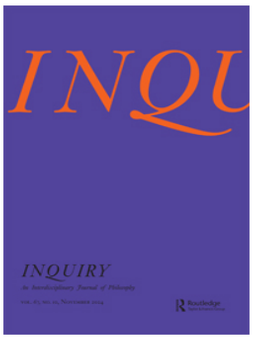

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How to understand 'nonsense': do not ask what nonsense is, but rather how we show that something is nonsense!

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the problem of how to elucidate the concept of nonsense. Viewed from a general philosophical standpoint this matters because the concept is used by certain philosophers in their criticism of philosophical questions and theses. I start with a presentation of examples of utterances considered nonsense, along with Baier's classification of kinds of nonsense. I then present various approaches, pointing out that none of them are completely satisfactory. I subsequently propose an approach that is a modification of the austere conception: while consistent with the latter in that it treats nonsense as a lack of something, it differs by holding that a determination of the nature of various instances of nonsense can only be accomplished by examining how we show that some given utterance is nonsense. This approach places the emphasis on distinguishing the question of the meaninglessness of an utterance from the question of the incorrectness of linguistic expressions. The advantage of my conception is that on the one hand, it does not deny that there is an important non-psychological difference between philosophical nonsense and gibberish, while on the other it avoids the absurdity that philosophical utterances are nonsense because what they say is nonsensical.

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1. Introduction

The main aim of this article is to elucidate the concept of nonsense. Focusing on this issue is, in my opinion, important from a general philosophical perspective, because this concept has been, and continues to be, employed by certain thinkers in their criticism of philosophical questions and theses (cf. Cappelen 2013). That is, these thinkers do not so much

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criticize philosophical questions as undecidable, or philosophical propositions as false, as question them by suggesting they are simply meaningless. Without clarifying the notion of nonsense it is impossible to properly understand the nature of this type of criticism. In the present article, I will not go into detail about the nature and character of the sorts of philosophical criticism that invoke the notion of nonsense, but I do wish to point out from the outset that the considerations below are intended to in some way lay the groundwork for achieving a deeper grasp of what that kind of criticism amounts to.[1]

I begin my considerations by pointing to examples in the form of various expressions that are characterized as nonsense. I then outline the most popular approaches to nonsense. I start with a very brief presentation of the approach that holds that the notion of nonsense plays no significant philosophical role: the so-called 'no-nonsense theory'. As an alternative conception, I discuss the so-called 'substantial' or 'combinatorial' conception of nonsense. I end the review of positions by presenting the so-called 'austere conception' of nonsense. Since none of these approaches to nonsense is entirely satisfactory, I then propose my own approach. The guiding principle of the latter is as follows: do not ask what nonsense is, but how we show that something is nonsense. This reformulation of the issue, I believe, makes it possible to present a more nuanced approach to nonsense than any of the three ways of dealing with it mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that the approach I am proposing should be regarded as a development of the austere conception of nonsense, rather than as coming from an entirely different direction. According to the approach proposed below, a given utterance is nonsensical when it does not constitute any speech act. So nonsense, on my view, consists in a certain lack, and on

[1]It is worth emphasizing that philosophical criticism of the sort that invokes the notion of nonsense or unintelligibility is hardly a new phenomenon. Berkeley attacked the concept of matter as something that supports qualities by trying to show that we do not really understand the concept (Berkeley 1999, 138; cf. Diamond 1991a, 44–46). Hume also questioned certain doctrines as unintelligible (Hume 1888, 220–225). It seems, however, that it was Wittgenstein who believed that one of the main tools of philosophical criticism is the notion of nonsense. In his opinion, philosophical investigations make it possible to see that certain seemingly intelligible sentences are in fact meaningless: that is, these investigations make it possible 'to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense' (Wittgenstein 2009, § 464). He presented such an approach to philosophical problems both in the *Tractatus* (1922, 4.003, 6.53) and the *Investigations* (2009, § 109, § 119, § 464). Another very famous 20th-century philosopher who often appealed to the notion of nonsense in his critical arguments was Carnap (cf. 1959). He rejected metaphysical claims and questions as nonsense on the grounds that they are either empirically unverifiable (undecidable) or not well-formed. In what follows I will not refer at all to Berkeley's, Hume's or Carnap's conceptions of unintelligibility and nonsense, and will only very briefly refer to Wittgenstein's account. The purpose of recalling these conceptions here is only to point out that philosophical criticism that appeals to the notion of nonsense is neither a new nor a very rare phenomenon.

this point, my account is consistent with the austere conception. However, there are some differences between these two positions. One of these concerns whether the way in which the nonsensicality of a given utterance is shown is relevant to understanding the nature of that nonsense; on the approach proposed here, this is important. Another is that the austere conception basically focuses on the nonsensicality of sentences, whereas according to the approach presented here, when considering the issue of nonsense one should always keep in mind the distinction between actual utterances and linguistic expressions (e.g. sentences).[2] As regards this, I hold that the austere conception of nonsense, while in some sense presupposing the distinction, does not articulate it in a sufficiently clear and explicit way. The distinction is important because it makes it clear that when someone describes as 'nonsense' the use of certain sentences that are grammatically correct and contain words that, according to the dictionary, have a meaning, it is not the sentences themselves that are nonsense but some of the corresponding utterances. Other such utterances, meanwhile, may turn out to be intelligible and therefore meaningful. (For example, it is not that the sentence 'Caesar is prime' is *itself* nonsense, but only that some utterances of it may turn out to be so). Having issued some remarks clarifying the notion of nonsense, I proceed to a brief discussion of how to interpret philosophical criticism invoking the notion of nonsense. I agree with the proponents of the austere conception of nonsense that because nonsensicality is not an inherent property of linguistic expressions, certain philosophical questions or propositions cannot be proven to be nonsense; rather, it can only be shown that they have not yet been invested with any determinate sense. It should be emphasized, however, that describing how different the ways are in which the nonsensicality of various utterances is shown enables us to better understand the nature of philosophical criticism of the sort that appeals to the notion of nonsense.

2. Baier's classification of types of nonsense

The following presentation of examples of various utterances[3] recognized as nonsense may serve as a starting point for clarifying the concept of nonsense. Here is a list of eight such utterances:

[2]In my view, utterances are linguistic expressions (or possibly signs resembling linguistic expressions) used in a given context. My reasons for preferring to speak of the nonsensicality of utterances rather than sentences will be set out later.

[3]I wish to emphasize that I am assuming that the examples below can be thought of as corresponding to such sentences' actually being uttered in some context or other, such that it makes sense to regard them as utterances. Of course, only if this assumption is made can the following list be referred to

1. The moon is inhabited by nomadic peoples.
2. Electrons are bigger than ants.
3. London is south-east of here. (When this sentence is uttered at the North Pole.)
4. What I am saying now is true. (When this sentence is the only sentence uttered by the speaker at the time.)
5. The square root of three is tasty.
6. On if package stool lies.
7. Mark is gonic.
8. Gaborant rores trossgrols.

The word 'nonsense' is used to refer to various types of utterances: to outright falsehoods, absurdities and utterances that are incomprehensible for various reasons. In seeking to give a preliminary classification of the above utterances, I will refer to the typology proposed by Baier (1967). According to this typology, utterances 1 and 2 should be classified as obvious falsehoods, while utterances 3 and 4 correspond more or less to what Baier calls 'semantic nonsense', meaning utterances whose nonsensicality stems from the fact that the rules linking certain 'well-formed sentence[s] to certain non-linguistic contexts' are broken (1967, 520). Utterance 5, according to Baier's typology, can be called 'nonsense' because it involves a category mistake. (She adopts the term 'semisentence' as a label for such utterances.) Utterance 6 should be classified as a 'nonsense string', as it is a string of words whose syntax does not match the syntax of any meaningful expression: it is simply an ungrammatical expression. Utterance 7, according to Baier's classification, is 'vocabulary nonsense', meaning that it is an utterance 'which ha[s] enough familiar elements to enable us to discern a familiar syntax, but whose vocabulary, or a crucial part of it, is unfamiliar … ' (1967, 521). Utterance 8, meanwhile, should not be included either in the category of vocabulary nonsense or in the sixth category distinguished by Baier (i.e. 'nonsense as gibberish'). On the one hand, this utterance does not seem to be vocabulary nonsense, because in this case none of the components belongs to the lexicon of any language, but on the other hand, it does not appear to be mere gibberish, as this sequence of unknown elements is meant to mimic the syntax of the English language.

as a list of utterances. At this stage I will not be presenting any specific contexts of utterance for these sentences; later on, however, when discussing particular cases of such sentences being uttered, I do try to present such contexts – albeit only in sketchy terms.

3. Three approaches to nonsense: the no-nonsense theory, the combinatorial conception and the austere notion

Before presenting my own approach to classifying various utterances as nonsensical, I will outline three other ways of dealing with the issue. I will start with the no-nonsense theory, then move on to the theory of substantial or combinatorial nonsense, and subsequently end this part of my text with a presentation of the austere conception. Basically, I will not analyse the arguments supporting these positions; I will focus only on presenting them.[4] The main point of contention between these three concerns the determination of the status of utterances such as 5. Other examples of this type of utterance are, for example:

5′. Ceasar is a prime number.

5″. Virtue is green.

5‴. Quadruplicity drinks procrastination.

Proponents of the no-nonsense theory (Bradley 1978; Haack 1971; Magidor 2009; Prior 1976; Quine 1960, 229) claim that such utterances are not nonsense, but plainly false. One line of argument in favour of this thesis is based on the belief that since the negations of these utterances are truths, the utterances themselves must be meaningful. Given that, for example, it is true that virtue is not green (cf. Prior 1976), the statement asserting that virtue is green must be intelligible and meaningful. Moreover, treating such utterances as nonsensical would significantly complicate either logic itself or its application to utterances in natural language (Haack 1971, 74; Quine 1960, 229). The reasoning leading to the first conclusion might go roughly speaking as follows. If one wanted to assign a third truth-value to nonsensical utterances – a value different from truth and falsity – then in the natural languages in which such utterances can be formed classical logic would not apply. Assuming that, for example, the utterance 'Virtue is green' has a third truth-value, and that the negation of the utterance with a third truth-value also has a third truth-value, then the statement that 'it is neither true that virtue is green, nor true that it is not green' is correct – and this statement, if one understands conjunction and negation in the classical way, entails

[4]It should be noted that although the supporters of these three conceptions speak about the meaningfulness and nonsensicality of sentences, when discussing their conceptions I am basically presenting them as if they were speaking about the meaningfulness and nonsensicality of utterances. This is because what interests me is precisely the latter, not the former.

the following contradiction: 'virtue is both green and not green'. Avoiding such contradictions would therefore require adopting some version of non-classical logic. Another solution, possible but undesirable from the point of view of the no-nonsense theorists, would be, as I have already mentioned, to introduce some complications not to logic itself, but to the way it is applied. According to this solution, the laws of logic would not apply to all utterances of grammatically correct declarative sentences belonging to natural language (Haack 1971, 71). They should therefore not be applied to utterances such as 'Caesar is a prime number'. Such an approach to the application of the laws of logic to utterances produced in natural language could be unsatisfactory, because it would deprive us of a clear and transparent criterion for the applicability of these laws: it seems that these laws can be applied to all utterances of declarative sentences – provided, of course, that the reference of any occasional terms appearing therein is specified.

Still, other arguments in favour of the no-nonsense theory are presented by Magidor (2009). In order to show that sentences of type 5 are meaningful, she appeals *inter alia* to the principle of compositionality and the possibility of translating sentences such as 'Caesar is a prime number' into other languages. She adopts the following version of the principle of compositionality:

> If S is a generally competent speaker of a language L and S understands the terms 'a' and 'F' of L, then S understands the sentence 'Fa' (Magidor 2009, 557).

According to this principle, the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' is intelligible because its components are: the proper name 'Caesar' can be understood, as can be the predicate 'is a prime number'. The translatability argument, on the other hand, assumes that if a sentence like 'Virtue is green' can be translated into other languages, then the sentence is meaningful because the translation must retain the meaning of the original sentence; hence, the original sentence must already have had some meaning, so that it could be translated.

A different approach to utterances such as 5 is presented by proponents of the combinatorial conception of nonsense (Carnap 1959; Glock 2004, 2015; Goddard 1970; Hacker 2003; Pap 1960; Routley 1969). In their view, it is obvious that type 5 utterances are meaningless. However, this fact needs to be explained. The best explanation is to treat the components of utterances like 'Virtue is green' as incompatible. That is, for example, names of certain types of objects cannot be combined with predicates that cannot be meaningfully predicated of these

types of objects. The predicate 'is green' can be meaningfully predicated of ordinary physical objects, but cannot be meaningfully predicated of morally positive or negative traits, and therefore the sentence 'Virtue is green' is meaningless. Similarly, the predicate 'is prime' cannot be meaningfully predicated of persons, and therefore the sentence 'Caesar is prime' is meaningless. Thus, this conception assumes that linguistic expressions that *prima facie* belong to the same syntactic categories may belong to different semantic categories. In order to obtain a meaningful sentence, and not just a grammatically correct one, it is not enough to combine expressions belonging to the appropriate syntactic categories, as it is also required that the expressions we combine belong to the appropriate semantic categories. Therefore, it is not enough, for example, to combine a predicate with a name: it is also necessary that the name belong to the appropriate semantic category – i.e. that its referent belong to the range of meaningful use of this predicate. The referent of the name 'Caesar' does not fall within the range of meaningful use of the predicate 'is prime', and this renders the sentence 'Caesar is prime' meaningless.

Utterances such as 'Caesar is prime' are treated in yet another way by supporters of the austere view on nonsense. According to their view, when we utter the sentence 'Caesar is prime' we utter nonsense unless we assign some new meaning to the components of the sentence (Bogucki 2023; Bronzo 2011; Conant 2000; Conant 2002; Conant and Diamond 2004; Diamond 1991b, 1991c; Witherspoon 2000). Our utterance turns out to be meaningless not because the words in the sentence are assigned meanings that do not match, but because the components of the sentence we use have not been assigned any meanings. That is, since the sentence 'Caesar is prime' has not been assigned any specific meaning in a given context of use, neither have 'Caesar' and 'is prime' been assigned any specific meaning in this context. This approach to the relationship between the meaninglessness of the whole sentence and the meaninglessness of its parts is justified by Frege's context principle (Conant 2000; Diamond 1991b), according to which one can only ask about the meaning of a word in the context of a sentence (Frege 1959). Thus, if no meaning has been assigned to a sentence uttered in a certain context, its components also have no meaning in that context. If the utterance 'Caesar is prime' is meaningless, then the word 'Caesar' in that utterance is neither a proper name for Julius Caesar nor a carrier of any other meaning: this word, in this utterance, is only a certain inscription or sound. This, of course, need not prevent that same word,

understood as just some inscription or sound, from having a specific meaning in other utterances. The meaning of the word 'Caesar' – like the meaning of all other expressions – in a given utterance is determined by its contribution to the meaning of the whole utterance. When the whole is meaningless, the components contribute nothing to the meaning of the whole and are therefore also meaningless. According to the proponents of the austere view of nonsense, utterances like 'Caesar is a prime number' are in fact logically indistinguishable from what Baier (1967) calls 'vocabulary nonsense'. Thus, according to this view, the nonsensicality of utterances like 'Caesar is a prime number' or 'Virtue is green' is purely negative: they are nonsensical simply because these sentences have not been assigned any meaning in their context of utterance.[5]

In concluding this short presentation of the austere view, I would like to point out a feature that, in my opinion, distinguishes it from the two previously outlined approaches to utterances such as 'Virtue is green' and 'Caesar is a prime number'. Both the no-nonsense theory and the combinatorial conception of nonsense pose the question about utterances of this type in the following terms: are sentences like 'Virtue is green' meaningful sentences? It should be emphasized here that this question concerns sentences conceived of as certain types of linguistic expression. The austere view, on the other hand, poses a slightly different question which, I think, can be phrased as follows: do utterances like 'Virtue is green' make sense? It is not possible to give an entirely general affirmative or negative answer to this question. Therefore, supporters of the austere conception of nonsense recognize that meaningfulness and nonsensicality are by no means inherent features of linguistic expressions, and that the question of the nonsensicality of a sentence belonging to a given language is valid only in relation to a particular use of that sentence, not in relation to the sentence itself. For example, unless further explanation is given as to what the expression 'is a prime number' is meant to mean, the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' used in a discussion about the importance of Julius Caesar's achievements makes no sense, while the same sentence used in a conversation about the age of various rulers might, for example, mean that the number of years Caesar lived is a prime number. Without recognizing this difference between the austere view and the previously presented conceptions it is

[5]It is worth adding that there also exist positions that are slightly different from the three presented above: Cappelen's conception of nonsense, for example, is to some extent a combination of the austere conception with the no-nonsense theory (2013, 46).

not possible to properly understand the nature of the dispute over the characterization of certain utterances as nonsense. I will be returning in due course to this question of whether nonsense is to be attributed to sentences themselves or to utterances of sentences, as a proper grasp of the nature of philosophical criticism of the kind that makes an appeal to the notion of nonsense also requires its consideration.

4. The guiding principle of the considerations set forth here pertaining to nonsense, and its application to nonsensical utterances of types 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8

After this brief presentation of the aforementioned three conceptions of how to classify and characterize type 5 utterances – i.e. utterances like 'Virtue is green', or 'Caesar is a prime number' – the following question ought to be posed: should one of these conceptions be adopted, or do we need to formulate an alternative one? In my opinion, the best solution is to slightly modify and develop the austere view. In what follows, I focus primarily on presenting my proposal as to how to modify the latter, but stop short of seeking to present in a systematic fashion the arguments in favour of this modified view.

To understand what nonsense is – and, in particular, the kind of nonsense uttered when we do philosophy – we should adhere to the following methodological recommendation: do not ask what nonsense is, ask how we show that something (e.g. a given utterance) is nonsense. The suggestion is somewhat analogous to Wittgenstein's famous dictum on explaining the meaning of a word:

> What is the meaning of a word?
>
> Let us attack this question by asking, first, what is an explanation of the meaning of a word; what does the explanation of a word look like?
>
> Asking first, 'What's an explanation of meaning?' has two advantages. You in a sense bring the question 'what is meaning?' down to earth. For, surely, to understand the meaning of 'meaning' you ought also to understand the meaning of 'explanation of meaning'. (Wittgenstein 1960, 1; cf. Wittgenstein 2009, § 560)

If we were to ask about the nature of nonsense without asking how, in particular cases, we show that certain utterances are nonsensical, then – it seems – we would be presupposing that the nonsensicality of the utterance is the same in each case. Of course, in a trivial sense you can say that nonsensicality always comes down to the same thing: an utterance is nonsensical because it doesn't make sense. Nonsense is not a positive feature

of an utterance. On this point, the supporters of the austere view of nonsense are absolutely right: the conception of so-called 'positive nonsense' is absurd (Witherspoon 2000). It is absurd to say that a given utterance is devoid of meaning because its *meaning* is somehow nonsensical – so it is absurd, for example, to say that the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' is devoid of meaning because *what it says* is nonsensical.

The validity of this very general characterization of nonsense – the characterization of nonsense as lack of sense – does not, however, in my opinion undermine the methodological recommendation presented above, according to which one should ask how the nonsensicality of the utterance under consideration is shown. I shall thus go on to describe the ways in which it is demonstrated that utterances such as the examples of nonsense given earlier (i.e. the eight numbered utterances listed above) are in fact cases of nonsense. At the outset, I would like to point out that the ensuing description does not pretend to be complete: in fact, I limit myself to only a few remarks on examples 1 and 2, and the comments on the other examples cannot be considered exhaustive either. Moreover, this description is largely quite schematic.

I will begin my description with examples 8 and (then) 7; that is, with the following utterances:

8. Gaborant rores trossgrols.

7. Mark is gonic.

How to show that in uttering a string of meaningless signs like 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' we are talking nonsense? When someone utters such sounds or writes such signs, which in some respects resemble articulated speech[6] but are not used as words of our language, we basically do nothing but indicate that we are dealing with a sequence of sounds or signs that do not belong to our language. It is obvious that an expression consisting solely of signs that do not belong to a given language does not in principle serve to constitute a meaningful utterance when uttered. Only if someone were to deny that an uttered string of signs of this type is meaningless would our position need to be supplemented. In

[6]This includes, for example, phonetic and grammatical aspects – the 'words' in this 'sentence' bear some phonetic resemblance to genuine English words, and the 'grammatical structure' of this 'sentence' bears some resemblance to that of genuine English sentences. It is worth emphasizing that the recognition of certain sequences of sounds or signs as being something that can be thought about at all in terms of sense or nonsense is not a purely subjective matter. We would not say that strings of sounds or signs that do not resemble the expressions of any language at all are nonsensical – such sounds or signs are not treated as linguistic expressions. Eli Friedlander (1998, 231) is right in saying that in a sense nonsense also belongs to language.

such a situation, one should ask the person who is denying that a given utterance is nonsense to explain the meaning of this utterance and determine the meaning of its components. If this person were to say that the utterance 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' means Gaborant rores trossgrols, and that this is a sufficient explanation of the meaning of this utterance, then we would consider it to be simply nonsense. If, on the other hand, this person were to provide certain comprehensible explanations of its meaning, then it would have to be acknowledged that the utterance, taken in the context of the explanations given, is meaningful. This, however, would not also mean that it is intelligible and meaningful independently of what those explanations furnish with respect to a context of utterance.[7] Of course, there would still be the further question of whether

[7]For clarity, I should add that when talking about the 'meaning' or 'sense' of an utterance I am using these words rather more in their non-technical or ordinary sense, and so obviously do not have in mind *linguistic meaning*. Nor should this meaning be identified with the *utterer's meaning*, in that the meaning as understood here is not determined by the speaker's intentions in the way that, for Grice (1991b, 1991c), an utterer's occasion-specific meaning is. The meaning I have in mind here is determined by the linguistic (dictionary-based) meanings of the components of the expression used to form a given utterance, the grammatical structure of the expression, and the context of utterance. In the particular and highly specific case under discussion, only the context determines the meaning, as the signs 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' – at least at this stage – do not belong to any language. Here, the context is provided, in effect, by the explanations given by the speaker. Of course, these explanations seem to express the intention with which the words 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' were uttered, but that does not mean that it was the intention that gave the utterance a specific meaning: a determinate meaning can be assigned to this utterance because it has been explained to the audience in a comprehensible way how it should be understood. According to the approach to the meaning of utterances presented here, their meaning is, roughly speaking, identical to *what is said* (where this also includes the illocutionary force of the utterance). However, I would not want to understand the phrase 'what is said' in such a minimalist manner as, say, Grice (1991a). An interesting critique of the Gricean conception of this is presented by Recanati (1989) and Travis (2008), and my understanding of the term is definitely closer to the way that, for example, Travis (2008) understands it. In my opinion, what Carston (2004) calls 'explicature' should also be included in what is said. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that even if, for some reason, one should assume that the minimalist conception of what is said is correct, it does not mean that one cannot operate with a very broad concept of the meaning of an utterance, where such a concept would include even some things which are implicated – in Grice's sense – by a given utterance (cf. Grice 1991a). In order to present what, in my opinion, constitutes the meaning of an utterance understood in this way, I will use two examples. 1. During an argument between two people that takes place in the apartment of one of them, the owner of the apartment utters the following words: 'We have nothing more to talk about; there is the door'. This utterance, in the sense of the word 'meaning' explained here, means, among other things, that the person with whom the owner of the apartment is talking is to leave. (One of the compliance conditions for this utterance is the person's leaving – it is not sufficient that the door just be in the place indicated). 2. B describes A's management of a company as follows: 'Director A has significantly increased employees' salaries, introduced a friendly atmosphere to the workplace, greatly increased the company's profits, and managed to do all this in one year. He's simply the world champion when it comes to management, and I don't know of any other director like him'. Amongst other things, this utterance means that B does not know any other director who manages her or his company so well. (The truth condition of this utterance need not be that A has won the title of World Champion in management; rather, among other things, it is that B does not know of any other director who has managed her or his company so well). Of course, it may turn out that each of these utterances means, after all, something different, due to the fact that after supplementing the aforementioned context of these utterances with additional elements, this expanded context would then require a different interpretation of those utterances. To sum up, in this text I am

the uttered sentence belongs to standard English or to the individual's private language. However, this issue is not relevant to the problem under consideration here.[8]

In the case of the utterance 'Mark is gonic', our procedure is analogous to the one presented above. We point out that the sign 'gonic' is not a word in English, and that uttering the sentence-like expression 'Mark is gonic' does not therefore count as saying anything meaningful in English. This explanation of the nonsensicality of the utterance would only need to be supplemented if someone were to claim that the utterance did make sense. In such a situation one would have to ask what meaning is assigned to the sign 'gonic' in the utterance. If that person were to say that the sign 'gonic' in this utterance means gonic, and that this counts as a sufficient explanation, then we would treat the utterance 'Mark is gonic' as mere nonsense. If, however, they were to claim that the sign 'gonic' was used in this utterance to mean, for example, wise, then the utterance would make sense in the context of that explanation. Of course, this does not mean that it would also be intelligible and meaningful outside of the context furnished by the explanation. Whether such utterances count as utterances of English sentences, or of sentences belonging to some specific idiolect, is not, as I have already stated above, an essential issue where the problem presently under consideration is concerned.

I shall now turn to a discussion of how one might show that utterances like 'on if the package stool lies' are meaningless. In such a case, it suffices to point out that the string of English words does not form a sentence – or any other expression at all – in English because the rules of grammatical construction have been violated in such a fundamental way that it is impossible to interpret it as a single expression of that language with a specific meaning. Such an argument for the nonsensicality of this type of utterance will only need to be supplemented if someone suggests that the utterance is intelligible. In such a situation, one should ask that person to explain how the utterance is to be understood. They may claim that what this utterance says is that *on if the package stool lies*. In

using the notion of the meaning of an utterance in what I myself take to be a rather ordinary sense. Moreover, I would add that whether the meaning thus understood is to be equated with what is said is, in principle, irrelevant to the validity of the conclusions about nonsense that follow below.

[8]The resolution of that question will depend partly on the facts and partly on convention. That is, if the use of these signs in some given meaning were to become widely adopted amongst English speakers, then the sentence uttered would have to be deemed to belong to the English language. However, an even more liberal approach could be adopted, according to which if these words, used in that sense, appear even just once in any published English text, they can be considered new English words.

this case, we will consider it plain nonsense. However, if someone were to point out that they use this string of words to mean, for example, that *if it is a package, then it is on the stool*, then, in the context of this explanation, this utterance should not be considered nonsensical. Moreover, the same conclusion would have to be reached if we thought that the string of words was not being used as a single phrase but simply as a list of words. It must be emphasized, however, that such utterances can only be deemed meaningful in the context of intelligible explanations.

Let us now consider utterances such as the following:

1. The moon is inhabited by nomadic peoples.

2. Electrons are bigger than ants.

The first statement may be called nonsense, not because it is unintelligible, but because it is patently and indisputably false. This type of use of the word 'nonsense' is fundamentally different from the use of that word for utterances that are unintelligible. Because this article focuses on the sense of the word 'nonsense' in which nonsense is unintelligible, I will not further analyse the application of the word 'nonsense' to type 1 utterances. Statements like 'Electrons are bigger than ants', meanwhile, seem to have a slightly different character than this. The difference can be explicated as follows: we know what the world would look like if the Moon were inhabited by nomadic peoples, but it is not clear what it would amount to for electrons to be larger than ants. Referring to the considerations of Kripke (1980) and Putnam (1975), one might say that 'Electrons are bigger than ants' is necessarily false, though it is neither analytically nor a priori false. Thus, according to this type of approach, such utterances would not be unintelligible. At this point, I do not want to definitively decide how to treat utterances such as this: rather, I will just assume that, at least on some occasions, uttering this sentence may be intelligible. These utterances are therefore not nonsense in the sense of the term that we are interested in here.

5. Application of the guiding principle to nonsensical utterances of types 3 and 4

In this section, I would like to deal with utterances such as these:

3. London is south-east of here. (When this sentence is uttered at the North Pole.)

4. What I am saying now is true. (When this sentence is the only sentence uttered by the speaker at the time.)

In the case of utterances of this type, it is clear that the designation of them as nonsensical does not come from the fact that the sentences uttered are flawed and nonsensical in themselves. According to a widely affirmed view about how language functions, it can be explicated as follows: these sentences have a specific and well-defined linguistic meaning and, therefore, from the standpoint of language as an abstract system of linguistic expressions, are not nonsensical. Even so, these sentences can sometimes be used in a context that is such that their being uttered conveys no content,[9] and when we use them on inappropriate occasions our utterances, being devoid of content, will be incomprehensible and in this sense nonsensical. I believe that this view of the nonsensicality of utterances like 3 and 4 is to some extent correct.

First, it is obvious that the sentence 'London is to the south-east of here' consists of English words and is grammatically unproblematic – which is as much as to say that it is simply a correct English sentence. Secondly, it is obvious that in principle it is known under what circumstances, when using it, we are saying something true, and under what circumstances something false. Third, when uttering this sentence at the North Pole the content of our utterance remains *prima facie* indeterminate until we interpret at least one of the components of the utterance in some non-standard way.

Nevertheless, the approach proposed here differs slightly from the previously mentioned view about how language functions. According to the approach to nonsense advocated in this text, linguistic expressions belonging to language understood as an abstract system simply divide up into those that are correct and those that are incorrect. The correctness of expressions depends on whether they consist of words of a given language and whether they are grammatically correct. Linguistic meaning is assigned to words and idiomatic expressions, and this kind of meaning is furnished in the dictionaries pertaining to a given language. On the other hand, when asking about the meaning of a sentence we generally focus on its 'meaning' in the ordinary, colloquial sense of the word – on what the content and force of a given utterance is. (That is, we ask about what we are saying in a given context when using this sentence.) Even so, the approach presented here should not be interpreted as denying the existence of linguistic meanings of sentences. Rather, my point is that when it comes to linguistic communication between competent language users, our understanding of what someone has said is

[9]Kripke (1975, 691–692), for example, approaches this issue in a similar way.

based on (1) recognizing the components of the sentence uttered as having particular linguistic meanings, (2) recognizing the sentence uttered as grammatically correct and (3) recognizing the (linguistic and non-linguistic) context in which the given sentence was used.

At the same time, I would like to point to certain doubts that may arise in relation to the above explanations regarding what determines the understanding of the content and force of linguistic utterances. These explanations may, at first glance, seem incompatible with the austere conception of nonsense – a modified version of which is, as I have already indicated, what I seek to advocate here. This conception assumes that Frege's context principle, which says 'Never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a sentence' (Frege 1959, X), is correct. Therefore, the austere conception of nonsense seems to be incompatible with the approach to understanding our utterances or speech acts that appeals to the dictionary-based meaning of words, in that it would appear that one can ask for the latter sort of meaning of a word without considering the context of any particular sentence. However, I will address the problem indicated here only after discussing utterances of type 5, as a closer look at the different uses of sentences such as 'The square root of three is tasty' will allow us to better understand the role played by the meanings of words as given in dictionaries in the interpretation of various utterances.

Returning to the issue of the nonsensicality of utterances such as 3 and 4, it should be emphasized that the sentences uttered are linguistically correct, and that the use of these sentences only leads to the uttering of nonsense in very specific circumstances. How do we show that utterances like these are nonsensical? Basically, the starting point is the question of how a given utterance should be understood. Let us consider this issue using as an example the sentence 'London is south-east of this place' uttered at the North Pole. There may be different answers to the question of how this utterance should be construed. Someone might say that it means that London is both south and east of the North Pole, but not west of it. Someone else may say that this utterance means that there is only one place which is exactly south of the North Pole and also exactly west of London. Still another one might say that this utterance means that there are places that are south of the North Pole and at the same time directly west of London. The second explanation imparts a definite meaning to the utterance 'London is south-east of this place', and on such an interpretation the utterance is clearly false. The third explanation also gives a definite meaning to the utterance in

question, but on that interpretation the utterance is evidently true. However, the first explanation seems insufficient when it comes to understanding this utterance: it does not specify its meaning. A person who gives such an explanation should, for example, be asked whether he or she believes that only places west of London can be described as places south of the North Pole. If, on the one hand, they were to answer in the affirmative, then their utterance would have to be considered as having a certain meaning – one resulting from assigning a modified meaning to the term 'south of'. If, on the other hand, they were to deny this and say that every place on Earth other than the North Pole was south of it, and that when they uttered the sentence 'London is south-east of this place' they simply meant that London is south-east rather than south-west of the North Pole, we would consider their utterance incomprehensible and therefore meaningless.

6. Application of the guiding principle to nonsensical utterances of type 5

I now move on to a discussion of the status of utterances such as the following:

5. The square root of three is tasty.

5'. Caesar is a prime number.

As I have already indicated, it is the determination of the status of this type of utterance that is the most controversial. With regard to such cases, the following questions arise against the background of the conceptions presented above. Are they nonsensical? If so, what does their nonsensicality consist in? According to the approach proposed here, it is impossible to give a completely general answer to this question. To better understand why this is so, it is necessary to make a few observations concerning the sentences used to produce utterances of this type.

Sentences such as 'The square root of three is tasty' and 'Caesar is a prime number' are linguistically correct, because they consist only of English words, and they are also grammatically correct. However, they are generally not used to form meaningful utterances. That is, unlike sentences like 'What I am saying now is true', their use is only intelligible in very specific contexts: the use of the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' becomes intelligible, and therefore meaningful, only in a very specific context of utterance, while that of 'What I am saying now is true'

becomes incomprehensible, and therefore nonsensical, only in a certain context of utterance. According to the approach I am proposing, nonsensicality is not an inherent feature of sentences such as 'Caesar is a prime number'. However, as I have already noted, this does not mean, of course, that when we are using sentences of this type we are simply producing some meaningful utterances; hence, my approach is incompatible with that of Prior, Quine and Magidor. The approach to the status of sentences like 'Caesar is a prime number' advocated here is also not compatible with the combinatorial conception of nonsense: as I have already pointed out, such sentences can be used in some particular contexts in a meaningful way.

How do we proceed if we want to determine whether utterances such as 'The square root of three is tasty' or 'Caesar is a prime number' are nonsensical? As with utterances like 3 and 4, we start by asking how these utterances are to be understood. Of course, very different answers can be given to this question. Below, I will consider just three possible answers to the question of how the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' is to be understood. (1) The utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' means that the Roman emperor Caesar is a prime number: i.e. a natural number divisible only by itself and one. (2) In the context of a conversation we are having about the number of letters that go to make up the standard name of a given character, the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' means that the number of letters going to make up the standard name of Caesar is a prime number. (3) The utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' means that Caesar is a Roman commander.

The first answer – unless further explanation is provided – in fact shows that in this case, we are not dealing with a meaningful use of the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number'. The use of this linguistically correct sentence does not automatically result in an intelligible utterance. To deem this utterance intelligible, one would have to be able to explain – at least in general terms – what it means that the Roman emperor Caesar is a natural number divisible only by itself and one. Perhaps it will be possible to explain it in an intelligible way, and then this utterance, in the context of these explanations, will turn out to be meaningful, but without such explanations it has no determinate meaning. In opposition to this conclusion, supporters of a strong principle of compositionality will insist that since the expressions 'Caesar', 'is', 'a' and 'prime number' have a linguistic meaning and are connected together in a grammatically correct way, the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' simply must make sense (cf. Magidor 2009). And, of course, if the meaningfulness of the whole is

interpreted as being only a matter of the linguistic correctness of the uttered sentence, then there is no reason to argue with that. However, if recognizing this utterance as meaningful comes down to recognizing it as simply intelligible, then, in my view, this is inconsistent with how we actually treat such utterances. I think that the only motivation for treating this type of utterance as meaningful stems from reasons of a theoretical sort, and in my opinion this shows that we are on the wrong path. In this situation, in my opinion, it is better to apply *modus tollens* and conclude that since utterances of such sentences as 'Caesar is a prime number' do not appear to make sense in every context, the strong principle of compositionality must be wrong, than to apply *modus ponens* and hold that because the strong principle of compositionality is valid, and all components of the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' have a linguistic meaning and are connected up in the right way, it must be the case that utterances of sentences like 'Caesar is a prime number' make sense in every context.[10]

The second of the above answers to the question of how the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' could be understood is as follows: in the context of our conversation about the number of letters that go to make up the standard name of a given character, the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' means that the number of letters that go to make up the standard name of Caesar is a prime number. Such an answer is – in my opinion – a sufficient explanation of the meaning of the utterance in question, and allows us to conclude that this utterance, in the indicated context, makes sense. It is worth emphasizing that in the context of such a conversation, in order to understand the meaning of the utterance 'Caesar is prime', nothing more is needed than knowing that the proper name 'Caesar' designates Caesar, the predicate 'is prime' refers to the property of being a prime number, and the conversation concerns the number of letters appearing in the standard name of a given character. In the case of utterances of this type one should not, in my view, claim that they have meaning due to the fact that their components have been assigned completely new dictionary-based meanings. For example, the author of a text about Ronaldo's football achievements, in uttering the sentence 'However, the prolific number seven scored a

[10]It is worth noting that in her considerations pertaining to the meaningfulness of the sentence 'The number two is green', Magidor tries to explain how this could be understood (2009, 567–568). The attempt to provide this type of explanation shows that she is, as it were, subconsciously aware that simply insisting that the sentence is meaningful because it is composed of meaningful elements connected together in the right way is insufficient, and that such explanations are called for.

goal', is not giving a completely new dictionary-based meaning to the term 'the number seven' but rather using this term in a somewhat unusual context (Internet source 2022).

What conclusions should be drawn from the above observations? I believe that a distinction needs to be made between the dictionary-based meaning of a given expression and the meaning of that expression in the context of a given utterance – in the sense, that is, of its contribution to the content and force of the utterance. The meaning of the expressions used in a given utterance does not generally come down to the dictionary-based meaning of those expressions – with an obvious exception, it would seem, being the meaning of expressions appearing in an utterance that just consists in a certain listing of expressions of a given language. To determine the meaning of an expression used in a given utterance, one must indeed follow Frege's context principle, according to which one should '[n]ever ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a sentence', yet with the proviso that this is itself now to be formulated in more precise terms as the idea that one should never ask for the meaning of an expression in isolation, but only in the context of some utterance in which it is used. As I have already pointed out, in order to determine the meaning of a given utterance, it is not enough to know the dictionary-based meaning of the words that make up the sentence uttered and the way these words are combined: you also need to know the context in which the sentence is uttered. Thus, a certain expression appearing in different utterances may have the same dictionary meaning in all of them, but different meanings in its role as an element that makes a varying contribution to the content and force of these respective utterances. The name 'Caesar' appears to have the same dictionary meaning in the utterances 'Caesar was the Roman Emperor' and 'Caesar is a prime number' (understood in the way indicated in the previous paragraph). However, if the meaning is understood as a contribution to the content and force of the utterance, then this name has two different meanings in these utterances; the meaning of this name in the first utterance can be explained by pointing out that it designates the Roman leader Julius Caesar, while in the second one it means approximately the same as 'the number of letters appearing in the standard name denoting Julius Caesar'. Summing up the discussion of the second answer to the question of how we should understand the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number', it can now be stated that this answer allows us to assign a certain meaning to that utterance. Moreover, in this case we

do not have to assume that the utterance is intelligible just because some word in the uttered sentence has been given an entirely new dictionary-based meaning.

The third answer I gave to the question about the interpretation of the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' is as follows: such an utterance means that Caesar is a Roman commander. This explanation indicates that the utterance is meaningful because one of the expressions in the uttered sentence has simply been given a new dictionary meaning. The expression 'is a prime number' has been assigned the same meaning as the expression 'is a Roman commander'. We are dealing here with a somewhat trivial case of giving meaning to an utterance that at first glance seems incomprehensible. This is possible because we can indeed endow words with novel dictionary-based meanings just by dint of stipulating these.

The above reflections on how to explain the meaning of utterances such as 'The square root of three is tasty' or 'Caesar is a prime number' show that any attempts to characterize these types of utterances as meaningful or meaningless that do not take into account the context in which these sentences are uttered will be based on a misconstrual. That is, it is a misunderstanding, for example, to treat either all utterances of the sentence 'Caesar is a prime number' as meaningful, or all utterances of this sentence as nonsensical. This misconception results from an embracing of the assumption that we generally attribute meaningfulness or nonsensicality to sentences, not utterances, and it seems to have been made by both supporters of the no-nonsense theory and supporters of the combinatorial conception of nonsense. To get beyond such a misunderstanding, one just has to note certain facts. First, when someone uses a sentence like 'Caesar is a prime number', and the question is asked whether this is nonsense, that question is essentially about that particular utterance, not about the sentence understood as a type. Second, as I have already pointed out, sentences like 'The square of three is tasty' are entirely correct from a purely linguistic point of view, so we can affirm that supporters of the no-nonsense theory are right not to rule out in advance the use of sentences like 'The square of three is tasty' as nonsensical. Third, in the absence of a specification of some peculiar context in which sentences of this type would be used, the meaning of such utterances is completely undefined; hence, it is still the case that supporters of the combinatorial conception of nonsense are right to assert that the mere fact that the words in a given sentence have a dictionary-based meaning and the sentence is grammatically correct does not itself guarantee that utterances of that sentence will make sense.

7. A juxtaposition of different ways of showing nonsensicality

In this part, I wish to juxtapose the various ways of showing the nonsensicality of the types of utterance presented above, and explain why the differences between these types of utterance are not only of a psychological nature.

As I pointed out earlier, my main interest is not in utterances that are deemed nonsensical because they are manifestly false: i.e. utterances of types 1 and 2. In the case of other types of utterances considered nonsensical – by which I mean utterances of types 3–8 – there is a certain common element in respect of the procedure for showing their nonsensicality: a request for an explanation of how they should be understood. On the other hand, it should be noted that the ways of demonstrating nonsensicality differ from each other depending on what kind of utterances they concern. In the case of utterances such as 'Mark is gonic' and 'Gaborant rores trossgrols', the starting point of the argument is to point out that certain words in the sentences uttered do not belong to some given language. In the case of an utterance like 'On if package stool lies', we start our argument by pointing out that the construction with which we are presented is grammatically incorrect: that is, we point out that the sequence of words uttered neither forms an expression belonging to a particular grammatical category, nor resembles, even in just some respects, such an expression. (It is not a sentence, nor does it resemble a sentence; it is not a noun phrase, nor does it even resemble a noun phrase, etc.). However, in the case of a sentence such as, for example, 'London is south-east of here', uttered at the North Pole, we begin our argument by pointing out that although it usually makes sense to utter this sentence, using it in this particular context is meaningless unless some additional explanation is provided as to how the utterance is to be understood. Meanwhile, we deal with utterances like 'The square root of three is tasty' in still another way. We start our argument by pointing out that although the uttered sentence is linguistically correct (in that it consists of meaningful words from a given language combined in a grammatically correct way), without specifying any particular context in which this sentence could be meaningfully used the utterance 'The square root of three is tasty' will be *prima facie* unintelligible and therefore nonsensical.

Thus, according to the approach proposed here, showing the nonsensicality of certain utterances begins with the observation that the expressions uttered simply do not belong to the language – this is

what we do when dealing with utterances of types 7 and 8. We treat the type 8 utterances as nonsense because, for example, the expression 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' does not belong to our (English) language. So in a sense it can be said that such utterances are considered *prima facie* nonsensical because the expressions used to create them do not belong to some given language and are in that sense meaningless. Showing the nonsensicality of utterances of some other kind begins by pointing out that the words uttered are combined in a way that is grammatically completely incorrect. In this case, the defectiveness of the linguistic expressions themselves is also considered to be the primary source of the nonsensicality of the utterances. Of course, as I have already pointed out, utterances that do not belong to any language, or are ungrammatical, may make sense, but they will only do so if appropriate explanations are provided: in the context of such explanations, utterances of this kind will make sense. The situation is different with utterances such as 'London is south-east of here' (when uttered at the North Pole) and 'Caesar is a prime number'. For these, we do not show their nonsensicality by pointing out that the sentences uttered are defective in one way or another; instead, we draw attention to the inappropriate context of their use or the lack of any definite context whatsoever, where this makes it impossible to understand them.

The above-mentioned differences in the ways of showing the nonsensicality of utterances are not differences of a psychological nature. Hence, contrary to what Diamond and Conant claim (Conant 2002; Diamond 1991b), one cannot explain the differences between various nonsensical utterances in psychological terms alone. These differences become apparent in the practice of criticizing certain ways of using language and certain ways of imitating the use of language. However, the existence of these differences does not mean, of course, that cases of nonsense somehow differ in their logical status, in the sense of some being *more* incomprehensible than others.

In what follows below, I try to expand somewhat on what has already been said about the differences between the various ways of showing the nonsensicality of various utterances, and to present a certain positive characterization of these differences. However, I would like to point out in advance that this characterization does not constitute a systematic theory. When I talk about differences in respect of ways of demonstrating the nonsensicality of various types of utterance, I have in mind those differences that depend on the utterances themselves, not those that depend on individual psychological predispositions or accidental external

factors influencing language users. In turn, the utterances we are dealing with themselves depend on how certain given linguistic expressions are used, where the latter depends both on certain general linguistic rules and on the broadly construed context of utterance of the linguistic expressions in question. General linguistic rules include ones that are grammatical (i.e. rules for the construction and transformation of linguistic expressions) and ones that are lexical (i.e. rules assigning dictionary-based meanings to words and idiomatic expressions). The context of an utterance includes both non-linguistic circumstances (e.g. time, place, speaker, audience) and its linguistic context (e.g. preceding utterances, which may contain explanations as to what meaning has been assigned to the words in the utterance in question).

Firstly, there exists a key difference between those ways of showing that an utterance is nonsense that appeal to the fact that some uttered linguistic expression violates certain general linguistic rules and those that invoke the fact that the specific context of utterance of a given linguistically correct (i.e. well-formed) expression does not make it possible to determine what the meaning of the utterance is. This, for example, is what makes for the difference between how the nonsensicality of the utterance 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' is demonstrated and how that of 'London is south-east of here' (uttered at the North Pole) is. Showing the nonsensicality of the first utterance basically involves pointing out that the signs occurring in the expression uttered have no dictionary-based meaning, and that for this reason, it is nonsense. (Of course, the utterance may turn out to be meaningful, but only if appropriate explanations are provided as regards how the signs occurring in it should be understood). On the other hand, when demonstrating the nonsensicality of the second utterance we do not invoke general linguistic rules, because the sentence used is linguistically correct (i.e. well-formed); instead, we point out that the use of this linguistically correct sentence in this specific context does not allow us to determine the meaning of the utterance. (It goes without saying that, as in the previous case, the meaning can still be fixed, but only if certain additional arrangements are made regarding how the words appearing in the utterance should be understood). This key difference in how we demonstrate the nonsensicality of different types of utterance rests on the difference between utterances of expressions that violate general linguistic rules and those that are linguistically correct in the sense that they do not violate said rules but are nevertheless uttered in a context that does not allow the assigning of any definite meaning (i.e. content and force) to them. This difference does not

seem to be of a psychological nature, as it concerns the difference between the role of general linguistic rules and the role of context in determining the meaning of a given utterance.

Secondly, there also exist non-psychological differences obtaining between ways of demonstrating the nonsensicality of utterances that invoke violations of general linguistic rules, and between ways of showing this that appeal to the context of utterance of expressions where those expressions do not themselves violate general linguistic rules. Let us first consider differences of the former sort. Basically, the rules in question can be divided into grammatical and lexical ones, and for this reason the procedure for showing the nonsensicality of utterances such as 6 ('On if package stool lies') differs from that for utterances like 7 ('Mark is gonic'). The point is that in showing the nonsensicality of the former one must invoke the lexical rules of English and point out that they do not include anything that would assign a dictionary-based meaning to the word 'gonic', whereas in demonstrating the nonsensicality of the latter one must invoke the grammatical rules of English and point out that on the basis of these the expression 'On if package stool lies' cannot be considered linguistically correct (i.e. well-formed). The difference between the rules to which we refer when showing, respectively, the nonsensicality of utterances of types 6 and 7 – i.e. the difference between lexical and grammatical rules – is not, of course, a psychological difference: it is rather a difference between two aspects of the functioning of language.

Let us now move on to a consideration of the differences between those ways of showing the nonsensicality of utterances that appeal to their context of utterance. The meaning of an utterance is determined by various contextual components, including time and place of utterance, as well as by utterances that have preceded it. Moreover, it should be emphasized that the components of the context of a given utterance that determine its meaning are fixed either by occasion-specific expressions occurring in the sentence uttered, such as the words 'here' or 'now', or by certain very general assumptions about what may be relevant to understanding the broader linguistic context of the utterance. When seeking to demonstrate the nonsensicality of various utterances by referring to the context of their formulation we are obliged to invoke different components of this context because, depending on the case we are dealing with, different components are responsible for making it the case that they have no definite meaning. Let us consider the following utterances: 'London is south-east of here' (when this sentence is uttered at the North Pole), and 'Caesar is a prime number'. In

the first case, we show that uttering the sentence 'London is south-east of here' in this particular place, i.e. at the North Pole, results in nonsense being uttered, and the component of the context to which we refer in this instance is place. In the second case, on the other hand, we try to determine whether any utterances preceding that of 'Caesar is a prime number' allow us to assign any definite meaning to it, and in this instance, the contextual component to which we refer is the existence or non-existence of such prior utterances as would render it intelligible. Moreover, in the first case the component of the context of utterance responsible for its nonsensicality (namely, the place where the sentence was uttered) is fixed by an expression occurring in the sentence uttered (this being the word 'here'), while in the second case, the contextual component (i.e. the lack of any utterances preceding this utterance that would indicate how it should be understood) is obviously not fixed by any such expression. The differences between the components of the context responsible for rendering different utterances meaningless are, of course, not psychological: a difference pertaining to the place and time of an utterance is hardly a psychological one. The difference between cases of nonsense in which the component of the context of a given utterance responsible for its nonsensicality is determined by an occasion-specific expression occurring in the sentence uttered, and cases where the component of the context of a given utterance that determines its nonsensicality is not thus fixed but is instead determined by certain very general assumptions about what may be relevant to understanding the broader linguistic context of the utterance (as in cases where there is a lack of explanations that would make a given utterance intelligible), is also not of a psychological nature.

To sum up, the above considerations would seem to lead to the conclusion that the differences that exist between ways of showing the nonsensicality of various utterances are by no means exclusively psychological in character, and that they rest on the fact that when seeking to demonstrate the nonsensicality of those utterances we invoke various aspects of the functioning of language, and not just our personal associations and individual psychological predispositions.

8. A comparison of the austere conception of nonsense with that being currently proposed

In this part, I compare the conception of nonsense proposed here with the austere one. I will try to briefly explain both how my approach

coincides (or at least overlaps) with the austere conception, and how it diverges from the latter. Firstly, like proponents of this other conception, I recognize that nonsensicality marks a kind of lack. Nonsensical utterances are not nonsensical because *what they say* is flawed in one way or another: rather, such utterances simply do not say anything (cf. Conant 2000, 2002; Conant and Diamond 2004; Diamond 1991b; Witherspoon 2000). Secondly, I also agree with the austere conception of nonsense on this point: that nonsensicality is not an inherent feature of linguistic expressions (cf. Diamond 1991b). That is, certain sequences of words that have not previously been used to form any meaningful utterances can be used to create such utterances when used in contexts furnished by appropriate explanations. Thirdly, I share the belief of proponents of the austere conception of nonsense that the conclusion that a given utterance is nonsense is ultimately the result of a lack of any coherent explanation of how that utterance should be understood. Therefore, such a conclusion will always be temporary, in that at a later stage of the discussion about a given utterance explanations may be provided in whose context the utterance will turn out to make sense.

Still, the approach to nonsense proposed in this text does seem to deviate from the austere conception on some points. Let me first discuss how we deal with the question of the nature of the difference between various nonsensical utterances. Proponents of the austere conception suggest that the differences between kinds of nonsense are essentially psychological (Diamond 1991b, 103; Conant 2002, 423). That is, the utterance 'Ab sur ah' differs from the utterance 'It is now five o'clock on the Sun' in that we immediately recognize the former as nonsensical, whereas in the case of the latter, we may be inclined to recognize it as meaningful. Looked at from the standpoint proposed in this text there are, nevertheless, other differences between cases of nonsense: namely, those that should not be understood in terms of psychological differences. These differences – as I have already pointed out – consist in the fact that in the case of different nonsensical utterances there are different reasons for recognizing them to be nonsensical, and consequently different ways of showing that they are so. Such differences show themselves in our linguistic practice of criticizing certain utterances as nonsensical, so they are not reducible to psychological differences. The difference between different types of nonsensical utterances is not merely psychological, because it does not depend solely on whether the speakers or hearers are thinking or imagining something when uttering or hearing the nonsense. This difference depends on the way in which we show the

nonsensicality of given utterances. This means that it depends on the activities undertaken to demonstrate their nonsensicality. These activities, in turn, essentially depend on what kind of utterance we are dealing with. It is not a psychological difference that criticism of the utterance 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' as nonsensical may, unless additional explanations are provided, be based on the observation that the strings of letters corresponding to 'gaborant', 'rores' and 'trossgrols' are not English words at all, whilst criticism of the utterance 'Caesar is a prime number' as nonsensical reflects no comparable observation. Firstly, the uttered sentence is linguistically correct, secondly, this criticism of this utterance begins with a request for explanation of how it should be understood and revolves around the point that without providing the appropriate context the utterance is unintelligible. To sum up, the difference between different types of nonsensical utterances lies not in the mental states associated with these utterances, but in the activities that constitute the practice of showing their nonsensicality.

The second difference between the approach advocated here and the austere conception concerns the emphasis placed on distinguishing linguistic expressions from utterances.[11] On my reading of the matter, a clear distinction should be made between our evaluations of linguistic expressions and our assessments of utterances.[12] Linguistic expressions may be correct or not: some incorrect linguistic expressions can even be called nonsense – e.g. 'On if package stool lies', or 'Gaborant rores trossgrols'. In turn, utterances can be divided into intelligible and unintelligible ones, where the former can be called meaningful and the latter nonsensical – but, of course, the use of the word 'nonsensical' in relation to utterances will be different from its use in relation to linguistic expressions. It should be emphasized that a nonsensical utterance can be formed using a correct linguistic expression ('It is now five o'clock on the Sun'), and also that a meaningful utterance can be created using an incorrect linguistic expression. (For example, the utterance 'Mark is gonic' will make sense in the context of an explanation according to which the word 'gonic' means the same as the word 'wise'.) Proceeding

[11]It is worth noting that according to Goldstein, for example, a proper understanding of the nature of paradoxical utterances requires making an analogous distinction. In his opinion, sentences should be distinguished from statements and other speech acts. The meaningfulness of a sentence is not a sufficient condition for using it, for example, to state something and thus convey a certain content (Goldstein 2009, 382–383; 1988, 72–73).

[12]It is worth pointing out that according to, for example, Cappelen, there are even three levels of nonsense. In his opinion, nonsense may consist in: 1. 'failure to have a proper semantic content', 2. 'failure to say something', 3. 'failure to have a thought when attempt to think what is expressed by the utterance of a sentence' (Cappelen 2013, 26). However, I will not discuss this conception here.

in the same vein, proponents of the austere conception of nonsense consider sentences to be meaningful or nonsensical (Conant 2000; Diamond 1991b), but what they really seem to be concerned with are utterances, as they point out that whether a given sentence is meaningful or not depends on how it is used (Conant 2000, 2002; Diamond 1991b; Witherspoon 2000). It can therefore be said that they do not distinguish clearly enough between the evaluation of linguistic expressions and that of utterances.

The consequence of this lack of a clear distinction between the evaluation of linguistic expressions (including, *inter alia*, sentences) and that of utterances is another claim endorsed by supporters of the austere conception that, in my view, requires some revision. They assert that for sentences such as 'Virtue is green', unless we assign them a certain meaning the words 'virtue', 'is' and 'green' will also have no meaning (Diamond 1991b; Conant 2000, 2000, 2; Conant and Diamond 2004; Witherspoon 2000). This statement has, of course, been criticized: it has been argued that although sentences of this type do not have meaning, their components do (Glock 2004, 2015; Hacker 2000, 2003). According to the approach proposed in this text, the words occurring in the uttered sentence 'Virtue is green', even when this utterance is meaningless, possess dictionary-based meanings, because words have such meanings regardless of the context of their utterance. This, however, does not mean that these words have been given a specific meaning in that utterance, as given that the latter has no content or force (i.e. meaning), they have no meaning as elements contributing to its content and force. Put another way, since the whole has no meaning thus construed, the components cannot make any contribution to the meaning of that whole. To sum up, the approach proposed here does not entail a paradoxical-sounding consequence to the effect that the English word 'virtue', having a certain determinate dictionary-based meaning, does not occur in the sentence 'Virtue is green'. However, at the same time this account does not commit itself to embracing the absurdity that consists in claiming that the word 'virtue', in the nonsensical utterance 'Virtue is green', has meaning in the sense of making some contribution to the nonsensical content of that utterance.

The above remarks prompt the following question, already mentioned earlier: does Frege's context principle apply to the dictionary-based meanings of words? A detailed consideration of this issue would, of course, require the writing of a separate article. At this point, I would just like to make some very sketchy comments regarding this matter.

Firstly, a person who has mastered a language is able to understand the dictionary-based meaning of a word without considering its role in any specific sentence in which it appears. Secondly, understanding the dictionary-based meaning of a word requires knowledge of the role or roles it can play in various sentences. Thirdly, it seems that learning one's native language does not begin with acquiring the dictionary-based meanings of words, but rather with understanding and issuing utterances (Wittgenstein 2009, § 6). Based on the above observations, it can be concluded that the dictionary-based meaning of a word is determined only insofar as the meaning of a certain sufficiently large class of utterances in which the word or words necessary to define the meaning of the word are used is also determined (cf. Dummett 1993, 222). The point here is not, of course, that there must be one well-defined set of such utterances, but that such utterances must exist and there must be enough of them. (The number of these utterances cannot be determined in any precise way.) To sum up this point, one can ask about the dictionary-based meanings of words without taking into account the context of the sentences in which these words appear, but this does not mean that one can know the dictionary-based meaning of words independently of understanding any utterances in which these words are used.

Several differences between the approach to nonsense proposed in this text and the austere conception have been presented above. The main feature that distinguishes the conception advocated here from the austere one is that unlike in the case of the latter, different nonsensical utterances can be classified into different types according to how we go about demonstrating their nonsensicality, with the differences between these types of nonsense not being of a psychological nature. Another difference is that on the view being put forward utterances, not sentences, should in principle be considered nonsensical, whereas the austere conception does not explicitly ascribe nonsensicality to utterances, but rather to sentences used in a given context. This issue is, of course, not crucial, but in my opinion the way in which adherents of the austere conception express themselves shows that they have failed to articulate with sufficient clarity the difference between the question of linguistic impropriety as it pertains to sentences and that of nonsensicality in respect of utterances. The third of the differences presented above is that on the austere conception the components of nonsensical utterances are simply meaningless, whilst according to the conception proposed here the words occurring in nonsensical utterances still have

their dictionary-based meanings: they just do not have meanings construed as components contributing to the meaning of some utterance or other taken as a whole.

With regard to such distinguishing features, the following question can be posed: is there anything that unifies these three points?[13] What seems to underlie them all is an approach to the meaningfulness and nonsensicality of utterances according to which whether some given utterance is meaningful or nonsensical depends on two types of factor: on general linguistic rules and on context. Compliance or non-compliance with general linguistic rules determines linguistic correctness or incorrectness. However, the linguistic correctness of the expression uttered does not guarantee that a given utterance has a definite meaning (in the ordinary sense of 'meaning'), because uttering this expression in a specific context may render the utterance meaningless. A significant violation of the general rules of language will generally lead to nonsensicality where some given utterance is concerned, but if the context (such as the preceding utterances) makes it possible to understand the utterance, the linguistic incorrectness of the expression used will not be decisive for the question of the nonsensicality of that utterance.

Let us now consider how the above approach to the meaningfulness and nonsensicality of utterances connects up with the three features that distinguish my conception of nonsense from the austere one. As regards the first feature, it should be noted that if different nonsensical utterances differ from each other in respect of how their nonsensicality is demonstrated, and the differences in how this is accomplished depend in turn on whether this method primarily involves invoking general linguistic rules or whether it assumes that we can refer just to the context of utterance, then the differences between different types of nonsense do not boil down to differences that can be said to be of a psychological nature. Regarding the second feature, it should be pointed out that attributing nonsensicality to utterances rather than sentences (i.e. linguistic expressions of a certain type) is justified by our having distinguished two factors responsible for the meaningfulness or nonsensicality of an utterance: general linguistic rules and context of utterance. A sentence constructed in accordance with general linguistic rules will be linguistically correct (i.e. well-formed), but not every instance of such a sentence being uttered will constitute a meaningful utterance (in the ordinary sense of the word 'meaningful'): the use of such a

[13]I am most grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.

sentence in certain specific contexts may result in nonsense being uttered. Equally, a sentence constructed in violation of general linguistic rules will be linguistically incorrect, but not every case of such a sentence being uttered will amount to nonsense: in cases where the use of such a linguistically incorrect sentence is preceded by explanations enabling the utterance to be understood, it should be considered meaningful. For the reasons just stated it is worth drawing a clear distinction between the defectiveness of sentences, which consists in their violating general linguistic rules, and the defectiveness of utterances, which consists in the fact that they are devoid of meaning (in the sense of content and force). As regards the third feature that distinguishes the conception proposed here from the austere one, it should be pointed out that whether a given word has a dictionary-based meaning or not depends on general linguistic rules, and not on the context of utterance of the expression of which this word is a component, and that therefore the words of some given language occurring in nonsensical utterances do not lose their dictionary-based meaning. This does not mean, however, that the components of a nonsensical utterance have a significance construable as something contributing to the meaning (i.e. the content and force) of the entire utterance, because if the whole has no meaning then the parts of that whole do not have meaning either. Distinguishing the two types of factor responsible for the meaningfulness and nonsensicality of utterances allows us to understand why words that are components of nonsensical utterances may at one and the same time possess a dictionary-based meaning and not carry a meaning understood as something that contributes to the meaning of the whole utterance.

9. The nature of philosophical criticism invoking the concept of nonsense

I would like to end my reflections on the concept of nonsense with a few remarks on how criticism of philosophical questions and theses of a kind that invokes this concept should be understood.

Philosophical criticism may take various forms. When, for example, an objection is raised that a given philosophical thesis is false, it is at least generally clear what may constitute a justification for such an objection. The objection may be, for example, justified by pointing out that, on the basis of certain credible premises, it is possible to draw the conclusion that a given thesis is false. However, such an inference may either lead irrefutably to a given conclusion, because it is valid, or only make this conclusion likely to be true.

It may seem that philosophical criticism invoking the concept of nonsense is of a different nature. One can argue that it is impossible to reduce arguments aimed at showing that a given philosophical question or a given philosophical thesis is nonsense to the drawing of such a conclusion – according to a certain pattern of inference – on the basis of a certain set of premises. This is because those philosophical utterances that are nonsense are essentially utterances of such sentences as are linguistically correct but used in such a way that no specific content is assigned to utterances of them – and philosophical nonsense is certainly different from utterances such as 'On if package stool lies' and 'Gaborant rores trossgrols'. So, one cannot show that a given philosophical utterance is nonsense by referring to a violation of general linguistic rules. An important component of such an argument is the attempt to find an interpretation of the words uttered that would be acceptable to their author (cf. Wittgenstein and Nyman 1991, 8), and one can argue that it is the presence of this component that prevents this type of argumentation from being reduced to mere inference (cf. Conant and Diamond 2004, 56). If this attempt turns out to be unsuccessful, we can conclude that the utterance in question is meaningless.

I would say that some elements of this view about arguments aimed at showing the nonsensicality of philosophical utterances are right, while others are questionable.[14] In order to determine which of them hold up and which are doubtful, it is worth considering the questions below. What, according to the conception proposed in this text – a conception close to Wittgenstein's approach to nonsense – is the nature of the arguments aimed at demonstrating that certain utterances are nonsensical? Are there significant differences between this type of argument and a significant portion of those philosophical arguments that aim to achieve other goals, or philosophical arguments that, while also aiming to demonstrate the nonsensicality of various philosophical utterances, are not reliant on any approach that could be said to be close to Wittgenstein's where nonsense is concerned? To answer these questions it is necessary to recall some of the features presented above that characterize different ways of showing the nonsensicality of different types of utterance. It is also necessary to determine both the form taken by arguments aimed at demonstrating the nonsensicality of various philosophical utterances as given by philosophers who do not adopt an approach close to

[14]I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the existence of these questionable ones.

Wittgenstein's with respect to nonsense, and the form taken by philosophical arguments aimed at achieving other goals.

Let us deal with the last and penultimate points first. A significant portion of philosophical arguments take the form of deductive, abductive, or inductive reasoning. One might wonder whether arguments aimed at demonstrating the nonsensicality of philosophical utterances really can take the form of deductive reasoning. As an anonymous reviewer has rightly pointed out, such arguments exist – e.g. the following, which is a deductive argument:

1. Sentences that use empty names are meaningless.
2. Your utterance of 'Hamlet is sad' uses an empty name. (We suppose this to be referring to a specific utterance).
3. Therefore, your utterance of 'Hamlet is sad' is meaningless.

The following argument is also a deductive one:

1. Empirically unverifiable statements are nonsense.
2. The statement 'The human soul is immortal' is empirically unverifiable.
3. Therefore, the statement 'The human soul is immortal' is nonsense.

However, if the conception of nonsense proposed in this text is right, such arguments are not sufficient to show that the utterances in question are nonsensical, even though in both the first and second cases of inference the conclusion follows logically from the premises. This is because demonstrating the nonsensicality of any utterance requires us to show that no attempt to find an intelligible interpretation of that utterance based on the context of the use of the sentence uttered has so far been successful.[15] Until this is done, the fact that deductive inferences such as those presented above exist does not determine whether the utterances in question are nonsensical or not – and, moreover, it can be concluded on the basis of this that at least one of the premises of this type of reasoning is open to question. (A well-known maxim can be cited in support of this approach to the issue we are discussing: namely, that 'one philosopher's *modus ponens* is another philosopher's *modus tollens*' (Putnam 1994, 280)). It seems that the questionable premises in the above arguments are such general philosophical theses as

[15] A component of the context enabling the understanding of a given utterance may be, for example, an explanation provided by the speaker as to what new meaning has been assigned to a certain word occurring in this utterance.

'Empirically unverifiable statements are nonsense'. So is it possible, then, to present, in the form of deductive reasoning, such arguments for the nonsensicality of the utterances under consideration as aim to show that all attempts to find a certain intelligible interpretation of them based on the context of the use of the sentences uttered have failed? Yes! But such reasoning will have to take a slightly more complicated form than the sorts of inference presented above.

Let us address this issue by examining two arguments aimed at showing that the utterance 'Mark is gonic' is nonsense. I will attempt to do so using the example of uttering a certain linguistically incorrect sentence because if, in order to show the nonsensicality of an utterance involving such a sentence, it is not enough to invoke a violation of general linguistic rules, and one must instead refer to the fact that the context of this sentence's being uttered does not allow it to be understood, then this is even more so in the case of instances of philosophical nonsense, these being utterances of linguistically correct sentences.

Were we to not take into account the fact that some linguistically incorrect sentences can, in certain highly specific contexts, be used meaningfully, it would seem that the following deductive argument suffices to show that the utterance 'Mark is gonic' is nonsense:

1. If a word used in an utterance that is supposed to be an utterance in a given language does not belong to the vocabulary of that language, then that utterance is nonsense.
2. The word 'gonic' used in the utterance 'Marc is gonic', which is supposed to be an utterance in English, is not part of English vocabulary.
3. Therefore, the utterance 'Marc is gonic' is nonsense.

This argument, though, is not sufficient to show the nonsensicality of the utterance 'Marc is gonic', because it may turn out that the utterances preceding this one – utterances containing explanations as to what meaning should be assigned to the word 'gonic' here – allow us to understand it. To justify the conclusion that this utterance is nonsensical, one of the premises of the argument must state that all attempts to interpret it have failed. So the argument should take the following form:

1. If a word used in an utterance supposed to be an utterance in a given language does not belong to the vocabulary of that language, then unless, based on the context of that utterance, there is an intelligible

explanation available as to what meaning should be assigned to that word in that utterance, that utterance is nonsense.
2. The word 'gonic' used in the utterance 'Marc is gonic', which is supposed to be an utterance in English, does not belong to the vocabulary of English, and based on the context of this utterance no intelligible explanation is available as to what meaning should be assigned to this word in this utterance.
3. Therefore, the utterance 'Marc is gonic' is nonsense.

In regard to arguments of the type presented above, I would like to make three comments. Firstly, the general principle constituting the first premise is essentially trivial – it is not a controversial philosophical thesis.[16] Secondly, the above form of argument is in fact only an inference scheme. That scheme should be filled out either with content to the effect that no explanations as to what meaning should be assigned to the word 'gonic' in this utterance are available, or with information about what explanations regarding this matter have been provided, along with arguments showing that actually these are incomprehensible. Thirdly, since the first premise of the argument is trivial, and the claim that 'gonic' is not an English word is also trivially true, the most important element of the argument leading to the conclusion that this utterance is nonsense will consist in showing either that no explanations are available as to what meaning should be assigned to the word 'gonic' in this utterance or, if such explanations have indeed been provided, that they are not intelligible.

Summing up the foregoing discussion as to whether or not arguments aimed at demonstrating the nonsensicality of various utterances can take the form of deductive reasoning, I note that on the conception of nonsense advocated here the answer to this will be in the affirmative. However, such arguments differ, I believe, from many deductive philosophical arguments, in that their most important premises are not certain general, and therefore often controversial, principles. Rather, their most important elements are the premises that concern whether or not there are explanations making it possible to understand the utterances in question.

Let us now proceed to a consideration of at least one real example of the kind of criticism of philosophical questions and theses that invokes

[16]This remark is consistent with the thought expressed in § 128 of *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2009).

the concept of nonsense. This will allow us to better understand what this kind of criticism actually involves. It is generally accepted that Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, criticizes the idea of a private language. In my view, his assault on this conception consists in showing that its supporters, when uttering the words 'I can think of a language that no one else can understand except me', are not assigning any specific meaning to this utterance (cf. Diamond 1989; Mulhall 2007; Stroud 2000).[17] It is worth noting that Wittgenstein conducts his critical argument in such a way that, on the one hand, he shows how the conception of a private language could be understood, and on the other, he points out that a given way of understanding is not the one intended by the proponent of this conception. This can already be seen in the fragment where the topic of private languages is explicitly introduced:

> But is it also conceivable that there be a language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and so on – for his own use? – Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? – But that is not what I mean. The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language (Wittgenstein 2009, § 243).

This way of approaching the problem of private language and issues related to it can also be seen, for example, in §§ 246, 247, 251, 253, 257, 258 and 261. Wittgenstein's reflections on private language lead to the conclusion that all attempts to describe any particular use of an expression of such a language will end in failure as no intelligible description is acceptable, in that the latter are bound to invoke the expressions of a public language:

> What reason have we for calling 'S' the sign for a *sensation*? For 'sensation' is a word of our common language, which is not a language intelligible only to me. … – And it would not help either to say that it need not be a *sensation*; that when he writes 'S' he has *Something* – and that is all that can be said. But 'has' and 'something' also belong to our common language. – So in the end, when one is doing philosophy, one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound. – But such a sound is an expression only in a particular language-game, which now has to be described (Wittgenstein 2009, § 261).

To sum up, Wittgenstein neither claims that the sentence 'I can think of a language that no one else can understand except me' is itself somehow defective and therefore meaningless, nor asserts that the utterance of

[17] There is, of course, no consensus among commentators to the effect that this is how this line of criticism should be interpreted (cf. Hacker 2021, 245–275; Kripke 1982; Malcolm 1954; Wright 2001).

this sentence *cannot* be assigned a meaning that would be acceptable to supporters of the private language conception. He only asks questions about how the conception of a private language should be understood and presents various possible answers to these questions; however, it turns out that none of the sets of intelligible answers to these questions express what a private language is actually supposed to be according to the supporters of this conception.

I would like to end my remarks on the nature of philosophical criticism that invokes the concept of nonsense with a brief explanation of the previously mentioned issue of the specificity of philosophical nonsense. Those who claim that philosophical nonsense is different from utterances such as: 'On if package stool lies' and 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' are certainly right (cf. e.g. Oza 2022). Moreover, this specificity consists in the fact that philosophical nonsense seems to make sense (Oza 2022, 2), and for this reason can occur in something that looks like reasoning and can be a component of that-clauses – that is, as Oza puts it, philosophical nonsense should meet 'the Engagement Constraint' (Oza 2022). However, I believe that meeting this constraint does not require that such sequences of utterances as look like instances of reasoning, but whose components are cases of philosophical nonsense, should be considered genuine examples of reasoning. The satisfaction of the above-mentioned constraint does not require that utterances such as 'A thinks that *p*' in which '*p*' must be substituted with some piece of philosophical nonsense are not instances of nonsense themselves. The possibility of the occurrence of cases of philosophical nonsense in that-clauses and in certain sequences of utterances that look like arguments is simply due to the fact that the sentences uttered are linguistically correct. (It is worth recalling here that linguistically correct sentences are, in accordance with the terminology adopted in this text, grammatically correct sentences consisting of expressions with dictionary-based meanings.) To sum up, then, on my view the satisfaction of 'the Engagement Constraint' does not entail recognizing the following sequence of sentences as constituting genuine reasoning: (1) 'Caesar is a prime number'; (2) 'Caesar is a person'; therefore (3) 'A certain person is a prime number'. Nor does it entail treating the utterance 'Diamond is not convinced that Caesar is a prime number' as meaningful.

10. Concluding summary

As a final summary, I would like to present a short recapitulation of the most important conclusions drawn from the above considerations

regarding nonsense. First, a natural way of understanding nonsense is to understand it as a lack. Nonsense is something that is unintelligible: i.e. something that has no content. Secondly, nonsensicality understood in this way should be attributed to utterances and not to linguistic expressions (e.g. sentences understood as types) or signs resembling linguistic expressions; expressions should rather be classified as linguistically correct or incorrect. However, due to the context in which some given words are uttered, it may be the case that linguistically correct expressions can be used to form utterances that are nonsensical, and that linguistically incorrect expressions can be used to create meaningful utterances. Thirdly, nonsensical utterances can be classified according to how their nonsensicality is shown, and this criterion of division does not seem to be a purely psychological one. Fourthly, the existence of the differences pointed out between various nonsensical utterances does not mean that there are cases of 'positive nonsense': i.e. utterances that are nonsensical because of what they say. Fifthly, the above explanations of the nature of nonsense allow us to combine two seemingly opposing positions as regards what philosophical criticism invoking the concept of nonsense amounts to. One of these holds that there is a fundamental non-psychological difference between cases of philosophical nonsense and instances of trivial nonsenses such as 'Gaborant rores trossgrols'. This difference, on this position, results from the fact that cases of philosophical nonsense try to say something that cannot be said, and this something cannot be said because it constitutes some sort of incoherent content, whereas instances of trivial nonsense simply do not say anything. The other of these two positions, meanwhile, holds that the difference between these types of nonsense is only of a psychological nature – both philosophical nonsense and cases of trivial nonsense such as 'Gaborant rores trossgrols' will be utterances that have not been given any meaning. According to the approach to nonsense put forward in this text, cases of philosophical nonsense will differ not just in psychological terms from utterances such as 'Gaborant rores trossgrols', and this will be so because the nonsensicality of the former is shown in a different way than the nonsensicality of the latter. This does not mean, however, that the nonsensicality of philosophical utterances consists in anything other than the fact that these utterances are devoid of all content.

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