

Contextualism and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*¹

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Abstract:

Central to a new, or 'resolute', reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is the idea that Wittgenstein held there an 'austere' view of nonsense: the view, that is, that nonsense is only ever a matter of our failure to give words a meaning, and so that there are no logically distinct kinds of nonsense. Resolute readers tend not only to ascribe such a view to Wittgenstein, but also to subscribe to it themselves; and it is also a feature of some readings which in other respects are clearly not Resolute. This paper forms part of a reply to Hans-Johann Glock's work in which he argues (in part) that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* held a view of nonsense other than the austere view. Instead, Glock argues, Wittgenstein there held that there are many logically distinct kinds of nonsense. Here, I outline and defend the austere view, together with its attribution to the early Wittgenstein, against a number of Glock's criticisms, and focussing especially on Wittgenstein's reformulation in the *Tractatus* of Frege's context-principle.

1

In this paper, I am concerned to defend the attribution to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* of what has come to be known as the austere view of nonsense (or, as I shall also call it, 'austerity'). Specifically, I want to defend that view and its attribution to Wittgenstein against a number of criticisms put forward by Hans-Johann Glock (in his paper 'All Kinds of Nonsense'), and which focus on Wittgenstein's Tractarian reformulation of Frege's context-principle. Glock argues, in short, that Wittgenstein's contextualism will not support the attribution of an austere view of nonsense.²

This view – the austere view – might be summed up as follows. First, as the view that there is no as it were 'positive' nonsense – that is, that there is no such thing as nonsense that is nonsense on account of what the combined words mean. All non-

¹ Many thanks to Alessandra Tanesini, and to Hugh Mellor, David Spurrett and other members of the audience at the PSSA Annual Conference 2006 for comments.

² Glock (2004) further argues that Wittgenstein's later contextualism will not support such an attribution, either, and that the austere view lacks independent plausibility (substantially and exegetically). In this paper, I focus on Glock's exegetical case in relation to the *Tractatus*.

sense, from the point of view of austerity, is plain nonsense, resulting from a lack of meaning, from our failure to assign to our words a meaning (in that context and to date), and not for any reason more philosophically substantial. Glock (2004:222) terms this 'the privation view'. Second, and as a consequence, there are, for austerity, no logically distinct kinds of nonsense; all nonsense, logically speaking, is on a par. Glock (2004: 222) refers to this as nonsense 'monism'.

The austere view has its background in new or 'resolute' readings of the *Tractatus*, put forward originally by Cora Diamond and James Conant. Such readings typically claim to find in the *Tractatus* a much stronger anticipation of Wittgenstein's later thought than is standardly taken to be the case. They do this, in part, by rejecting two central features of standard readings of the *Tractatus*. At the end of this work, Wittgenstein famously tells us that we are to understand him and not his (elucidatory) propositions: those, he tells us, are nonsense, which we must overcome if we are to 'see the world aright'.³ Resolute readings reject the (standard) idea that 'seeing the world aright' involves coming to grasp with ineffable insights of some kind, and they reject the (again, standard) idea that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* lays down a theory of sense, against which his own propositions then fail to measure up. The austere view is then a corollary of that second rejection, and as such is fundamental to resolute readings.⁴ But the austere view is also a feature of some readings of the *Tractatus* – such as Adrian Moore's (2003) – which are in other respects clearly *not* resolute. Although Glock's concern is primarily with Resolute readings, and although I shall focus on such readings I want my defence of the austere view to have wider application, for instance to readings such as Moore's.

The attribution of such a view to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* receives support primarily from two areas. First, the *Tractatus* 5.473s, which seem to state such a view. Wittgenstein writes, for instance, that 'Socrates is identical' is nonsensical 'because we have failed to make an arbitrary determination' (5.473) and that, if a proposition has no sense, 'that can only be because we have failed to give a *meaning* to some of its constituents' (5.4733) – and so not because they have the wrong kinds of meaning, say, or because they violate logical syntax. Second, it receives support from Wittgenstein's Tractarian reformulation of Frege's context-principle to read as follows:

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

Or, again:

3.314 An expression has meaning only in a proposition.

Glock focuses on this second point and argues that the appeal to Wittgenstein's (Tractarian) contextualism will not serve to justify the attribution of an austere view of nonsense.

2

Glock begins by distinguishing two different interpretations of the context-principle: a strong, 'restrictive' version, and a weaker, 'non-restrictive' one. Whatever exactly Glock means by each of these terms, it is clear that, for him, the former, strong version

3 Wittgenstein, 1974: 6.54. All further references to this work will be made by section number and given in the text.

4 See Conant and Diamond, 2004, especially pp.47-48.

requires at least that words only have a meaning when actually used in a proposition, while the latter version (in Glock's words) 'is compatible with the idea that individual words can mean something without *actually* occurring in a proposition' – rather, Glock continues, they must only be *capable* of occurring in a proposition; they must have been given a (rule-governed) use in the language.⁵ 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 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 have a meaning.

Then Glock's argument is this: if the Tractarian formulation of the context-principle is taken to offer evidence that Wittgenstein held an austere 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 actually occur within the immediate context of a genuine proposition. 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 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'. These, Glock maintains, are simply not open to Resolute readings to appeal to. So while there is some evidence that Wittgenstein did hold a restrictive version of contextualism 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 *Philosophical Investigations*), since the restrictive principle is at odds with certain other elements of the *Tractatus*: namely, its compositionality – the idea, expressed for instance in *Tractatus* 4.024–4.03,⁶ that the sense of a sentence is in some sense dependent upon, or built up of, or arrived at by reflection upon the meanings of its constituent parts, the individual words (and together with the structure of their arrangement).⁷ Much better perhaps, then, Glock suggests, to attribute to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* a weaker, non-re-

5 Glock, 2004: 227–228 and 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 meaning than the individual letters of a word.

6 See below.

7 Glock, 2004: 228. Glock also notes the incompatibility of restrictive contextualism and compositionality (in general) as a substantial (and not simply exegetical) objection to the restrictive principle on pp.226–227.

strictive understanding of the context-principle,⁸ thus dissolving any sense of inconsistency but, with it, also anything that could constitute a contextual justification for the austere view of nonsense.

Glock, then, presents those (primarily) Resolute readers, who claim to find an austere view of nonsense in the *Tractatus*, 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 such (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 austerity can receive 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 also serves to undermine the reading of the *Tractatus* 5.473s as explicitly stating an austere view of nonsense, as well as diminishing any independent appeal austerity might have had.

3

I want to focus on the following three points from Glock's argument: (i), that austerity requires the restrictive principle if it is to receive support from Wittgenstein's early contextualism; (ii), that the restrictive principle is wrong;⁹ and (iii), that the restrictive principle conflicts with the compositional aspects of the *Tractatus*, as well as with compositionism more generally. In the following pages, I discuss each point in turn.

(i) *Austerity requires the Restrictive Principle*

There are, I think, two senses in which this statement – that austerity requires the restrictive principle – might be thought false. The first is that the austere view is (as Glock in fact acknowledges) at least trivially true: it is just the case that, for any combination of signs, we could assign them a meaning such that the whole would make sense. Hence, ultimately at least, if our words do not make sense, the reason for this is our failure to make just such an assignment. Still, however, this leaves open the possibility that there is a further, non-trivial story to be told, which is exactly what Glock would claim and what Resolute readers would wish to deny. Second, then, I want to argue that it is not clear that anything so strong as Glock's restrictive principle is required for a contextualism-based argument for austerity.

As we saw, Glock distinguishes two different versions or interpretations of the context-principle: a strong, restrictive version, and a weak, non-restrictive one. Since on the weak view, a word has a meaning in virtue of its having a role in propositions generally, and not only when it actually occurs as a component of one, the stronger view seems to be required, as Glock claims, by an austere view of nonsense – if, that is,

⁸ Glock, 2004: 228. Despite this, Glock also seems to concede that the early Wittgenstein *did* hold a restrictive view (p.227 and p.228), but argues that this involves a notion of meaning incompatible with the aims of a Resolute reading. Glock seems to want to suggest that Wittgenstein was already moving away from his restrictive principle in the *Tractatus*, even if he had not explicitly resigned it.

⁹ One reason Glock gives for thinking this – that the restrictive principle is incompatible with compositionism (2004: 228) – is discussed under point (iii).

contextualism is to provide any kind of argument for the austere view. Glock's claim, however, depends 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. This interpretation would allow for the existence of the kind of nonsense that Glock thinks the *Tractatus* does allow for, involving prohibited combinations of meaningful words.¹⁰ If this is the only alternative to the restrictive view, then it appears very much that the strong, restrictive view is what is required in order to make the case for austerity.

But Glock's weak view is *not* the only alternative to the restrictive position. The contrast that Glock presents between strong and weak contextualisms 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' (Glock, 2004: 229). Although Glock clearly associates the latter position with the view he attributes to the later Wittgenstein, and which Glock himself endorses, that in order for a word to have a meaning it must only be *capable* of occurring in a proposition, and in the sense that it has been given some rule-governed use in the language, that is not the only way of taking the weak view. Another way, for instance, for one's view to count as weak on Glock's distinction, would be simply to acknowledge the existence of exceptions to the restrictive principle, such as in the case of names used in greeting.¹¹

My point here is just this: if the weak view is not as it were automatically the same as Glock's own view, then it simply is not clear that the strong view *is*, as Glock says that it is, what is required in order for contextualism to provide support for austerity. Thus, whatever force Glock's subsequent objections to austerity by way of the restrictive principle may have, may turn out to depend upon Glock's artificially narrowing the scope for different interpretations of Wittgenstein's contextualism available to resolute (and other) readers. In this case, it would then not be clear that Glock's objections to the restrictive view are so much as relevant to the exegetical or substantial plausibility of the austere view of nonsense.

In fact, the suspicion is to some extent borne out by the following passage in which Cora Diamond discusses the context-principle in Frege, to whom Diamond also ascribes an austere view of nonsense. Diamond writes:

[Frege] 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.¹²

10 It would also allow for what Conant (2000) calls 'substantial' nonsense, combining incompatible words to express an incoherent sense.

11 Rupert Read's view (2000: 77) is something like this. That, too, though it may seem a little ad hoc, would also nullify Glock's objection to the restrictive view based on its failure to account for such examples.

12 Diamond, 1995: 109. Diamond's use of the word 'senseless' here would, perhaps, be misleading were

That combination, then, of 'senseless whole and parts with content', is the bare minimum that contextualism must exclude if it is to provide a case for austerity. And ruling out that much, according to Diamond, requires ruling out one way of taking Frege's principle – the way favoured by Glock. But this need not (although it might actually) result in taking the strong view as Glock describes it.

There is, then, a question mark over whether the contrast between Glock's strong and weak views is quite as straightforward as he seems to suggest that it is. And, given that, there is a further question mark over whether austerity requires this strong principle at all. Although the restrictive view might be used to provide an argument for austerity, there is some scope for less restrictive interpretations that are not yet as weak as Glock's non-restrictive view, but would still be capable of excluding the possibility of anything other than 'plain' – austere-conceived – nonsense. The scope for different varieties of contextualism that 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 the view absent from the less restrictive versions. Nevertheless, I do not wish to pursue alternative interpretations of Wittgenstein's Tractarian contextualism here. Instead, I want to argue that, even were we to grant to Glock this first point, his other arguments against austerity are still not without serious difficulties.

(ii) *The Restrictive Principle is Wrong*

The first of these arguments, then, is that the restrictive principle is wrong. That is, in ordinary talk, words can and do very often have a meaning outside the immediate context of a proposition. So, for instance, Glock (2004: 226) gives two examples. First, two brief lists of words:

to be	to abide
to have	to arise
to do	to awake

Second, a dictionary entry for the word 'nonsense':

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.

In the first example, Glock notes, the words are not part of a proposition, but nor are they simply meaningless: rather, the first column lists the auxiliary verbs, and the second 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' (Glock, 2004: 226).

Glock may well be right that, in one sense of the word 'meaning', the claim would be absurd. But the point fails to engage with the restrictive principle (as invoked by 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

she talking of the early Wittgenstein, who distinguishes between sentences which have sense, those which are nonsense, and those which are senseless.

the sense of 'meaning' in which what a sentence says depends on the meanings of its working parts.¹³

In the sense of the word 'meaning' it clearly would not be absurd to say of 'nonsense' as it appears in bold in the dictionary entry Glock cites, that it is meaningless; although the text of the definition does indeed specify the various roles the word can play as a working part of a proposition, it does not actually fulfil any one of those roles. And similar things might also be said of Glock's first example.¹⁴

My response, however, plays nicely into Glock's hands. Glock thinks that such an objection is not open to resolute readings of the *Tractatus*, since it relies on adopting a theoretical notion of meaning as against Glock's ordinary use of the term. Glock's claim here is that, if one thinks of the *Tractatus* as consisting – in whole or in large part – of 'plain' (austerely-conceived) nonsense, then one cannot also claim to find at work a theoretical notion of meaning since, as Glock (2004:227) writes, 'such nonsense cannot constitute a theory'. 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. This, 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 that one climbs, 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 that may suffice to provide such a story. It would, however, be fair to say that the burden would lie with those resolute readers who followed this route (and 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 also grant that this relies on a technical notion of meaning, it provides no clear-cut case against attributing to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* an austere view of nonsense.

(iii) *The Restrictive Principle is at odds with the Tractatus's compositionism*

The third point I want to consider here is this: that Wittgenstein's compositionism conflicts with the attribution to him of a restrictive principle. This combines the exegetical point with a more substantial objection, based on the incompatibility of those two views generally. From the first, Glock concludes that this suggests 'the early Wittgenstein did not take *TLP* 3.3 [the Tractarian reformulation of Frege's context-principle] literally as proponents of the austere conception suppose'; and from the

13 Diamond 1995: 98. (Note, by the way, the appeal Diamond makes here to (some form of) compositionism in her explanation of (some form of) contextualism.)

14 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.

second, Glock concludes that the restrictive principle must therefore be wrong (Glock, 2004: 228 & 226).

Roughly, compositionism is the view that the sense of a sentence is in some way determined by the meanings of its constituent parts, and how the parts are put together. In the *Tractatus*, this view is expressed, for instance, in the idea 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). The merit of such a view, as Wittgenstein suggests, is that it seems to be the only way of explaining our ability to understand new, or previously unencountered, sentences.

Although Glock does not expand on the sense of contradiction between this view and restrictive contextualism, reasons for believing them to be in conflict are not hard to find. Where contextualism (of any stripe) asserts the 'primacy of the proposition', as it were, over its constituent parts, compositionism on the contrary stresses (or seems to) the primacy of the individual words over the proposition.

One way of seeing how the two views might not conflict after all is to ask what follows from compositionism; that is, compositionism itself might be held to be trivially true, but a matter of contention is what this view then entails. On Glock's interpretation, compositionism 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. The 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 compositionism intuitively seems to be required in order to explain: namely, the fact that we can understand sentences we have not previously encountered. Does restrictive contextualism – and the latter view of the consequences of compositionism – then leave this 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 (1995: 109) 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.

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 ex-

pressions and relational expressions of various sorts' (Diamond, 1995: 109). 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 (1995: 110) 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.

The sentence will have such a syntactic structure only if the thought it expresses does actually have a form of this kind. 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 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 also in expressing the process in a way that does not beg any questions.¹⁵ 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 – that Wittgenstein's compositionism 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 that Glock explains by way of certain features of Wittgenstein's picture-theory of propositions and by his extraordinary notion of meaning (Glock, 2004:227-8). 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 also be undermined by Glock's discussion elsewhere of the *Tractatus*'s compositionism as forming the 'implicit rationale' (Glock 1996: 87) for Wittgenstein's early restrictive

15 I am grateful to Alessandra Tanesini for bringing these points to my attention.

contextualism (even if Glock goes on to say that, as a rationale, it is not strong enough to justify the restrictive view). Whatever the force of these two points, however, it simply is not the case that restrictive contextualism and compositionism 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.

4

I have argued that Glock's criticisms of the austere view of nonsense and its application to the early Wittgenstein by way of Wittgenstein's contextualism do not succeed. In closing, I want to note briefly how I would respond to two further points Glock makes against the austere view; this time in relation to Wittgenstein's later work. There, Glock suggests, Wittgenstein's contextualism entails that a word has a meaning if it has a role in propositions generally. Furthermore, Glock claims that the attribution to Wittgenstein of an austere view of nonsense is incompatible with Wittgenstein's use of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. I do not have the scope to expand on Wittgenstein's later contextualism here, but I merely wish to note that whatever exactly his view, it does not seem to take the form of a stipulation, or principle, or dictum about when a word has a meaning. If this were the case, it would put Wittgenstein's view at odds with his understanding of his own philosophical procedure. Nor does Wittgenstein's use of *reductio* arguments conflict especially with austerity. Rather, the problem with employing some piece of nonsense within the structure of a *reductio ad absurdum* is not *what kind* of nonsense it is, but *that it is* nonsense at all: the problem is that it lacks a truth-value, and this applies whether we think it is nonsense because it lacks a meaning, or because it has the wrong kind of meaning, or for any other reason. What that suggests is not that Wittgenstein must hold a different view of linguistic nonsense, but rather that his use of the term is on such occasions far more colloquial – that the sentences are nonsense in the sense of being absurd, or obviously false.

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