

Ludwig Wittgenstein  
Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951  
(Ed) James Klagge & Alfred Nordmann  
Hackett Publishing Co, IN.  
1993 pp. 65-69.

G. E. Moore

be without sense. But, if so, his view may have been that, e.g. " $2 + 2 = 4$ ", when used in the way in which it would commonly be said to express a necessary proposition, *is* used in accordance with the ordinary rules of grammar, and is nevertheless "without sense", and is so partly *because* it *is* used in accordance with the ordinary rules; for he certainly would not have denied that that expression *might* be used in such a way that it had sense. But I do not know whether this was his view or not.

[294] But finally there is still another reason why I am puzzled as to what his view was about sentences, which would commonly be said to express necessary propositions. His view was, if I am right, one which he expressed by the use of the expressions, ( $\beta'$ ) "without sense", as equivalent to which he often used the expressions "nonsense", "meaningless", and even "useless" and ( $\beta''$ ) "rules of grammar"; and these two expressions were used by him constantly throughout these lectures. And my last puzzle is due to the facts that I think there is reason to suspect that he was not using either expression in any ordinary sense, and that I have not been able to form any clear idea as to how he was using them.

( $\beta'$ ) With regard to the expression "without sense" I think there is no doubt that he was using it in the same way in which he used it in the *Tractatus*, 4.461, when he said that a "tautology" is without sense (sinnlos). In that passage he gave as an example of the supposed fact that a "tautology" is without sense the statement "I know nothing about the weather, if I know that either it is raining or it is not"; and in these lectures he used a very similar example to show the same thing. Also in that passage of the *Tractatus* he said that a "tautology" "says nothing", and seemed to mean by this the same as what he meant by saying that it was "without sense"; and this expression he also used in these lectures, and apparently in the same sense. And I think it is clearly true that we could say correctly of a man who only knew that either it was raining or it was not, that he knew nothing *about the present state of the weather*. But could we also say correctly of such a man that he knew *nothing at all*? I do not think we could; and yet, so far as I can see, it is only if we could say this correctly that we should be justified in saying that the sentence "Either it is raining or it is not" "says nothing" or is "without sense". I think, therefore, that Wittgenstein can only have been right in saying that "tautologies" and other sentences, which would commonly be said to express necessary

↓

This  
★ is the  
★ difference  
between  
LW and  
GEM!

(cf.  
Use  
GEM!)

propositions, are "without sense" and "say nothing", if he was using these two expressions in some peculiar way, different from any in which they are ordinarily used. So far as I can see, if we use "make sense" in any way in which it is ordinarily used, "Either it's raining or it's not" *does* make sense, since we should certainly say that the meaning of this sentence is different from that of "Either it's snowing or it's not", thus implying that since they have different meanings, both of them have *some* meaning; and similarly, if "say nothing" is used in any sense in which it is ordinarily used, Wittgenstein's [295] proposition in *Tractatus* 5.43 that "All the 'Sätze' of Logic say the same, namely, nothing" seems to me to be certainly untrue. And that he was using these expressions in some peculiar way seems to me to be also suggested by the fact that in *Tractatus* 4.461, he seems to be saying that "contradictions" are "without sense" in the same sense in which "tautologies" are, in spite of the fact that in the very same passage he asserts that the latter are "unconditionally true", while the former are "true under no condition". But, if he was using these expressions (and also "meaningless" and "nonsense", which, as I have said, he often used as equivalent to them) in some peculiar sense, what was that sense? Later in (III) he expressly raised the questions "What is meant by the decision that a sentence makes or does not make sense?" and "What is the criterion of making sense?" having said that, in order to answer these questions, he must "plunge into something terrible", and that he must do this in order to "put straight" what he had just been saying, which, he said, he had not "put correctly". In trying to answer these questions or this question (for I think he was using the two expressions to mean the same) he said many things, including the statement that he had himself been "misled" by the expression "sense"; and he went on to say that his present view was that "'sense' was correlative to 'proposition'" (meaning, apparently, here by "proposition" what he had formerly called "proposition in the narrower sense", *i.e.* "experiential proposition", thus excluding, *e.g.*, mathematical "propositions") and that hence, if "proposition" was not "sharply bounded", "sense" was not "sharply bounded" either. He went on to say about "proposition" the things which I have already quoted (p. 55); and then implied that where we say "This makes no sense" we always mean "This makes nonsense in this particular game"; and in answer to the question "Why do we call it 'nonsense'? what does it mean to call it so?" said that when we call a sentence "nonsense", it is "because of some

similarity to sentences which have sense", and that "nonsense always arises from forming symbols analogous to certain uses, where they have no use". He concluded finally that "'makes sense' is vague, and will have different senses in different cases", but that the expression "makes sense" is useful just as "game" is useful, although, like "game", it "alters its meaning as we go from proposition to proposition"; adding that, just as "sense" is vague, so must be "grammar", "grammatical rule" and "syntax".

But all this, it seems to me, gives no explanation of how he was [296] using the expression "without sense" in the particular case of "tautologies" and other sentences which would commonly be said to express necessary propositions: it only tells us that he might be using it in a different sense in that case from that in which he used it in other cases. The only explanation which, so far as I know, he did give as to how he was using it in the particular case of "tautologies", was where he asked in (III), "What does the statement that a tautology 'says nothing' mean?" and gave as an answer, that to say that " $q \supset q$ " "says nothing" means that  $p \cdot (q \supset q) = p$ ; giving as an example that the logical product "It's raining and I've either got grey hair or I've not" = "It's raining". If he did mean this, and if, as he seemed to be, he was using "says nothing" to mean the same as "is without sense", one important point would follow, namely, that he was not using "without sense" in the same way in the case of "tautologies" as in the case of "contradictions", since he would certainly not have said that  $p \cdot (q \cdot \sim q) = p$ . But it gives us no further explanation of how he *was* using "without sense" in the case of "tautologies". For if he was using that expression in any ordinary way, then I think he was wrong in saying that "It's raining, and I've either got grey hair or I've not" = "It's raining", since, in any ordinary usage, we should say that the "sense" of "either I've got grey hair or I've not" was different from that of, *e.g.*, "either I'm six feet high or I'm not", and should not say, as apparently he would, that both sentences say nothing, and therefore say the same.

In connexion with his use of the phrase "without sense", one other thing which he said or implied more than once should, I think, be mentioned, because it may give a partial explanation of why he thought that both "contradictions" and "tautologies" are without sense. He said in (I) that "the linguistic expression" of "This line can be bisected" is "'This line *is* bisected' has sense", while at the same time insisting that "the linguistic expression" of "This line is infi-

nately divisible" is not "‘This line is infinitely divided’ has sense" (he held that "this line *is* infinitely divided" is senseless) but is "an infinite possibility in language". He held, therefore, that in many cases the "linguistic expression" of "It is possible that *p* should be true" or "should have been true" is "The sentence '*p*' has sense". And I think there is no doubt that he here meant by "possible" what is commonly called, and was called by him on a later occasion, "logically possible". But to say that a sentence "*p*" is the "linguistic expression" of a proposition "*q*", would [297] naturally mean that the sentence "*p*" and the sentence "*q*" have the same meaning, although for some reason or other "*p*" can be called a "linguistic expression", though the sentence "*q*" can not. And that he did hold that, if an expression "*p*" is "the linguistic expression" of a proposition "*q*", then the expression "*p*" and the expression "*q*" have the same meaning was also suggested by a passage late in (III), where, having explained that by "possible" he here meant "logically possible", he asked the question "Doesn't 'I can't feel his toothache' mean that 'I feel his toothache' has no sense?" obviously implying that the right answer to this question is "Yes, it does". And he also, in several other places, seemed to imply that "*p* can't be the case", where this means "It is logically impossible that *p* should be the case" means the same as "The sentence '*p*' has no sense". I think that his view in the *Tractatus* that "contradictions" are "without sense" (sinnlos) may have been a deduction from this proposition. But why should he have held that "tautologies" also are "without sense"? I think that this view of his may have been, in part, a deduction from the conjunction of the proposition that "It is logically impossible that *p*" means the same as "The sentence '*p*' has no sense" with his principle, which I have already had occasion to mention (pp. 55–56), and which he said "gave us some firm ground", that "If a proposition has meaning, its negation also has meaning", where, as I pointed out, he seemed to be using "proposition" to mean the same as "sentence". For it is logically impossible that the negation of a tautology should be true, and hence, if it is true that "It is logically impossible that *p*" means the same as "The sentence '*p*' has no sense", then it will follow from the conjunction of this proposition with his principle, that a "tautology" (or should we say "any sentence which expresses a tautology"?) also has none. But why he thought (if he did) that "It is logically impossible that *p*" means the same as "The sentence '*p*' has no sense", I cannot explain. And it seems to me that if, as he certainly held, the

former of these two propositions entails the latter, then the sentence "It is logically impossible that *p*" must also have no sense; for can this sentence have any sense if the sentence "*p*" has none? But, if "It is logically impossible that *p*" has no sense, then, so far as I can see, it is quite impossible that it can mean the same as "The sentence '*p*' has no sense", for this latter expression certainly has sense, if "having sense" is being used in any ordinary way.

(β) With regard to the expressions "rules of grammar" or "grammatical rules" he pointed out near the beginning of (I), [298] where he first introduced the former expression, that when he said "grammar should not allow me to say 'greenish-red'", he was "making things belong to grammar, which are not commonly supposed to belong to it"; and he immediately went on to say that the arrangement of colours in the colour octahedron "is really a part of grammar, not of psychology"; that "There is such a colour as a greenish blue" is "grammar"; and that Euclidean Geometry is also "a part of grammar". In the interval between (II) and (III) I wrote a short paper for him<sup>5</sup> in which I said that I did not understand how he was using the expression "rule of grammar" and gave reasons for thinking that he was not using it in its ordinary sense; but he, though he expressed approval of my paper, insisted at that time that he was using the expression in its ordinary sense. Later, however, in (III), he said that "any explanation of the use of language" was "grammar", but that if I explained the meaning of "flows" by pointing at a river "we shouldn't naturally call this a rule of grammar". This seems to suggest that by that time he was doubtful whether he was using "rule of grammar" in quite its ordinary sense; and the same seems to be suggested by his saying, earlier in (III), that we should be using his "jargon" if we said that whether a sentence made sense or not depended on "whether or not it was constructed according to the rules of grammar".

I still think that he was not using the expression "rules of grammar" in any ordinary sense, and I am still unable to form any clear idea as to how he was using it. But, apart from his main contention (whatever that may have been) as to the connexion between "rules of grammar" (in his sense) and necessary propositions, there were two things upon which he seemed mainly anxious to insist about "rules of

5. For more on this paper and Wittgenstein's reply to it see John King's notes recorded on pp. 97–98 of *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1930–1932*, ed. D. Lee. (eds.)