinguistic, and so is best expressed by using, and not simply mentioning, the signs involved (e.g. 'There is no such thing as its being five o'clock at the North Pole').

(5) The latter judgement(s) or the understanding that issues in it, on the austere view, will prove inexpressible.

(6) Hence, the austere view involves a commitment to ineffable understanding.[1]

In relation to the kind of (fairly pedestrian) nonsense-sentence which Moore at first considers (and on which I focus in Chapter Four) – such as 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole' – Moore is clearly not committed to step (4), which is pivotal, or indeed to anything quite like it.

In fact, Moore explicitly distances himself from such a claim. Thus, Moore imagines the question: 'But you have still not explained how it can be appropriate to express such recognition – the recognition that something is a mere illusion of sense – by using, rather than mentioning, the relevant signs. Why is it not just as nonsensical to say, "There is no such thing as its being five o'clock at the North Pole" as it would be to say, "There is no such things as its being frumptiliously quirxaceous"?'[2] To this, Moore canvasses three possible (and, as Moore notes, mutually incompatible) responses. Furthermore, Moore declines to speculate on what other responses may be available, thereby acknowledging at least that others (such as that given in Chapter Four) may indeed *be* available.[3]

Of those responses which Moore does consider, only the third would commit him

to something like step (4) of the above argument. That response runs as follows:

> *Third Response*: It is indeed as nonsensical to say, 'There is no such thing as its
> being five o'clock at the North Pole' as it would be to say, 'There is no such thing
> as its being frumptiliously quirxaceous'. But this is still the best we can do when
> trying to express our recognition of that illusion, as of any other similar illusion –
> the point being that our recognition of that illusion, as of any other similar
> illusion, is incapable of being expressed. It is of a piece with the ineffable
> understanding afforded by the *Tractatus*.[4]

Of that response, however, Moore writes that he is 'uncomfortable' with it and, as he

goes on to say: 'I find the postulation of *that* link between ineffability and nonsense

overly crude'. So, even though Moore acknowledges a certain pressure to take such a

response, he clearly does not give in to it: 'I recoil from the third response', he writes.[5]

But if that is the case, what is this argument doing in Moore's paper?[6] Moore's

answer follows straight away; for despite 'recoiling' from the third response, Moore

continues, 'I do ultimately want to endorse something of that sort'. Having distanced

himself from such a response, and so from the crucial premise (step (4)) in the argument

given above, is Moore now going to commit to it after all? Well, yes and no. No, in

relation to the kind of nonsense-sentence with which Moore illustrates the argument, but

yes (or so, at least, it appears), in relation to a particular and 'altogether more

fundamental *family* of illusions to which we are subject':

> I have in mind illusions that manifest the urge we have, itself ill-conceived, to
> transcend our limitations: illusions that arise when we try to apply concepts that
> are adapted to these limitations as though they were not, indeed as though they
> were not adapted to any limitations at all. An example, I suggest, is the illusion
> that attaches to the sentence 'The world exists as a limited whole'.[7]

Moore's suggestion, insofar as I understand it, is that here, in relation to this kind of

nonsense-sentence, our recognition of their nonsensicality is apt for an application of

(something like) that third response; our understanding that these sentences (the sentences

that the 'urge we have to transcend our limitations' issues in) offer no more than an

illusion of making sense will itself prove inexpressible in the way that Moore's original

argument suggests.

Why, however, should that be so? This, Moore only gestures at (while

recognising that much more is required here) by way of the following rhetorically-posed

questions:

> Consider the understanding which someone might have of this general
> phenomenon, and the associated capacity to recognise the illusions in this family
> as illusions. Can *that* understanding be expressed? Will not the attempt to
> express it involve producing more of the very nonsense in question? Will it not
> involve trying to transcend the relevant limitations in an effort to stake off the
> territory that is home to the illusions; and perhaps also trying to implement some
> form of transcendental idealism whereby we cannot talk about anything that is not
> part of 'our' world, a world that is itself in some mysterious way bound by these
> limitations? In sum, will it not involve trying 'to draw a limit to thought' – where
> this is something that cannot be done unless 'both sides of the limit [are]
> thinkable'?[8]

The attempt to express our recognition or understanding that the sentences in this family

of illusions are mere nonsense will inevitably, so the suggestion is, issue in further

nonsense (and, what is more, in nonsense belonging, so it would seem, to that self-same

family of nonsense-sentences: i.e. in 'more of the very nonsense in question').

Specifically, perhaps, it is for Moore the understanding of this family of illusions (not just

as illusions but) *as a family of illusions* – the understanding 'of this general phenomenon'

– since (again, perhaps) to recognise them as a family is to recognise them as sharing a

common source in the attempt to 'transcend our limitations'. And what that recognition involves is some recognition of those limitations (recognition of them as limitations and recognition of where they lie), and hence expressing, or attempting to express, our understanding of these limitations would then seem to involve us in the attempt to *draw* (those) limits to thought – and that attempt itself, so Wittgenstein seems to suggest in the preface to the *Tractatus* (and in spite of the almost inevitably misleading presentation of matters there[9]), can only issue in nonsense.

Of course, as Moore notes, much more needs to be said here, with regard to these reasons. But without further elaboration of those reasons, my response to Moore's argument in the previous chapter (Chapter Four) must to some extent 'beg the question' against Moore here, since it is clear that Moore thinks that *no* (attempt at) expression of our understanding – not any of those three responses he canvasses, nor any of the further possibilities he declines to speculate upon – could possibly suffice in relation to this family of illusions, and our recognition of them *as* illusions (and, of course, specifically as a *family* of illusions). Against this, it would be futile to insist that the understanding in question just *can* be expressed in such and such a way.

Rather than do that, then, and rather than (alternatively) invent reasons on Moore's behalf (and which then to counter), I want to explore the possibility of a more thorough-going response to Moore, suggested to me by Cora Diamond, and in terms taken (fairly) directly from the *Tractatus* itself, and which makes use of the notion of a

propositional variable there, and which might deny to Moore not the inexpressibility of

the understanding in question, but the understanding itself.

That understanding is characterised by Moore as understanding of how *not* to use

concepts. Moore writes:

> [O]ur grasp of concepts comes to have two aspects. Alongside our knowledge of
> how to use them, there is our knowledge of how not to use them; alongside our
> command of what sense they can be used to make, there is our command of what
> ostensible sense they can be used to make. Each of these admits of degrees. Our
> command in the latter case can be more or less complete, just as our command in
> the former case can.[10]

For Moore, then, there is a very substantial notion of what it is to understand how not to

use concepts; a notion, that is, that is substantially different from (i.e. something that is

more than just the flipside of) our understanding of how to use concepts correctly. The

problem arises when our understanding of how not to use concepts seems to involve us in

grasping something about the limits of thought itself.

In order to see how we might usefully bring the *Tractatus* notion of a

propositional variable into play here in denying the (as it were) 'substantial-ness' of that

understanding of how not to use concepts, I want to return to Moore's original, pedestrian

example: the sentence 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole'. What Moore suggests is that

in coming to recognise that this string only purports to make sense we must reflect first

on 'the relevant concepts' – the concepts which the utterer intended to invoke or,

alternatively, the concepts which these signs do express when used elsewhere with a

sense, in sentences such as 'It is five o'clock in Paris', or 'It is five o'clock at the Eiffel

Tower'. At *Tractatus* 3.315, Wittgenstein writes the following: 'If we turn a constituent

of a proposition into a variable, there is a class of propositions all of which are values of

the resulting variable proposition'.   Immediately prior to that remark comes

Wittgenstein's reiteration of the context-principle, at 3.314, and his application of that to

the notion of a variable: 'An expression has meaning only in a proposition. All variables

can be construed as propositional variables. (Even variable names.)' We might then

imagine applying those two remarks (3.314 and 3.315) to the second of those two

sentences given above: 'It is five o'clock at the Eiffel Tower'. If we turn the words 'the

Eiffel Tower', as they appear as a constituent of that proposition, into a variable, the

result will be, on the one hand, a variable proposition of the form, 'it is five o'clock at

...', and, on the other hand, that there will be a class of propositions all of which are

values of that variable proposition. (In Fregean terms, what we will have is a function,

and a course of values for it which together will be all of the ways that that function can

be sensefully completed.) The common characteristic of those propositions making up

that class will just be that variable proposition, Wittgenstein seems to suggest (3.317).

So, what we end up with, if we turn 'the Eiffel Tower', as it appears in the

sentence, 'It is five o'clock at the Eiffel Tower', is something like this:

Variable Proposition:
Fx It is five o'clock at ....

Values of the Variable Proposition:
Fa It is five o'clock at the Eiffel Tower.
Fb It is five o'clock at London Bridge.
Fc It is five o'clock at the White House.
...   ...

The class of propositions making up the values of the variable proposition will give all

the ways in which the expression 'it is five o'clock...' gets used with a sense. And what

all those uses have in common is just their being uses of that same symbol, represented

by the variable proposition.

In our example, there seem to be (at least) three different ways of specifying the

values of that variable proposition, and so three different classes of propositions giving

the values of what are in fact three quite distinct variable propositions. (Again, in

Fregean terms, what we have are three different courses of values for three different one-

place functions which themselves are, in Frege's terminology, 'concepts'.) One way of

individuating those three alternative classes of propositions would be to follow the sort of

route that Moore would perhaps take, and give them by way of three different 'concepts'.

That, for our purposes, is also the most convenient way forward, but it might also be

thought to be not what the *Tractatus* says is either needed or wanted here, when

Wittgenstein writes that the stipulation of values for a variable proposition will 'be

concerned only with symbols, not with their meaning' (3.317). So, although this is a

convenient short-cut, it is not one the *Tractatus* would countenance. That is important,

because it suggests that nothing in the *Tractatus* account would commit Wittgenstein to a

notion of concepts and of the kind of reflection upon them that Moore thinks is involved

in our understanding of the nonsensicality of some (nonsensical) string of signs. The

three concepts I have in mind, then, are as follows:

(1)   'Zone' time.

Here, the surface of the globe is divided into twenty-four different time zones,
with one hour added or subtracted (respectively) for each zone travelled to the
east or west of the Greenwich meridian.

(2)   'Sun' time.

For instance, time defined in terms of the number of hours since the sun rose above the horizon (with one o'clock being one hour after the sun's initial appearance), or, differently, in terms of the height of the sun above the horizon. (The latter seems to be the conception behind the idea that 'noon' at the North Pole comes when the Sun reaches its highest point on the horizon, midway through a six-month long day.)

(3)   'Political' time.

So, for instance, here we might imagine a simple stipulation that the time in one region will track that of another. That might occur with regard to a (far-flung) colony, say, or within a country spanning two or more time zones (such as China) or on a much smaller scale (an example might be suggested by the following entry in Bill Wilson's polar diary: '*January 17*. We camped on the Pole itself at 6.30pm this evening'[11]). Another example of this kind of thing might be that of British Summer Time.

Corresponding to these three 'concepts', we can then identify three different classes of propositions which will constitute the values of three different variable propositions. Suppose we were then, armed with these three variable propositions and their associated classes of propositions, to turn to someone who wished to utter the sentence 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole'. Clearly, under the values of the second variable proposition, we might well find that sentence. And we might well find it under the values of the third too.[12] For our case to be analogous with Moore's however, we need to imagine that our utterer refuses to accept that either of those sentences are what they meant; what they want, instead, or so they insist, is the first sense. On the model suggested by the *Tractatus* notion of a variable proposition, we are then in a position to point out to that person that the sentence they want simply does not appear among all those specified as values for the variable proposition; in that context, they just have not given their remark a meaning.

What is the sense of contrast that this Tractarian alternative provides with respect

to Moore's account? I want to suggest that it is something like the contrast presented in

the preface to the *Tractatus* (and reinforced in the *Tractatus* 4.11s) between on the one

hand, the (assuredly absurd) idea that we can draw a limit to thought, where that requires

us to be able to both think and talk on either side of that limit, and the very different

notion that we can work outwards towards the limit to the expression of thought, where

that limit is not taken to be equivalent somehow to the limit to thought – not because

there are thoughts that cannot be expressed, but because working outwards simply

involves saying all that there is to be said and not then grasping by means of that project

some substantial idea of a limit (to anything) which we can understand and think about

independently of that working outwards; working outwards is not a means by which we

are afforded a separate and substantial grasp of some limit or other (to thoughts or to the

expression of thoughts), but it does nevertheless grant us a means of showing someone

(someone else or ourselves) when they (or we) have failed to give to their (or our) words

a meaning. What I want to suggest is that the picture Moore leaves us with is more akin

to a conception of drawing a limit to thought, has more in common with that idea, than

with the idea that we simply work outwards through what can be said in a way that does

not leave us with the temptation to imagine that we have thereby grasped something

substantial about the limit to thought. That, it seems to me, is what is involved in the

contrast between, on the one hand, concepts failing to give a sense to a whole and, on the

other, the simple absence of a string of signs from the set of values of some variable

proposition. The application of the *Tractatus* notion of a variable proposition leaves us

not with the substantial understanding of how not to use concepts that Moore's account

leaves us with, but simply with the understanding that we have not given a sense to these

words, and that, so far, we do not know what it would be like to do so.

Nevertheless, the kind of approach suggested by the *Tractatus* idea of working

outwards through what can be said and by the notion of a variable there might be thought

also to have the negative consequence that it cannot account for one aspect of the

Tractatus view which Moore's account can explain. That is, that by denying the

substantial understanding of how not to use concepts which is central to Moore's account,

it may also seem that we lose the ability to account for an aspect that might be thought to

be crucial to the purpose of the *Tractatus*, and which Moore sums up as follows:

> If there is such a thing as understanding Wittgenstein *via* the *Tractatus*, in the way
> that he intends, then it includes a capacity to recognise as nonsense not only the
> nonsense in the *Tractatus*, but other, similar 'transcendental twaddle'. It includes
> a capacity, 'whenever someone ... [wants] to say something metaphysical, to
> demonstrate to him that he [has] failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his
> propositions'.[13]

The point is that if we do not end up with a substantial understanding of the limits to the

expression of thought or, in Moore's terms, of how not to use concepts, then we will not

end up with the capacity to recognise straight-off, as it were, other 'similar' nonsense as

such; that is, recognising that one sentence is nonsense will not allow us to draw any

conclusions about the nonsensicality or otherwise of any other sentence. Still, however,

we will have the means, for instance through the *Tractatus*'s conception of a variable, to

come to recognise such utterances as nonsense. What we will not have, and I think

cannot have, on such a view, is the understanding, suggested by *TLP* 6.53, that some

whole region of discourse (here, 'metaphysics') is nonsense. That objection is something

very like Warren Goldfarb's suggestion,[14] that we cannot simply come to recognise that

nonsense is as it were the mark of something metaphysical, aside from individual

instances of utterances turning out, upon examination, not to have been given a sense; we

cannot, that is, given the austere view, generalise from any number of instances of

remarks failing to have sense to a whole area of talk's failing to have sense. The austere

view itself seems to block such a move. So, if this view is correct, one of the things the

Tractatus must be taken to be teaching us is that the kind of catch-all response presented

in 6.53 is itself only an illusory possibility which must be 'overcome'.

I hope, then, in this postscript, to have drawn out what Moore's view might

actually be, and where he might be committed to the argument discussed in Chapter Four.

I also hope to have developed a response to Moore's argument where he does commit to

it, and which draws on terms taken directly from the *Tractatus* itself, but which does not

simply beg the question against Moore, given how underdeveloped his arguments for that

position are in his paper.

Notes to Postscript

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[1] There is something awkward about this formulation, which stems from trying to move from talk of 'judgements' in the first five steps, to talk of 'understanding' in the last, as Moore might seem to want to. Moore certainly begins with judgements (in steps (1) and (2) above). So, Moore writes that, on the austere view, 'the judgement that something is nonsense is always a judgement about the actual history, to date, of some particular sign' ('Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII (2003), 169-193 (p.186)). And Moore also seems to suggest that steps (3) and (4) deal in judgements: 'the discussion above suggests that the judgement that something is nonsense is sometimes none of these things [i.e. neither empirical, nor provisional, nor metalinguistic]. It suggests that the judgement is sometimes arrived at by reflection on concepts' (p.186).

Moore also talks in this context of 'recognition': 'So reflection on those concepts is required to recognise the illusions as illusions' (p.187). And he talks also of a 'capacity to recognise as nonsense' certain illusions of sense. So too, Moore very clearly wants to end up with a notion of ineffable understanding, understanding of Wittgenstein, the utterer of nonsense. Equally clearly, given his rejection of ineffable truths (p.175), Moore does not want to end up with a notion of ineffable judgements, since judgements are generally taken to be truth-apt. How, then, do these terms relate in Moore's paper, such that he can move from the idea of judgements, to that of understanding? I think, like this:

For Moore, we have an understanding of how to use concepts and of how not to use concepts. Our understanding of how not to use some concept itself issues in an 'associated capacity' to recognise illusions of sense involving apparent uses of that concept as illusions. That recognition will result in the judgement that certain concepts will not serve to give sense to such-and-such a string of signs and, ultimately, if no other relevant concepts are forthcoming, that the string of signs lacks a sense. I think that, for Moore, even in the case of the kind of illusion of sense that might attach to the sentence, 'The world exists as a limited whole', the first of these two types of judgement will be expressible in ways such as that presented in Chapter Four. What Moore takes to resist expression here is not that judgement, but the understanding of the general phenomenon behind this kind of illusion, and which issues in the capacity to recognise these kinds of utterances as illusions, thereby providing what is needed to make that judgement.

If that is correct, what it suggests is that my previous response to Moore is not question-begging in the sense that it focuses on a very pedestrian kind of illusion, but that it misses entirely the force of Moore's argument, by equating judgements and understanding in a way that Moore's paper does not permit. I hope that this postscript goes some way to making clear what Moore's argument is, and to addressing this aspect of Moore's paper, by way of the alternative response developed here.

[2] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.187.

[3] Moore's responses are given on pp.187-8. He follows them with the words: 'I shall not try to arbitrate between these responses. Nor shall I speculate on what others may be available'.

[4] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.188.

[5] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.189.

[6] For the argument, or something very much like it, *is* in Moore's paper.

[7] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.189.

[8] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', pp.189-190. The reference in the final sentence is to *TLP*, preface.

[9] Here I am agreeing to some extent with Peter Sullivan, who writes that 'it is no accident – it is part of the way these paragraphs [of the preface] are written' that one will read or try to read Wittgenstein as saying that the limit to thought cannot be drawn in one way but can in another; that 'the limit' on both occasions in the preface refers to the limit to thought (and so that drawing the limit to the expression of thoughts just amounts to drawing the limit to thought). Thus, Sullivan continues: 'So, if one were to say that these paragraphs belong to a "frame" in which Wittgenstein offers instructions for reading the book, then that ought to come with a warning that the instructions will be tricky to follow straight off'. Peter Sullivan, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII (2003), 195-223.

[10] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', pp.184-5. Moore here talks of 'knowledge' rather than 'understanding'. I take it that he is thereby exploiting his remark (p.178, note 35) that for him 'states of

understanding *are* states of knowledge' (though see note 35 of Moore's paper for a qualification to that claim).

[11] Quoted in Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Picador, 1994), p.521. (Wilson is, of course, referring to the South, not the North, Pole.)

[12] I want to comment here briefly on how what I say here fits with the following remark of Wittgenstein's from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> "But if I suppose that someone has a pain, then I am simply supposing that he has just the same as I have so often had." – That gets us no further. It is as if I were to say: "You surely know what 'It is 5 o'clock here' means; so you also know what 'It's 5 o'clock on the sun' means. It means simply that it is just the same time there as it is here when it is 5 o'clock." – The explanation by means of *identity* does not work here. For I know well enough that one can call 5 o'clock here and 5 o'clock there "the same time", but what I do not know is in what cases one is to speak of its being the same time here and there.
>
> In exactly the same way it is no explanation to say: the supposition that he has a pain is simply the supposition that he has the same as I. For *that* part of the grammar is quite clear to me: that is, that one will say that the stove has the same experience as I, *if* one says, it is in pain and I am in pain. (*PI* §350.)

J.L. Mackie, in his 'Five O'Clock on the Sun' (*Analysis*, 41:3 (1981), 113-114), argues that the suggested parallel here, between the difficulty of understanding the sentence 'it is five o'clock on the sun' and (e.g.) 'He has a pain', will not work, just because we can specify contexts which will give the former sentence a clear sense. And it might look too as if the third concept illustrated above might itself be used to give a sense to the remark 'it is five o'clock on the sun', in line with one of Mackie's suggestions: e.g., that 'It is 5 o'clock on the sun by GMT [Greenwich Mean Time] just when it is 5 o'clock by GMT in Oxford or in Tokyo or anywhere else' or, alternatively, that 'it will be 5 o'clock on the sun by GMT when some disturbance occurs there which is seen from the earth ... at 8 minutes past 5 by GMT' (p.113).

I am not at all sure that such statements do give a clear sense to statements purporting to be about the time on the sun, but at the same time, I want to suggest that the explanation of the sense of the remark 'It is five o'clock at the North Pole' by way of the third of these concepts is not simply (what Wittgenstein above says will not suffice in the case of the sun) an explanation by means of identity. That is, it does not simply say that we will say that it is the same time here (Cardiff) and there (the North Pole) if one says five o'clock here and five o'clock there, but specifies a sense in which one might say that it is five o'clock here and five o'clock there. That that sense may be such that it will always (by simple stipulation) be five o'clock there if it is five o'clock here does not mean that the explanation of the sense is as in Wittgenstein's example purely by means of identity. Hence, were this explanation to give a sense to Wittgenstein's example ('It is 5 o'clock on the sun') it would not, I think, conflict with his point there.

[13] Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', p.184. The quotation in the final sentence is from *TLP* 6.53.

[14] Discussed in Chapter One, above, pp.68-70.

Concluding Remarks

I

I have, in the course of this thesis, been concerned to defend the austere view of nonsense

and its ascription to Wittgenstein against a variety of criticisms. That view – the austere

view – has, as I see it, two aspects: a trivial (trivially true) aspect, and a non-trivial one.

The trivially true aspect is simply that any string of signs – no matter how far they might

deviate from, say, familiar (established) phonetic patterns, etc – could, by appropriate

assignments of meanings, be given a sense.[1] Hence, in this, trivial sense, if a string of

signs is nonsense, that will be due, at the last, to our failure to make just such a

stipulation, such an assignment of meanings. The non-trivial aspect of the view is just

this: the denial that there is any further, non-trivial story that needs to be, or indeed could

be, told here. That is, what is not trivial about the view (but is in fact, and on the

contrary, quite clearly controversial to many) is the idea that the trivial story is all the

story to be had.

If the austere view is correct, as an account of Wittgenstein's use of the word,

then that use can, I want to suggest, be understood by the reader of Wittgenstein without

their needing to enter into a technical or theoretical account of what nonsense is or might

be at all.[2] In some sense, then, it would be wrong to say of Wittgenstein that he held a

'view' of nonsense at all, just as it might be thought to be misleading to talk (as I have

done throughout) of the austere 'view'. Such a view, insofar as it might be called one, is entirely negative: that there is nothing more philosophically substantial to nonsense than a simple failure to make sense. Still, if that is indeed all there is to Wittgenstein's 'view' of nonsense, that is not quite to say that his use of the word 'nonsense' remains uniform throughout his life: one way in which it does change from early to later is marked by Wittgenstein's increasing willingness to use the word not simply of instances of linguistic nonsense, but also more colloquially, as it is often used to refer to something absurd, or obviously false. That is not a move from a technical use of a term to non-technical uses, but from a narrow to a broader range of non-technical uses.

I have tried to defend that view of nonsense and its attribution to Wittgenstein against criticisms primarily from Peter Hacker and Hans-Johann Glock, and against an altogether different kind of criticism from Adrian Moore, which does not reject the austere view (in fact, far from it) but rather brings into question its place alongside other features typical of Resolute readings of the *Tractatus* – most notably, the rejection of the very idea of ineffable insights as having a place in the lesson of that work. I shall want here to say a little in conclusion about each of these criticisms, and where my responses leave 'New' readings of Wittgenstein's work.

I shall begin with Hacker. Against Hacker, I have argued, with Diamond and with Conant, that the conception of logical syntax to be found in the *Tractatus* is not one such that nonsense is produced when one violates the rules of logical syntax. Violating logical syntax, in this sense, need not produce nonsense at all, since there may be other uses of

the sign (or signs) available, or an entirely new use might be being made of it (or them). Nor is logical syntax in the *Tractatus* a system of rules which serve to license or prohibit combinations of signs or symbols: the rules of logical syntax are not concerned to prohibit anything on the *Tractatus* view – not combinations of signs, because logical syntax is not concerned merely with signs as signs, and not combinations of symbols either, because there is nothing here coherently to proscribe. Hence, on the *Tractatus* conception, and against Hacker, the difference between a sign-language that is governed by – or that obeys – the rules of logical syntax and one that is not so governed, is not that the rules of the latter permit the construction of strings which do violate logical syntax, which are not permitted by the rules of the former; rather, it is that, in the former, what symbol a symbol is will be clearly reflected in the sign for that symbol – the use of signs will track or reflect how symbols are used in accordance with logical syntax – and in the latter we may find one sign being used for more than one symbol, or signs for two quite different symbols being used in superficially similar ways. We could, as Diamond notes, call the latter kinds of use of signs 'violations' of logical syntax, even though it would be misleading to do so,[3] but the result of such 'violations' would be a lack of clarity, and not – though the unclarity might eventually give rise to it – nonsense.

Glock's view of nonsense, I have argued, is very similar to Hacker's view, in which nonsense, as well as sometimes being the result of our failure to give words a meaning, is also sometimes the outcome of a specific violation of a specific rule, or set of rules, governing the use of some sign. Where their views differ, is over the question of what would constitute a logical difference between nonsense-sentences. For Hacker, it

would have to be a difference in the end-product, a difference in the sense of the resulting

nonsense-sentence. Hence, for Hacker, there can be no different logical kinds of

nonsense. For Glock, on the other hand, a difference in the cause of the sentence's being

nonsense, for instance a difference in what kind of failure of understanding makes the

sentence seem nonsensical, would constitute a logical difference, and hence there can, for

Glock, be many different logical kinds of nonsense.[4]

Glock's criticisms of the austere view seem to begin by assuming that there must

be something more to the austere view than the account I have given above suggests, that

austerity is more substantial a view than that, than I have wanted to allow. That idea

seems to lie behind Glock's treatment of the austere view as consisting of two quite

substantial and independent philosophical claims, which he labels the 'privation' view

and nonsense 'monism', and which themselves require a deal of philosophical argument.

Glock's approach is to begin with those two 'strands' he identifies to an austere view and

treat them not as the outcome of rejecting the very idea of a theory of sense, but as

assumptions or premises of a Resolute reading, which must themselves be argued for

within the context of some theory of sense.[5] In my argument, in Chapter Three, I have

tried to show that one can go a long way down the road that Glock wants to go down, and

yet still his arguments will not provide a sound case against the austere view, exegetically

or substantially. That approach may end up conceding too much to Glock, but it might

nevertheless also be useful against someone like Glock, who refuses to see, or to take

seriously, the possibility of a non-theoretical approach to nonsense.

Finally, against Moore, I have offered two very different responses to his claim that our understanding of why certain sentences offer no more than the illusion of making sense to us is inexpressible, given the basic correctness of the austere view of nonsense. One of the consequences I have drawn from the austere view (at the end of Chapter One) is that our recognition that certain sentences on some occasion fail to say anything tells us just that and no more: coming to see some string of signs as failing to make sense cannot have the consequences that we might have thought, or that Wittgenstein's remark, at *Tractatus* 6.53, seems to suggest it could. It will not, that is, tell us anything about whether or what other strings of signs are nonsense. Ultimately, I think, Moore's claim stems from the conviction that such recognition, at least in places, must be capable of being more consequential than that, and that is what I have wanted to deny.

Inevitably, much of my defence has centred on the attribution of the austere view to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, since that is where criticism of austerity has most often (and most vociferously) been focussed. Nevertheless, many of my arguments are applicable to the attribution of the austere view to the later Wittgenstein also. Against Glock, I have argued that Wittgenstein's understanding of the context-principle in the *Philosophical Investigations* was other than Glock's, and my criticisms of Glock's presentation both of the austere view of nonsense and of the different versions of the context-principle available apply equally to the later as to the earlier Wittgenstein. Similarly, my criticisms of Hacker have a ready parallel in the case of the later Wittgenstein's notion of rules of grammar, where Hacker must imagine those rules too to be prohibitive.[6] So too, although centred on the *Tractatus*, Moore's claims about the

consequences of the austere view of nonsense are not limited to that work; if the austere

view does involve a tacit commitment to the existence of ineffable understanding, then it

will involve that commitment in relation to the later work as much as to the earlier.

Where does my defence of the austere view of nonsense, and of its attribution to

Wittgenstein, leave New readings of Wittgenstein's work, and the debate between such

readings and their 'Standard' alternatives? Although that view is a central feature of New

readings of Wittgenstein's work, early and later, that defence can only ever go part of the

way towards making the case for New readings, and for a variety of reasons. In relation

to the *Tractatus*, that is, in part, because the austere view is a corollary of only one of the

two basic features of such readings and, as Moore succeeds in showing, one idea rejected

by the other feature, the idea of ineffable understanding, is at least compatible with the

austere view of nonsense, even if Moore's claim that the latter involves a commitment to

the former is mistaken. So too, as Moore again suggests, it may also be that, in relation

to the *Tractatus*, even on a reading which sees the lesson of that work in terms of

ineffable truths 'there is no reason why we should be not be left realising that the book is

sheer lack of sense'.[7] At the same time, however, without the kind of defence of the

austere view offered here, such readings are bound to be left looking somewhat shaky.

Hence, I take it that this defence contributes to establishing the basic plausibility of New

readings – not least because (and notwithstanding Moore's two suggestions) the anti-

theoretical spirit of the austere view simply sits more comfortably with Resolutely anti-

metaphysical readings of the *Tractatus* as a whole, and so too of Wittgenstein's later

work as continuing in that spirit, not as being concerned to reject the realist doctrines of

Standard readings. As Conant and Diamond stress, that leaves a lot still to be done: the austere view is a corollary of only one of two basic features of Resolute readings, and those features amount at best to a programme for reading the *Tractatus*, not a reading of that work, and something similar is clearly true of the *Investigations*. The details of such readings, however, are beyond my concerns here; I hope only to have defended the austere view against some of the more serious objections to it, exegetical and substantial, and provided some reasons for thinking its most plausible alternative, developed by Hacker, to be confused.

Notes to Concluding Remarks

[1] That is not to say anything about how one does go about assigning meanings to signs, about what exactly that process involves. Rather, the point is just that, however one does do that, there is nothing to stop one giving a sense – any sense – to any string of signs. Hence, I do not think that this remark conflicts with the following remark of Wittgenstein's:

> Can I say "bububu" and mean "If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk"? – It is only in a language that I can mean something by something. This shews clearly that the grammar of "to mean" is not like that of the expression "to imagine" and the like. (*PI*, p.18.)

Wittgenstein does not reply to his question either 'yes' or 'no' – so there is no prohibition here on that sign, "bububu", coming to have the sense Wittgenstein postulates. Instead, Wittgenstein replies by highlighting the kind of context within which one can mean anything at all.

[2] Here I am agreeing with a point made by Denis McManus (in conversation). I do not rule out the possibility of there being the occasional exception in the many pages of Wittgenstein's notes; it is just that I think such an exception would be just that – an exception, a lapse – and not evidence of his knowingly having held a very different kind of view of nonsense at any point.

[3] Since a rule prohibiting giving a sign more than one use would not, in the *Tractatus* sense, be a rule of logical syntax (or so, for instance, *TLP* 3.334 suggests).

[4] Thus, Glock identifies a range of different failures of understanding, each of which might lead to a different kind of nonsense. Glock, 'All Kinds of Nonsense', in *Wittgenstein at Work: Method in the Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.221-245 (pp.239-240).

[5] The suggestion that Glock treats the austere view as itself amounting to a substantial philosophical position is also made by William H. Brenner in his review of the collection in which Glock's paper appears. Brenner writes: 'I believe that Glock's criticisms of Diamond depend on ascribing to her some special, draconian notion of nonsensicality, over and above the ordinary notion of having failed to say anything'. Brenner, 'Review of *Wittgenstein and Scepticism* (ed. Denis McManus) and *Wittgenstein at Work* (ed. Erich Ammereller and Eugen Fischer)', *Philosophical Investigations*, 2005, 375-380 (p.380).

[6] See, for instance, Edward Witherspoon's paper, 'Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein', in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.315-349.

[7] A.W. Moore, 'Ineffability and Nonsense', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume LXXVII (2003), 169-193 (p.179). Moore's point is just that, even if such readings must commit to the existence of two kinds of nonsense ('substantial' and 'mere'), still there is no reason to suppose that they must read the *Tractatus* as composed (even in part) of the substantial variety.

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[1] Included in this bibliography are a number of works which, although not explicitly referred to in the text of this thesis, have nevertheless informed my thinking on the issues discussed herein.