

‘Resolution’ – an Illusion of Sense?

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An ever-widening rift divides the world of Wittgenstein studies. Located on one side of the debate are the self-declared ‘resolute readers’¹ who cleave to some version of what James Conant (2007) calls ‘Mono-Wittgensteinianism’ – the idea that, roughly speaking, early and later Wittgenstein were up to the same thing: namely, offering a therapy that will cure us of the illusion of meaning something where we really mean nothing. Located on the other side are what the resolute like to call the ‘standard readers’², who believe, first, that although there is some continuity in places, there is significant discontinuity between early Wittgenstein and his later self, and, second, that later Wittgenstein aimed at more than mere therapy.

‘Resolute readings’ initially started life as a radical new approach to Wittgenstein’s early work: first presented by Cora Diamond and James Conant³, they gained currency as an attempt to save the *Tractatus* from ending in self-contradiction. But the debate has not remained *Tractatus*-centred. As Conant points out in a recent paper: ‘issues parallel to those which arise in the interpretation of the *Tractatus* arise in connection with the interpretation of Wittgenstein’s later work as well’ (2004, 168). Stephen Mulhall, in his latest book, *Wittgenstein’s Private Language*, concurs – taking his cue from the aforementioned paper by Conant, Mulhall (2007) offers the first sustained attempt at providing a ‘resolute’ reading of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*⁴.

¹ The term ‘resolute reading’ was coined by Warren Goldfarb (1997).

² Hutchinson (2007, 693) calls them ‘elucidatory’ readers.

³ See Conant (2000, 2002) and Conant / Diamond (2004).

⁴ Others sympathetic to, or actively endorsing, resolute readings include Stanley Cavell, Alice Crary, Burton Dreben, David Finkelstein, Juliet Floyd, Phil Hutchinson, Oskari Kuusela, Matthew Ostrow, Rupert Read, Martin Stone and Edward Witherspoon.

Mulhall identifies two features necessary for a reading to count as ‘resolute’: commitment to nonsense monism – the contention that from the point of view of logic there is only one kind of nonsense, i.e. plain gibberish (2007, 2) – and rejection of the idea that there is something we ‘cannot do’ in philosophy (2007, 8). While I agree with resolute readers that the limits of sense are not limitations fencing us off from anything in particular, I contest their claim that acceptance of this fact requires endorsement of nonsense monism on pain of falling prey to an alternative conception of ‘substantial’ nonsense – i.e. the notion of pseudo-propositions that are ‘determinately unintelligible’, or that specify ‘a thought that we cannot think’ (2007, 8). Such a conception is, indeed, incoherent, only nonsense monism doesn’t follow from a rejection of it. More than the two interpretative options offered by resolute readers – ‘resolution’ or some kind of commitment to ‘substantial’ nonsense – are available here: as the present paper will show, neither a ‘resolute’, nor a ‘substantial’ reading, can in fact do justice to the complexities of Wittgenstein’s text. I will argue, *contra* Mulhall and Conant, that the author of the *Investigations* does allow for more than one kind of nonsense, and, furthermore, that recognition of this fact does not, of itself, push one into ‘substantiality’. Given that Mulhall has, to date, developed the most comprehensive account of a ‘resolute’ *later* Wittgenstein, his interpretation will be the focal point of my discussion, but much of my critique will also be aimed at Conant and, to a lesser extent, at Hutchinson (2007).

I

The interpretative challenge of *Wittgenstein’s Private Language* is to motivate the idea that in the *Investigations*, too, and not just in the *Tractatus*, it is possible to distinguish between ‘substantial’ and ‘resolute’ readings. *Prima facie* this is not an easy task, as the later Wittgenstein does not present his reader with a *Tractatus*-type exegetical conundrum: the *Investigations* does not declare itself, like the *Tractatus*, to be nonsensical. But if not, what are the merits of reading Wittgenstein’s later work in ‘resolute’ fashion?

Mulhall takes his interpretative cues for promoting a ‘resolute reading’ of the *Investigations* from §374 – ‘The great difficulty here is not to

represent the matter as if there were something one *couldn't* do.' – and §500 – 'When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation' (2007, 9). If we don't heed Wittgenstein's warnings here, Mulhall argues, while at the same time regarding his notion of 'grammar' as a 'way of recalling us to the distinction between sense and nonsense' (2007, 9), then we might be tempted to give this a 'substantial' spin; we might end up regarding grammar, like logical syntax in the *Tractatus*, as prohibitive and as preventing us from articulating something that is, nevertheless, in some sense, perfectly intelligible. So we might be seduced into thinking that we can get intimations of what lies beyond the limits that grammar has demarcated.

But this problem may well strike one as spurious: it clearly betrays a misunderstanding to confuse the limits of sense with *limitations* or exclusion from a specifiable domain – one might just as well regard grammar in the ordinary (linguistic) sense as imposing limitations on one's expressive capacities! Neither does Mulhall make it clear why a realization of the fact that there is indeed nothing – no *thing* – that lies beyond these limits should be incompatible with appreciating grammar's 'prohibitive' role. For the rules of chess, for example, precisely in virtue of allowing certain moves, prohibit others. But it would be confused to gloss this as, say, the rules of chess limiting my ability to play chess, since without the rules, there would be no such thing as 'chess' in the first place.

Perhaps it is Mulhall's 'resolute' conception of nonsense that is preventing him from appreciating this point. For, according to resolute readers, nonsense is not the result of violating established criteria for the use of words; rather, nonsense occurs because we have not yet established criteria for the use of the offending expression. But if so, then it would seem to follow that grammar can't rule anything out, since that would allegedly involve ruling out *something in particular*, and this is not possible, given that, according to resolute readers, no sense has yet been assigned to the string in question. Mulhall (2007, 3-4) uses the following example to illustrate this idea:

Michael Dummett has offered 'Chairman Mao is rare' as a piece of substantial nonsense, because he claims it attempts to conjoin a proper name (which can take only first-level functions as arguments) with a second-level function

(which can take only first-level functions as arguments). But if it is essential to a symbol's being a proper name that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat 'Chairman Mao' as a proper name in this context only if we treat 'is rare' as a first-level function rather than a second-level function (say, as meaning 'tender' or 'sensitive'). And by the same token, if it is essential to a symbol's being a second-level function that it take first-level functions as arguments, then we can treat 'is rare' as a second-level function in this context only if we treat 'Chairman Mao' as a first-level function rather than a proper name (perhaps on the model of 'a brutal politician'. Either way of parsing the signs is perfectly feasible – we need only to determine a suitable meaning for the complementary component in each case; but each way presupposes an interpretation of the string as a whole which excludes the other. So treating it as substantial nonsense involves hovering between two feasible but incompatible ways of treating the string, without ever settling on either.⁵

This argument relies on a counter-intuitive suppressed premise: the thought that it is only possible to identify the meaning of a sub-propositional expression if this occurs within a sentence that has a sense. Not only is this principle extremely implausible in its own right, there is also no evidence at all that the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*⁶ would have accepted it. Consider, for example, the following passage:

What does it mean to say that the 'is' in 'The rose is red' has a different meaning from the 'is' in 'twice two is four'? If it is answered that it means that different rules are valid for these two words, we can say that we have only *one* word here. – And if I am now attending to the grammatical rules, then these just do allow the use of the word 'is' in both connexions. – But the rule which shows that the word 'is' has different meanings in these sentences is the one allowing us to replace the word 'is' in the second sentence by the sign of equality and prohibiting this substitution in the first sentence (1992, §558 translation emended).

This section makes it quite clear that Wittgenstein thinks that there are grammatical rules which determine the correct and the incorrect applications of words. That is to say, Wittgenstein thinks that grammar *prohibits* the formation of the construction 'the rose equals (or is equivalent to) red'. This contradicts Mulhall's contention that nonsense cannot be the result of

⁵ For similar arguments see Conant (2005), Diamond (2005) and Witherspoon (2000).

⁶ Henceforth PI.

attempting to 'conjoin intelligible words in unintelligible ways' (2007, 9). We can combine intelligible words in unintelligible ways, but the result of this won't be a proposition that is 'determinately unintelligible', since there is no such thing, but a meaningless string of words.

But from the fact that there is no such thing as a 'determinately unintelligible' proposition, it does not follow, as resolute readers suppose, that we cannot identify *the words* that make up the meaningless string. We can see, for instance, that in the phrase 'the rose equals red', the word 'equals' is being misused, just as we can see that in Dummett's example 'Chairman Mao' and the expression 'is rare' are being misused, without having to attribute a meaning – some sort of 'nonsensical sense' – to the expression as a whole (since it has none). All that is required for identification to occur is to know the meanings – the uses of – these expressions in ordinary contexts⁷. Once I have mastered the rules for the uses of these expressions, I can tell straight away that 'Chairman Mao is rare' makes no sense, just as I can see straight off, if I have mastered chess, that moving the rook diagonally across the board is not, cheating aside, a possible move in this game.

In other words, once the rules for the use of the expressions 'Chairman Mao' and 'is rare' are in place, it *follows* that the combination 'Chairman Mao is rare' can make no sense. That is to say, it is precisely because of the kinds of meanings (uses) that 'Chairman Mao' and 'is rare' have in other, 'normal', contexts, that the construction 'Chairman Mao is rare' is nonsensical. Hence, *pace* Mulhall, the grammatical rules *do* constitute 'a given, impersonal source of authority' (2007, 66), as once they are in place, certain formations will be ruled out as inadmissible *in advance* on pain of unintelligibility⁸.

Hutchinson (2007) runs an even more radical line than Mulhall: not only does a word not have a meaning outside a particular context of use,

⁷ See also Hacker (2003); Glock (2004); Schönbaumsfeld (2007).

⁸ And it is important to note here, as Hacker (2003, 19-20) says 'that if one were to assign to a significant word or phrase a meaning in contexts from which it is excluded' – as in assign 'is rare' in 'Chairman Mao is rare', as Mulhall suggests, the meaning of 'tender' or 'sensitive' – 'then one would have changed its meaning. So one would, as Wittgenstein noted, be talking of something else'.

‘it’ (whatever ‘it’ is) doesn’t even qualify as a word unless it is used. Hutchinson claims:

There is no such thing as a word outside some particular use...For a word to be is for a word to be used. Language does not exist external to its use by us in the world ... [it] cannot, in McDowell’s phrase, be viewed ‘from sideways on,’ in the sense in which we cannot stand outside language in order that we might talk about language. (2007, 706)

This is very confused. We cannot, indeed, use language to get ‘outside’ language *tout court*, in the sense, perhaps, in which, if we are not resolute readers, Wittgenstein himself attempted to ‘get outside language’ in the *Tractatus*, and which is also the sense McDowell (who is being misused by Hutchinson here) has in mind, i.e. by trying to adopt some sort of ‘transcendental perspective’ on language and the world. But this does not imply, as Hutchinson mistakenly seems to assume, that we cannot use language to say something about how language functions. That is to say, it is an error to believe, as Hutchinson does, that if we reject such a transcendental perspective, then it just follows that ‘there is no such thing as a word outside some particular use’. For to think that there is such a thing as a word outside *particular* contexts of use is not in the least the same as thinking there is such a thing as a word outside *all* contexts of use, and only the latter would qualify as adopting an ‘external’ perspective on language. Hence, at best, all that Hutchinson has shown is that there is no such thing as a word outside language – outside *all* contexts of use – but no reader of Wittgenstein, ‘resolute’ or otherwise, would disagree with *that*.

II

Whatever the merits of attributing a resolute conception of nonsense to the *Tractatus*⁹, nowhere, in the PI, does Wittgenstein say that he believes that there is no difference between philosophical nonsense and plain gibberish¹⁰.

⁹ This is a question I shall not be addressing in this paper. For a critique of the view see, for example, Hacker (2000), Proops (2001), Williams (2001) and Schönbaumsfeld (2007).

¹⁰ Even the resolute readers’ oft-quoted remark – ‘My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense’ (PI

It is consequently not surprising that Conant (2004, 186), for example, has to cite as evidence a passage from an unpublished 1935 ‘Lecture on Personal Experience’:

Different kinds of nonsense. 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 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 regarding it as nonsense, and hence the trouble arises.

Conant takes this passage as unambiguously supporting his case, and relates it to his reading of the ‘private language’ sections of the PI in the following way. The standard interpretation of these remarks, Conant claims, is ‘to show that the very idea of a private language is the idea of something which we can rule out because of the kind of sense that the locution ‘private language’ has antecedently been given. It takes it that there is something determinate which the philosopher wants to mean by the locution “private language” and that *that* is nonsense’ (2004, 187). But Wittgenstein’s point, according to Conant, is to show that such a conception makes no sense, and, hence, that what we took to be an instance of ‘substantial nonsense’ – a particular something that cannot be – collapses into mere nonsense (plain gibberish).

If we apply these insights to the 1935 passage, the following picture emerges. Wittgenstein wants to disabuse the philosopher of the view that the locution ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ has a sense – there is something determinate the philosopher wants to mean by it – and it is this ‘sense’ which

§464) – is inconclusive, as ‘patent nonsense’ need not necessarily be the same as plain gibberish.

turns out to be nonsense. But, according to Conant's reading of Wittgenstein, there is at best a psychological distinction between 'I feel Smith's toothache' and 'abracadabra'.

It is not so clear, however, that the remarks in question really do support Conant's reading. For the point of Wittgenstein's comments is not to show that what the philosopher took to be substantial nonsense is really plain nonsense – the trouble arises, Wittgenstein says, because we constantly hover between taking the locution in question as *sense* or regarding it as nonsense, *not, pace* Conant, between regarding it as *substantial* nonsense or plain gibberish – rather, what he wants to get the philosopher to see is that we exclude from the language 'I feel Smith's toothache' for conceptual or grammatical reasons, and not, as the philosopher imagines, for *metaphysical* ones. In other words, it is not, as Wittgenstein says, 'because of some truth about the nature of things or the nature of the world' that the expression 'I feel Smith's toothache' is nonsense – say, because we have discovered 'that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain.' The point, therefore, of saying there is no difference between saying 'abracadabra' and 'I feel Smith's toothache' is not to show that the second string contains nonsense words, as Conant thinks, but rather to prevent the philosopher from supposing that the reason why we discard the latter from the language is to exclude an 'impossible' possibility – namely, the 'possible' state of affairs of my feeling Smith's toothache. The very idea of my feeling his toothache is senseless, however, for, if I could, as it were, feel it, then this would *eo ipso* make it *my* toothache, not Smith's (and to say this is to make a grammatical remark). Consequently, the significance of this passage consists in weaning the philosopher away from the idea that a rule of grammar functions like a metaphysical prohibition.

Naturally, once the philosopher has been brought to realize that 'I feel Smith's toothache' is nonsense, i.e. that it can be discarded from the language because it is not a move in the game, the same thing follows from it as from 'abracadabra' – to wit, nothing¹¹. In this respect, there is indeed no difference between the two strings. But this does not imply, as resolute

¹¹ Except if we are magicians and are signalling that the conjuring trick has taken place.

readers seem to maintain, that therefore the two strings are the same in *every other way too*. For nothing follows from a tautology such as ‘p or not p’ either, but this fact does not turn it into gibberish (it is, at best, and, as the author of the *Tractatus* thought, senseless, that is to say, it asserts nothing).

In other words, the reason why Wittgenstein says ‘that there is in fact no difference between these two cases of nonsense’, is in order to emphasize that nothing follows from ‘my not being able to feel Smith’s toothache’ – a form of words is withdrawn from circulation, that is all – and this, precisely, in order to head off the ‘metaphysical reading’ which is tempted to construe a string’s being nonsense as a kind of ‘super-falsehood’: something’s being impossible ‘because of some truth about the nature of things’. And if one were to construe nonsense thus, then something *would* follow from an expression’s being nonsensical – namely, the necessary truth of its negation. But it is one of the later Wittgenstein’s achievements to have shown that if ‘p’ is nonsense, then ‘not p’ is nonsense too. It is this that Wittgenstein’s remarks are supposed to alert the reader to, and not, *contra* Conant, that ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ and ‘abracadabra’ are logically indistinguishable – something already signalled by the fact that Wittgenstein italicizes ‘*different kinds of nonsense*’ at the beginning of the passage and says, ‘though it is nonsense to say “I feel his pain”, this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word.’

Of course Conant would continue to maintain that ‘I feel Smith’s toothache’ differs only *psychologically* from ‘abracadabra’. But here one may legitimately wonder what this ‘distinctive psychological kind of nonsense’ (Mulhall 2007, 5) is supposed to be that resolute readers appeal to. Given that, as Mulhall warns, ‘it is vital to note that what makes it [the nonsense] illuminating is not anything about the nonsense itself – nothing intrinsic to it, as it were – since logically speaking it has no intrinsic structure’ (2007, 5), it remains mysterious how, exactly, the string manages to bring it about that one is philosophically tempted by it.

It is at this point in the discussion that resolute readers tend to start speaking of ‘imaginatively inhabiting the interlocutor’s perspective’ (2007, 82). But this just raises the same question again in different guise: what, if not content, is it that constrains our imaginative acts of identification? If it is true, as resolute readers seem to suppose, that one cannot even *identify*

the meaning of a word unless it occurs within the context of a sentence that has a sense, then no constraints at all seem available here. And if so, then even wheeling in a Tractarian sign/symbol distinction will not help, for if all I am taken in by is mere signs (not symbols) – signs not parsed in any particular way – then I can conceivably take them to mean anything I please, and hence, it will again be down to pure chance whether what I take them to mean bears any relation to the confusion Wittgenstein wants to dispel.

Even if we grant resolute readers that what we are taken in by is the fact that the nonsensical string ‘jingles like’ or ‘superficially resembles’ a genuine sentence, the question arises, what, precisely, it is that makes the nonsensical string look or sound like a meaningful one in the first place. Can a resolute reader really help himself to a notion of resemblance without having to grant, at the same time, that the relevant string is actually composed of *words*, words that generally have a meaning (even if in this particular context they have none)? For in order for a notion of resemblance to get off the ground, the nonsensical string must have something in common with a genuine sentence. And what might this be, if not the fact that the string is composed of words we can recognize?

‘Piggle wiggle’ does not resemble any kind of sensible linguistic construction and therefore we can’t operate with it. But nonsensical strings of the relevant kind cannot be like that if we are, as resolute readers must maintain, to be ‘taken in’ by them. So the nonsensical string must dupe us by sounding and looking like real words in a grammatically well-formed sentence. But if ‘the words’ in the meaningless string sound and look like real words – and are not just plain gibberish like piggle wiggle – then what is to stop us from saying they *are* real words employed in ways contrary to the rules for their correct use? After all, one might say, if something waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it most probably *is* a duck. And if the only thing preventing resolute readers from granting this is the fact that the string as a whole is nonsense, then this is simply to beg the question.

III

In the light of all these objections, perhaps the only imaginable selling-point of a resolute reading is the fact that it is difficult to understand the role that *reductio*-type arguments play in the PI. Anthony Kenny (2004, 180), for example, believes that because Wittgenstein is committed to the view that the 'philosopher's dogma is not a genuine proposition from which other things might follow, but only a piece of nonsense in disguise' (2004, 175), therefore there can be no room for argumentation within Wittgenstein's philosophical method, since it is 'impossible to make a piece of nonsense a premise in an argument' (2004, 175). Consequently, Kenny contends, Hacker, for example, must be wrong to ascribe arguments to Wittgenstein, for, if something is in fact nonsense, it cannot follow from an argument by deductive inference. But if so, we may, Kenny says, 'well be puzzled about what kind of *following*' (2004, 175) Hacker is talking about when he says, for instance, that it follows from the private language argument that solipsism and idealism are misguided philosophies (2004, 175). That said, Kenny immediately goes on to attach a proviso to this claim (2004, 175):

The therapeutic procedure is not, however, a mere incantation. It must obey the laws of logic. What 'follows from' the pseudo-proposition must be what would really follow from it if it were a genuine proposition.

But now it seems that Kenny is hoist on his own petard. For he previously castigated Hacker for helping himself, when attributing arguments to Wittgenstein, to a non-deductive notion of 'following', while himself appealing, in this passage, to what sounds suspiciously like the resolute readers' idea of 'apparent logical relations' – 'relations' that would obtain if only the pseudo-proposition were a genuine proposition. And if something is wrong, as Kenny seems to think, with Hacker's conception of 'following', then, surely, his own invocation of 'pseudo-following' – what would 'really follow' from [a proposition] if it were a genuine proposition – cannot fare any better. For how, if we allegedly cannot make sense of the idea of 'non-deductive following', are we to understand the 'logical relations' supposedly at work in 'pseudo-following'? So, if Kenny is right about Hacker, then his own account can hardly be thought to be immune to similar criticism.

Kenny's reading therefore seems to parallel the dilemma faced by resolute readers in the previous section: on the one hand Wittgenstein's therapeutic procedure must not end up collapsing into mere incantation; on the other, it seems impossible to avoid this consequence if nonsense cannot figure in an argument, or is literally plain gibberish. To avoid the first horn, resolute readers appeal to a 'psychological conception' of nonsense, while Kenny invokes the notion of 'pseudo-following', but neither of these options is, for the reasons given in this paper, very promising.

Interestingly, Wittgenstein in the PI doesn't actually speak very often of a construction's being nonsensical. He tends, rather, to speak of a picture lacking a clear application. This might help us get a better sense of what Wittgenstein is up to when he tries to show why we should withdraw a combination of words from circulation, or why a form of words has no clear use. For it is this that '*reductio* arguments', within the context of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, really come down to. Consider, for example, the following remark which occurs within the context of whether it makes sense to ascribe pains to a stove:

Here it happens that our thinking plays us a queer trick. We want, that is, to quote the law of excluded middle and to say 'Either such an image is in his mind, or it is not [either the stove has a pain or it does not]; there is no third possibility. – We encounter this queer argument also in other regions of philosophy. 'In the decimal expansion of π either the group "777" occurs, or it does not – there is no third possibility.' That is to say: 'God sees – but we don't know.' But what does that mean? – We use a picture; the picture of a visible series which one person sees the whole of and another not. The law of excluded middle says here: It must either look like this, or like that. So it really – and this is a truism – says nothing at all, but gives us a picture. And the problem ought now to be: does reality accord with the picture or not? And this picture *seems* to determine what we have to do, what to look for, and how – but it does not do so, just because we do not know how it is to be applied. (PI §352)

I would like to suggest that to say 'this combination of words makes no sense' is analogous to saying 'this picture has no application'. But a picture, even if senseless, obviously isn't gibberish. For it suggests, as Wittgenstein says, a particular application to us – and it can only do this if it is *not* mere gobbledygook – but then, when we actually try to apply the picture in this way, this turns out not to be possible. So, for example, one might think that

in order to understand the question whether a stove has pains, it is sufficient simply to imagine that the stove 'has' what I 'have' when I am in pain ('either the stove has a pain or it does not'). Wittgenstein might then invite his interlocutor to specify what 'having' amounts to in this context, and it would quickly emerge that the philosopher construes the grammar of 'having a pain' as functioning like the grammar of being in possession of some kind of object, say, a beetle, albeit it one intrinsically inaccessible to anyone else. And so it perhaps makes sense to stipulate that the same 'private object' is forever locked away inside the stove as it is locked away inside me. Thus the latent nonsense gradually becomes ever more patent (PI §464), and Wittgenstein has loosened the grip of the 'picture that held us captive' (PI §115) (in this case the 'inner object' picture of pain). This process of transformation could be characterized as the attempt, as it were, to model something from the picture, in order to make us see that this can't be done.

If this account is correct, then Kenny and the resolute readers have, for different reasons, got Wittgenstein wrong. For it is only if we want to reserve the word 'argument' for showing a claim to be either true or false that we need balk, like Kenny, at the idea that Wittgenstein uses arguments to show how a particular combination of words does not make sense¹². Naturally, I cannot 'deductively prove' that something is nonsense, as this is a patently incoherent idea – and, in this much, I can, indeed, not make a piece of nonsense a premise in an argument. What I *can* do, however, is seek to make the nonsense patent by arguing against the philosophical preconceptions (false pictures) that attract the philosopher to the nonsensical sentence in the first place. Once these are undermined, the philosopher will himself be brought to see that his words only seemed to add up to a genuine claim.

¹² Even if this means having to modify, as Glock (2004a, 243) says, the standard assumption that everything that stands in logical relations with something meaningful is itself meaningful. See also Denis McManus (2006, 137). If this upsets our philosophical intuitions, it is perhaps high time they were upset.

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